



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 19 Oct 2019

Held at The Ulster Sports Club, Belfast

For our meeting in Belfast we were joined by more than 70 people, for most of whom it was their first experience of a TSF meeting. The networking session took a slightly different turn in that, because the sharing of projects etc. took less time than usual, we were able to have a deeper discussion about a number of different topics. The afternoon presentations, including the 2019 Roy Palmer Lecture delivered by Dr John Moulden, were very well received. We also had an excellent singing session on Saturday evening and a walk, with appropriate songs, conducted by Maurice Leyden and Jane Cassidy on a sunny Sunday morning.

Welcome

Maurice Leyden and Steve Roud welcomed TSF members and visitors to the Ulster Sports Club and thanked the owner, Bill Wolsey, and his staff for hosting us.

TSF Business

1. Finances

We have £1,600 in the bank at present. There are some deductions to come out of this, including expenses for this meeting and we have made a contribution towards a publication by the Ballad Partners (described below).

2. TSF Bursaries

Consideration is being given to creating a scheme for bursaries to assist younger researchers to attend conferences and meetings about traditional song. The details of this are under discussion, but its viability depends on the cash-flow into TSF from donations and to the 'Friends of TSF'.

1. Next year's meetings

The Broadside Day will be 22 February 2020. We are now looking at other possibilities for 2020. If anyone has an idea for a place to meet and can help with local organisation could they please get in touch with Martin Graebe. Consideration is also being given to a conference looking at the way in which traditional songs are (or have been) performed and the context in which that performance is given. A proposal is being put together and it is hoped that this could take place in the Spring of 2020. There was some discussion of this idea and it was thought to be a valuable area for such a conference.

Networking Session

People were asked to say a little about themselves, their interests and work, but the chairman asked that they kept it short. Some kept it very short.

Steve Roud talked about the Ballad Partners organisation which has been set up as a means of publishing papers from conferences and meeting at low cost. A group of partners have made a contribution of £100 each to start things off. New partners are welcome, the main benefit is that they will get a copy of each publication free of charge. Two books have been published so far. *Street Literature and the Circulation of Songs* is a collection of papers from recent Broadside Days. *Old Songs New Discoveries* is a selection of papers from the 2018 Folk Song Conference. Both books are available through the Folk Shop (on the EFDSS website) and cost £12 plus postage.

Bob Bray is a singer.

Phillippa Robinson lives in Derry, was raised in America, and has sung all her life. Takes an interest in song, but not at an academic level.

Kathryn Ann Cullen is currently Poet in Residence at Poetry Ireland. She contributed a paper to the book *Street Literature and the Circulation of Songs*.

Jim Carroll Originally from Liverpool, now living in Miltown Malbay. When living in London he collected from Travellers and, notably, from Walter Pardon. Some of the material collected by him and Pat Carroll will be soon made available on the British Library website. This includes a lot of background information recorded from the performers in addition to the songs.

Derek Schofield is the Reviews Editor for the Folk Music Journal. He is also the primary contributor to the Traditional Song Forum Facebook Page.

Richard Mellish describes himself as a dilettante, with a particular interest in folk song.

Fergus Woods is a collector of songs from Monaghan, which he talked about in the afternoon session. He has published a book about the collection, *Kind Friends Lend an Ear* with an associated CD – details on www.monaghansongs.com.

Roisin White is a singer (at the time without a voice!) and was involved with the project on Robert Cinnamond which she talked about in the afternoon.

Brian Doyle is the Field Recording Officer for the Irish Traditional Music Archive and would be recording the afternoon session for the archive. He is also one of the organisers of the Inishowan International Songs and Ballad Seminar – and he just loves songs.

Grace Toland is a singer from Inishowan and also works for ITMA. She mentioned an online exhibition on the ITMA website called 'Dusty Bluebells' about the children's songs collected by Hugh Shields. www.itma.ie/dustybluebells/index.html.

Bob Askew grew up in Hampshire and has done a lot of work on Hampshire songs.

Peter Wood is currently interested in Broken Token songs. He has found remarkably few and they are a subset of 'Unrecognised Returning Lover' songs.

Kathleen O'Sullivan is a London-Irish singer and lover of Irish songs.

Imogen Gunner is a musician, singer and composer working on an EU commission on gender equality with a particular interest in women's voices in traditional songs.

Jane Cassidy, singer and co-organiser.

Mairead Wallis is a singer from North Antrim and her particular interest is in songs from Co Antrim. She sings a number of songs based on poems set by John Kennedy.

Kara O'Brien is from Colorado and is studying in Limerick. She is working on a PhD on Irish hunting songs (mostly in Irish). A longer-term project is a website that presents the background stories of songs alongside the lyrics. Still very much in development but you can see the beginnings at www.song-lore.com.

