



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 12 Apr 2014

Held at Central Library, Plymouth

The meeting was held at The Central Library, Plymouth and was chaired by Paul Wilson. The meeting was arranged jointly with the Music Section of the Devonshire Association and with Plymouth City Library. Seven TSF members attended the morning session. The number swelled to twenty-six as a number of local guests joined us for the afternoon talks. The low numbers were due, in part, to the difficulties arising from the storm damage to the rail network in the Southwest.

Following a welcome from the Plymouth Library team, and an outline of arrangements for the day by Alan Rosevear, the session was opened by Paul Wilson.

Given the relatively small numbers of people present it was agreed that the opportunity would be taken for Martin Graebe to give those attending a guided tour of the Baring-Gould manuscripts and other items that the Library had put on display, as well as their permanent collection of his published books.

Networking Session

Gwilym Davies gave an update on the Gloucester Traditions project that he had talked about at the December meeting. The aim is to get as many of the songs that have been collected in Gloucestershire onto their website and then to use the material in a series of outreach projects. They are working in partnership with Gloucestershire Archives and Gloucestershire Music makers (The county music provider). Their bid to the National Lottery has now been submitted. They will be using the ABC format for digitising the tunes. An important part of the work – and a technical term new to most of those present – was ‘de-duping’. This is the removal of duplicate records of the same instance of songs being collected. Some material is not available to the project, such as the recordings made by Percy Grainger and James Carpenter. Otherwise Gwilym is still collecting new material around Gloucestershire. For this he is now using a video recorder, which he finds captures information that might have been missed if only audio is recorded.

Alan Rosevear, is the Hon. Secretary of the Music Section of the Devonshire Association (Paul Wilson is the Chairman). The association, whose full title is ‘The Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and the Arts’ was founded in 1862. The Music Section was created in their 150th year and its aim is to promote and recognise music that is either indigenous to Devon, or has been inspired by Devon. Though the section aims to represent the full picture of music in the county, they have been particularly successful in mounting events that focus on traditional music and song. They are able, in concerts, to dwell more on the origins and background of the songs. One of their projects was a concert based on songs that have been included in the association’s Transactions over the last 150 years.

This led to a discussion on the differences between songs from different counties. Yvette Staelens said that we carry our culture with us and gave examples of singers whose songs had come from family in other parts of the country or who had moved themselves. Gwilym Davies talked about the differences between the gipsy repertoire and that of other cultures (no drinking songs, distinctive types of melody, different themes for songs). Martin Graebe said that words are more often common to the country generally, while tunes were more variable – but that what might be more

truly local is the style in which the words and tune are performed. Yvette suggested that there might be an opportunity to study this by taking a group of singers from different parts of the country and getting them to learn and perform a song, and see what differences arose.

Yvette Staelens reported she is continuing with her research on Alice Snow, the collector who corresponded with Sharp. She is also engaged with Halsway Manor, the only residential folk arts centre in the UK, which is currently celebrating its Jubilee. She has been assisting with a lottery bid to interview people who have been engaged with the Halsway Manor Society over the last fifty years and gather the oral history of the manor since it became a centre for folk arts. In a way, this will reflect the history of the wider folk movement. If their bid is successful, the project will be starting in September this year. They will also be looking at songs composed at or about the Manor, and collecting any ephemera that can be found. There will be a small travelling exhibition about the project. The Somerset Archive is involved and they will undertake the digitisation for any material discovered. Halsway have just received planning permission for their ambitious [building and refurbishment project](#) and will now be launching an appeal to raise the balance of the £4 million that will be required to create this exciting regional resource.

Yvette also mentioned that David Sutcliffe (who spoke about Charles Marson at a TSF meeting a few years ago) is now looking at Edwardian music in Somerset. She told us that Alice Snow's brothers had been involved in local minstrel shows at the same time as Sharp was collecting songs in the area and that there were black Methodist preachers from America in Somerset churches, singing songs from the 'Deep South' with guitar – a fascinating picture of the broader picture of music in Somerton at the turn of the century. This is the sort of thing that David Sutcliffe is looking at as well. In addition, Yvette suggested that TSF members might be interested in looking at CHOMBEC – the Centre for the History of Music in Britain, the Empire, and the Commonwealth, which is a part of the music department at the University of Bristol. While they are mainly interested in classical music, there has been some interesting articles on traditional music.

Jan Goffey had come along to help manage the meeting and concerts, but reported that she has created a database of all the sheet music in the Wren Music collection. This has brought to light a lot of material from the last thirty years that had been forgotten. A large proportion of the material is traditional and it is an interesting record of thirty years of introducing songs to the community. This has saved Wren musicians from reinventing material that had already been created.