Barbara Snape is from Lancashire and, as well as being a singer, is researching Lancashire broadsides.

Peter Snape – Barbara's husband, with the same interests but with added melodeon.

Fionnuala Carson Williams is a folklorist from Antrim and has been studying the Ordnance Survey Memoirs for County Antrim and pulling out what they had on song, music and instruments. This is a comprehensive description of what the soldiers conducting the survey saw in their travels and is a valuable social history document. Only the surveys for the northern counties were completed and these have been published. She also mentioned the collection of songs (Irish language) made in schools in the 1930s which can be seen on www.duchas.ie.

Mossy Christian is a singer and researcher from Lincolnshire he has been working on the Colin Wharton collection which was thought to have been lost. He discovered that Rod Stradling had some of Wharton's tapes and Mossy had his thesis so, between them they have produced a 2 CD selection of 67 songs from the collections – 'Folk Songs of the North Riding' (Musical Traditions MTCD406-7) with notes by Mossy based on the thesis. The problem of archive material having been lost at Leeds University was discussed.

Stiofán Ó Direáin is interested in the story-telling and song traditions of Ireland for many years. He has been writing a biography of the Belfast Lawyer and Folklorist Francis Joseph Bigger who collected many songs in the ballad tradition of Northern Ireland.

Colin Durling is an occasional story-teller who occasionally sings.

Ian Russell continues his fieldwork and research in the South Pennines, particularly Carols and Hunting songs in the area. He has also looked at ballad and song traditions in North-east Scotland. He would like to see some of his work published but needs a kick up the back-side to get it done.

Norma Russell is Ian's wife and the reason he can do all those things.

John Moulden handed out a list of his publications and of websites of interest. He is currently torn between continuing his work on the Sam Henry and making the definitive collection of Orange songs which, despite their divisive nature are representative of an Irish song tradition and style. He is willing to be contacted if people have questions he might be able to help with.

Maurice Leyden also needs a bit of kicking to get his work on songs about the Linen industry published.

Martin Graebe has been helping Todd Gray with his study of the song Widdicombe Fair which has now been published. He has also continued his work on Doreen Senior who collected folk songs with Helen Creighton in Nova Scotia in the 1930s.

There was then a wider discussion about more general matters.

Steve Roud asked if anyone knew what was happening with Yahoo groups, as it had the potential to affect our 'Tradsong' group. Richard Mellish said that the online storage associated with Yahoo groups was being removed, but that the mailing list function would continue. Since Tradsong is primarily a mailing list we will not, it appears, be badly affected.

Inspired by John Moulden's bibliography, **Peter Wood** suggested that other members might like to make their bibliographies available and that these could be placed on the TSF website.

There are backlogs in cataloguing traditional material in archives because there is frequently something 'more important' ahead of it in the queue. We should, where we are aware of such situations, apply appropriate levels of pressure to get things done.

Maurice Leyden gave the example of important chapbooks that had disappeared from the Linen Hall Library while moving between storage locations. In one instance these were subsequently located.

Steve Roud said that offering to help index collections of material can sometimes be a factor in their remaining 'in sight and in mind' of the librarians responsible.

Grace Toland said that, while the role of individuals (or small groups) in creating collections was very important, their sustainability was often ensured by bodies like ITMA and that a central organisation (preferable government funded) should exist in every country. She also reminded people of the British Library's 'Save Our Sounds' project that is intended to ensure the survival of small collections of recordings.

Martin Graebe asked Steve Roud if he was open to people volunteering to provide data for his index. He replied that he was, in principle, keen to get them to do so, provided he did not then have to spend more time re-formatting and correcting their work than it would have taken for him to do it in the first place. He could provide an Excel template for people to use and a list of the conventions to be observed.

Martin also asked **Grace Toland** if she could say something about the reasons for the success of ITMA. Her response was very interesting and enlightening:

- The formation of ITMA involved a group of people politically coming together and making a case for such an archive. It would not have happened simply out of goodwill; it needed a concerted effort on their part.
- It started with a pilot scheme that built on its own success with professional researchers.
- It was founded on acceptance of the idea that the traditional arts were of equal value to other branches of the arts and deserved to be taken seriously.
- It has been important to make themselves visible and to involve the media as much as possible – showcasing themselves all the time and making sure people know what they are doing.
- It is also important to keep in contact with the people who made the music, song and dance in the first place and to ensure that the material is passed on to new performers. They are a part of the transmission process.

- They are continuously on the hunt for funding. As Director of the archive this was one of the biggest parts of her job.
- This needs to be a two-way street and people need to make sure the archive knows what they have and, when appropriate make it available.
- The archive is staffed by people who sing, play and tell stories.

Stiofán Ó Direáin said that the importance of CCE (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann) in bringing youth into music through their volunteers teaching and providing instruments.

Steve Roud pointed out the difficulty that traditional song in England is often perceived (wrongly, of course) to be linked to extreme right-wing politics. He went on to ask is ITMA 'Safe'?

Grace Toland responded that they have maintained their level of funding, even through the difficult years. They have huge ambitions to do more and costs are increasing. They currently get about €1 million a year and while this may seem a lot it only just meets their current needs, so they are always trying to persuade Government to give them more. She pointed out that universities can be very 'hands around' when it comes to their collections, so that they have something unique to offer research students. ITMA have a very different role, making the material in their archive available to as many people as possible. While they continue to be successful in that role, she believes their future is secure. Digital media are opening up possibilities that could not have been foreseen when ITMA was created. They are now looking to be part of a global network of knowledge about the traditional arts.

Ian Russell said that very few UK universities are funded to do research into traditional music and he is fortunate that Aberdeen is one, though the staffing level is very low. Their archives are open to any legitimate user. He gave the example of a project on the James Madison Carpenter collection in the course of which they made contact with many of the descendants of Carpenter's singers and formed lasting relationships with them.

Steve Roud asked if ITMA covered Northern Ireland as well. Grace replied that they cover the whole of Ireland, North and South, as well as the Irish diaspora. There is a collection in the Folk and Transport Museum in Belfast, but it is not easily accessible. In this case and others this is due to lack of funding. ITMA are working with a number of collections like this to digitise their material and make it available.

Martin Graebe asked if TSF could help in any way? Grace responded that sharing information about the activities people are engaged in would be the greatest help – partly so they knew what was going on in research and digitisation and partly to avoid duplication of effort. The new Director of ITMA, Liam O'Connor, is very keen that they record interviews with singers and musicians who have worked with collections, so that they know not only what they have in their archive but have the background on what has been done with it. So TSF members should pass this information to ITMA – and Grace is a good contact point. She also said that she would like to talk to Steve Roud about how ITMA could help with adding new songs to the Roud Index.

Brian Doyle said that he was planning make the recording of the afternoon session available on the ITMA website and that this might help raise the profile of TSF.

There was some discussion about sectarian songs and parodies and it was agreed that they should be collected. ITMA does have some material in the archive but many of the recordings are still in copyright.

Jim Carroll talked about the material he had that had come out of the work done by the Critics Group and the London Singers' Workshop. This includes radio plays, lectures, the BBC recordings from the 1950s, as well as the recordings of Critics Group workshops. etc. He is very keen that someone should take this archive over. The provenance of some of the material makes it difficult to make available through conventional outlets and most archives are reluctant to take it on. Jim has put a lot of this material online and will make it available to anyone who is interested and who makes contact with him (riddlesjim.com). In the longer term he would like to see someone take the whole lot over. There was a long discussion about the difficulties of permissions for use of the Critics Group recordings.

Before the morning session closed **Steve Roud** reminded people that, if they have collections, that the first thing to do was to make sure that they are safe. The second is to make clear in their will who becomes responsible for the collection.

He also said that he had forgotten to say that a new website for the Opie collection of children's songs and rhymes was to be launched at the end of October – opiearchive.org.

This concluded the morning session.



Forum Focus – Traditional Song in Ireland

The afternoon session featured six talks about aspects of traditional song in Ireland. Descriptions of the talks and information about the speakers is included below. The talks were videoed by Brian Doyle of the Irish Traditional Music Archive and will, in due course, be available on the ITMA website.

The Fourth Roy Palmer Lecture: The Worlds of Sam Henry – Dr John Moulden

Sam Henry is known world-wide for the newspaper series 'Songs of the People' and the singers and publications that draw on it. However, he was much more than that. He allowed himself to be distracted into the fields of journalism, broadcasting, topography, photography, genealogy, archaeology and others. John Moulden's talk explored and delineated these diversions to indicate that these diffuse strands of his activity can be drawn together to build a compelling context for the songs, the singers and life in north Ulster in the first half of the 20th century.



John Moulden is a lifelong singer and student, more concerned with the location of songs and singers within their communities than with mere words and music. A former Primary School Principal he is, like Roy Palmer, an advocate of the use of traditional songs in schools; but recent work, led by his doctoral thesis 'The printed ballad in Ireland', has been more academic; principally concerned with persuading historians that vernacular songs, properly questioned, are vital components in reaching into the lives of the ordinary people of the past and that literary scholars should appreciate that such songs have qualities not reached by the poetry of the formally educated classes.