Bill Murray is working with Dave Denford and Charles Scott, looking into the songs that used to be sung by Charles's uncle Henry who died last year. These are of a wide range of ages and types. He used to sing with Roy Hutchings who sounds traditional, but learned a lot of his songs from the radio in the 1940s, so that you hear him singing cowboy songs in a Devonshire manner. Bill thinks that the context and manner of performance make them 'folk'. He has also been involved in a project, writing songs about tin-mining on Dartmoor. There was some discussion of the transmission of songs in families, taking the example of Sarah England and her daughters, Lucy White and Louie Hooper and of the Orchard family in the present day.

Shan Graebe talked about the way in which she has used traditional songs when singing with her grandchildren and how well they work. She has shared a number of these songs with other grandparents, with positive results and is now putting together a book of traditional songs, sourced from England and America, that are intended for grandparents to sing with their grandchildren and other young children. She is hoping to get this published later in 2014. These songs are also very useful for vocal warm-ups – and more appropriate than songs in foreign languages.

Martin Graebe finished off his project on the life of pioneering folk song collector, Marianne Mason, which was the subject of an article in the recent issue of the Folk Music Journal, by taking the opportunity to find her papers in the National Archive in Cape Town. These led him to the cemetery in which she was buried, which he and Shan then visited. He has also cooperated with the American wind-band specialist, Prof. Robert Garofalo, in an article revisiting the material in the book that Bob

published last year on the folk songs in Vaughan Williams *English Folk Song Suite* and which Martin helped with research for. The article has been published in the March 2014 issue of *WASBE World* (the official magazine of the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles). Martin has also written a foreword and preface for a book about Baring-Gould and the Celtic Church and has completed his article on Baring-Gould and broadside ballads, which will appear in a book, which is being edited by David Atkinson and Steve Roud and will be published by Ashgate in July.

Bob and Jackie Patten have just completed an article for *English Dance and Song* about the Dartmoor Folk Festival – ‘The Dartmoor Generation’, looking at the families that have been involved in the festival. They have also been involved with Sam Lee in a project about the songs of the First World War, which has had performances in a number of places. This has led to further work on the men from Morchard Bishop who lost their lives in the war. Bob has found that no more than 10% of the families of these men have any information about them. They are still collecting and working on carols.

Paul Wilson tried to avoid launching another discussion on modes, but reported that he intends to do more work, particularly on the tunes in the Baring-Gould collection. Digitisation of Paul’s own collection has been completed and is now being catalogued. It is intended that the collection will, in due course, be made available on-line when all the necessary permissions from the singers or their relatives have been obtained. No further progress has been made with the inclusion of the collection in the British Library Sound Archive.

TSF business

TSF business was delayed, pending the expected arrival of Doc Rowe, the TSF Treasurer. Doc did not arrive and so, since there was nothing urgent to be considered, TSF business was held over for the next meeting.

Forum Focus Session

Tom Brown – *The Lock Collection of songs*

David and Nick Ramsey had moved to Cranscombe Farm at Brendon in North Devon in 2009 and, by chance, met an old couple, Ivy Archer (nee Lock) and her brother, Victor, who had been born at the farm. In further conversation it emerged that they had two exercise books of songs, written by George Lock born in 1882 and who farmed at Cranscombe. They had been passed to Ivy when he died. The first book was of 23 songs that had been sung locally by George at harvest homes and shearers gatherings. They included classical narrative songs as well as drinking songs. The second book contained Christmas carols. George was well known as a local singer as well as being a member of the church choir. David Ramsey interviewed Ivy for an oral history series, *Unforgotten Exmoor*.

David also photographed the notebooks and got in touch with Tom and Barbara who have since worked on them. The songs were written as continuous text, rather than as verses. The books were in poor condition and pages were damaged or lost. Not all of the songs have been identified. Ivy regarded the books as of sentimental value and could not sing herself. Her brother was, fortunately, able to sing some of the tunes. Ivy died just before Christmas and, unfortunately, the books were lost. Luckily, the photographs are available, and Tom and Barbara are continuing to work on them.

Paul Wilson – *Song Collecting in Devon*

Paul’s interest in folk song was kindled when, at the age of 15, he attended Scan Tester’s eightieth birthday celebration after having been attending local sessions in Sussex where he grew up. He is now Director of Wren Music, of which he was the co-founder. After thirty years of activity, they have

a programme of activities, which reach 30,000 people each year. Paul has recorded songs over the years and the resultant collection comprises 339 open reel tapes (much of it done in the early seventies in conjunction with Sam Richards and Tish Stubbs and, later, on his own). He has more recently been collecting using a digital recorder.

His first example was 'The farmer in Leicester' recorded from Nelson Penfold (with the recorder on the bonnet of a car with birds singing in the background). His friends in the gipsy community considered Penfold to be the finest singer among them.

His second recording was 'The Country Carrier' sung by Bob Hingston from Modbury, recorded when he was 91. This has been given a local connection, since the carrier ends up in Plymouth. There is now a lot of interest in locality in song and, when working in schools, the 'Full English' has created the opportunity for the students to search for songs from their own locality.

Paul raised the idea that a collection tells you more about the collector's preoccupations than about what is actually available to hear. Some collectors focus on the 'tradition' as they understand it. Others may focus on a wider range of material, such as children's parodies or football chants. He played a few examples of children's songs collected in Chagford in the 1980s, and which he, personally, greatly enjoys listening to..

As an example of a soldier's song he played Ray Tucker singing 'When this Bloody War is Over'. Ray, who was Paul's father-in-law, was a real 'Singer' with a capital 'S' and with a large repertoire of songs.

He realised, after being told in no uncertain terms to 'go away' when they cold-called at a gipsy camp, that this was not the right way to go about looking for songs. Since then he has relied on building relationships and letting the songs flow from that relationship.

Another singer, Bess Mallett, had a wide range of songs, learned from different sources, but she preferred the songs that she learned from her mother, which seemed more complete, more perfect.

He finished with a second recording from Nelson Penfold of 'Long a'growing'.

Ian Maxted – *The Printed Broadside of Devon*

Ian attempted to cover 300 years of broadside printing in Devon in 30 minutes. The earliest Devon ballad, *God hath gyven our kynge the victorye*, dates from 1549. Printing was regulated until 1695 and only allowed in London and a few other centres. After de-regulation the first press was set up in Exeter in 1698. Ian divided the ballads he looked at into two categories: those dealing with Devonshire topics and those printed in Devon. Rather than try to cover everything Ian said, I will refer you to his paper which he has put on his website .

Go to – <http://bookhistory.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/devon-printed-broadsides.html>

Bob and Jackie Patten – *Collecting folk material in Devon*

Jackie gave a little background to their collection of more than 1000 hours of folk song, folklore and oral history, mostly from North Devon and Somerset. Much of this collection is now available to listen to on the British Library Sound Archive website. Bob said that, when they moved to North Devon about thirty years ago, they noticed that Devon seemed to be a generation behind Somerset as far as singers were concerned and that it was still possible to collect the 'real' old songs.

Bob believes that the natural life of a song is about one hundred years. Now, at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, it is relatively easy to find songs from the beginning of the Twentieth Century (such as those current in the First World War) sung. When Cecil Sharp was collecting he was hearing songs that were popular over the previous century.

He played a number of examples of their recordings, starting with Margaret Palmer, 'The Queen of Exmoor' singing one of her favourite songs; not a 'traditional song' but her interpretation of Adge Cutler's 'Don't tell I tell 'ee', released in 1968. Margaret has adjusted the song to her own locality and dialect. He told us something of Margaret Palmer's background, including the quote: 'Music, that's what I enjoy. If I had a choice to go anywhere, I would rather go singing'.

Les Rice was best known as a Step-dancer, piano-accordion player, harmonica player and champion step-dancer from the Chagford area. Jason Rice had inherited some tapes of his grandfather and, until then, had not been aware that he also sang. He played a recording of 'Old John Braddlum' – after which Bill Murray nudged the applectart by saying that the recording was of Jack Rice – not Les.

Bob recovered and played a recording of a bravura performance by Norman Wall of his 'Egg Song' – a remarkable tale based on a succession of popular tunes from the C20th. They met Norman in 1996. He had then been living in Devon for thirty years, having been brought up in a pub near Reading. He had served in the navy and performed in 'sods operas'. Norman told how he had got the song from an old navy cook who had been at the Battle of Jutland and that he and some mates had made the song up. Tom Brown gave the applectart another nudge by saying that he had the sheet music for the song and that they had recorded it from another singer, Fred Warren. This made the Jutland story unlikely.