Mills, Millies and Mayday, A new industrial female song tradition – Maurice Leyden

Maurice looked at the way in which young mill workers rewrote their street songs to create a new industrial female folksong tradition of their own that reflected their working life in the mills and factories of Ulster. They also created songs to celebrate May day.



Maurice Leyden is a folk-song collector, singer and broadcaster living in Belfast. His first book *Belfast, City of Song* (Brandon, 1989) was published to celebrate the centenary of Belfast becoming a city. His second book *Boys and Girls Come out to Play* (Appletree, 1993) presents a rich collection of children's singing games. He contributed to *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (Cork University Press, 2011) and *Irish People, Irish Linen* by Kathleen Curtis Wilson (Ohio University Press, 2011). He was invited to the Library of Congress in Washington DC. He released a CD of Ulster songs in 2017 entitled *The Tern and the Swallow*.

Between Song and Tune: Liminality in Irish Song Melodies – Dr Conor Caldwell

This talk examined the links between the instrumental, dance, and song traditions in Ireland. Research carried out on The Irish Song Project, has explored the ways in which performers and publishers have reimagined both new and ancient airs, allowing for their continued development. The paper also explored the role of lilters who are key intermediaries between the various strands of music in Ireland, but have not been well studied to date.



Dr. Conor Caldwell is a fiddle player, musicologist, teacher and broadcaster working in fields of traditional and popular music. He engages audiences through a range of interfaces including performance, television and print. He was a presenter of the film *The Long Road to Glenties* and researcher for the TG4 series *Se Mo Laoch* and is the fiddle player with the traditional band Craobh Rua. He achieved his PhD in musicology and is a research fellow in the Irish Song Project from QUB, which is an examination of the history of singing in Ireland. He released a solo CD *To Belfast* in May 2018.

Kind Friends Lend an Ear, a collection of stories and songs from County Monaghan – Fergus Woods

This was a brief review of the process which led to *Kind Friends Lend an Ear* – a collection of stories and songs from Monaghan. Fergus Woods described a chance meeting with Tommy McCabe, recording the songs, interviewing the family, researching background information and finally publishing his discoveries as a book. Examples from the collection were played.



Fergus Woods was born in Newry, County Down but has lived most of his life in Belfast. A retired teacher, he has had a long standing interest in traditional music as a performer, organiser, speaker, researcher and listener. In 2016 he published *Kind Friends Lend an Ear*, a collection of songs and stories from Co. Monaghan and has a particular interest in singing songs from this collection. He was a founder member of the Belfast Folk Song Club back in the 1960's and currently co-hosts the website Belfastfolk.co.uk

'Tis Pretty to be in Ballinderry – Roisin White

Roisin White talked about the life and times of Robert Cinnamond (1884-1968). Because of a recent medical procedure she was not able to sing examples from the collection as planned, but played several examples of Cinnamond singing. These were taken from the CD which accompanies the booklet *Tis Pretty to be in Ballinderry*.



Roisin White was born near Kilkeel County Down. She began performing at the singing festivals in Beleek, County Fermanagh in the late 1970s. Len Graham, Joe Holmes, Sarah Ann O'Neill and Geordie Hanna were an enormous influence on her northern singing style and repertoire. She was awarded the TG4 Gradam Ceoil in 2015. She has released two solo CDs: *The First of My Rambles* (1991) and *Le Buíochas* (2010). In 2018 Roisín organised the release of a double CD of songs sung by Robert Cinnamond with a comprehensive booklet.

Child Ballads in Ireland - Jim Carroll

Using Tom Munnelly's list of 50 Child Ballads extant in Ireland up to the 1970s, Jim Carroll described and played examples of his further findings, largely taken from published sources, including those carried from Ireland to the U.K., U.S. and Canada by emigrants following the famine.



Jim Carroll and **Pat Mackenzie** became involved in folk song in 1962 in Liverpool. Association with MacColl, Seeger and 'The Critics Group' inspired a love of Ballads. In the early seventies, they began to work with source singers, collecting background information as well as their songs. Their work in Clare, with travelers near London, and with England's last large repertoire singer, Walter Pardon, proved invaluable in exploring the social and cultural significance of folksong as 'Voice of the People', beyond entertainment value.

Commercially available examples include an album by singers from Clare, *Around the Hills of Clare* and an album of travelers' songs, *From Puck to Appleby*. The Clare singers are accessible on Clare County Library's website, 'The Carroll/Mackenzie collection'.

Thanks

We are very grateful to Bill Wolsey for making the Ulster Sports Club available for the meeting and for providing tea and coffee. Thanks are also due to Maurice Leyden and Jane Cassidy for devising the programme, making all the local arrangements, organising and running the Saturday evening singing session and for the very enjoyable walk on Sunday morning. That it was such a successful and enjoyable weekend is due to their efforts.



Martin Graebe

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