Bob's next example was Harry Adams from Somerset singing his version of 'The Three Crows' that he had learned while working on the railway at Newton Abbott at a well-known singing pub, the Golden Lion. Harry only had three verses and included the spoken 'Sing, brethren, sing!' addition. After the first and third verses. He spoke of it as 'an old pub song', though, as Bob pointed out, it had been in print since 1611. He then read an extract of a version that he had heard in January of this year, demonstrating the vitality of this song.

He then went on to play a song from Charlie Hill of Drewsteignton, a retired farmer who also recorded a number of sessions in Devon and so picked up a lot of songs from revival singers, some of which he added to his repertoire. Bob played Charlie's localised version of 'Bold Princess Royal'.

He ended with the thought that there seemed to be less work to do in recovering folk songs compared with years past, and that we are now, more often, working with collections than making them.

Yvette Staelens – *Cecil Sharp's Gypsy Singers of Devon and Somerset*

Yvette opened by saying that her interest in traditional song is primarily in the context and their place in the lives of the singers themselves. Cecil Sharp collected a number of songs from gypsies in Devon and Somerset and, working with Chris Bearman, she has been able to fill in some of the details of these singers' lives.

She started by telling the story of his 1907 meeting at Simonsbath with Betsy Holland, aged 26, who had learned a number of songs from her grandmother. Sharp heard sing her version of 'James Macdonald', (Roud 1412) which he described as 'the finest and most characteristic bit of singing I have ever heard, fiendishly difficult to take down, both voice and music, but we eventually managed it.' Sharp photographed her and later gave her a copy of the photo – and got three more songs from her in return. Six weeks later Sharp was able to meet her grandmother, Rebecca Holland, from whom she had learned the song. Yvette has subsequently interviewed living members of the Holland family who told her that Betsy was always singing and that she only died in 1960 – one of the last survivors among Sharp's singers.

She also talked about Priscilla Cooper, who Sharp had met in the company of Rebecca Holland in East Devon and who was one of the few singers that Sharp recorded using a phonograph. These recordings can be heard on the British Library Sound Archive website.

He also collected songs from settled gipsies, like Lucy Carter of Tintinhull. Some, such as Emma Glover did not reveal their gipsy origins, though we can see these from studying their census details. Photographs of the singers that Yvette talked about can be seen on the VWML website.

The Influence of Folk Clubs such as the 'Jolly Porter' on singing in Devon – Bill Crawford (Interview)

The Exeter Traditional Folk Song Club, at the 'Jolly Porter', was, for many years, the flagship venue for traditional song in the Southwest and a place that has had a great influence on young (and not-so-young) singers. Bill Crawford was a regular at the club and talked to Martin Graebe about it, and about the links with traditional singing in Devon and the region.

Bill described the venue. The club had started in the upstairs room at the Left Bank coffee bar in Paris Street, before moving to the Jolly Porter. Bill was at the opening night, though he was too young to drink. The club was in the bar, rather than a function room and was always a noisy venue. The move to be a 'traditional' club was a conscious one, after having had a broader policy in the early days.

He also played a recording made at the club in the 1960s of one of the resident groups, The Journeymen, who were Ken Penny, Dave Robbins, and Jed Hickson, and were joined by Tony Rose during his holidays from university. Cyril Tawney was a regular visitor and was a great force in establishing folk song more generally in the Southwest. Other regular visitors were Charlie Bate and Mervyn Vincent and club members regularly made the pilgrimage to the May Day celebrations at Padstow.

Most folk clubs were guitar based at that time, though they were rarely seen at the Jolly Porter. A tradition of harmony singing at the club grew, starting with The Journeymen - other groups followed, such as The Oakleaves (which Bill was a member of at one time), Isca Fair and Hollinmor.

The club was a member of an early federation of folk clubs in the Southwest, which was organised by Ted Poole, who was then running the Swindon Folk Club. They would meet every three months at Halsway Manor to agree who to book and what they should be paid (Paul Simon was paid £7 in the 1960's). At that time it was possible to go to a different folk club in Devon every night of the week and still have choices.

Supporting Events

The programme of supporting events included a sing-around on the Friday evening and a concert of local singers on Saturday, both of which were well attended and greatly enjoyed. Martin Graebe's introduction to the Baring-Gould manuscripts on Friday afternoon was poorly attended and the planned tour to the sites associated with Dartmoor singers on Sunday did not take place as too few had signed up for it.

Thanks:

Thanks are due to Alan Rosevear and Paul Wilson for organising the meeting and to the Devonshire Association and Plymouth City Libraries for their support for the event. Thanks also to all the speakers for their interesting and informative presentations, which were greatly enjoyed by those present.

Martin Graebe

3 May 2014