



Traditional Song Forum

Traditional Song Forum Meeting, 25 March 2017

Held at Linklater Pavilion, Lewes

We last visited Lewes five years ago and, this time, we were the guests of the Sussex Traditions project. This was another well-attended meeting with a good mixture of TSF regulars and people from the locality who were interested to find out more about folk song and tradition in Sussex and about TSF. Thanks to the Sussex Traditions team for their excellent organisation and their hospitality. They had, clearly, grasped that good cake is an essential feature of a TSF meeting.

Welcome

Steve Roud and Anita Broad welcomed TSF members, and their guests to the morning session, and introduced the Sussex Traditions team. The meeting continued with a brief review of TSF business.

TSF business

1 Future meetings

The next TSF meeting will be held in Sheffield on 16 September, and will be the occasion for the second Roy Palmer Lecture to be given by Ian Russell. More details will be made available in the next few weeks. Next year's Broadside Day will be held in Cambridge on 24 February. Plans for 2018 are being considered and any thoughts on locations and any offers to host a meeting would be very welcome.

2 Membership Secretary

Shan Graebe will shortly be taking on the role of TSF Membership Secretary.

3 Finances

Our account stands at £1038.02. We have recently been very fortunate in that various organisations have made meeting venues available at low or no cost. A number of members have paid their subscriptions. Those that haven't are invited to do so.

Networking Session

Bob and Jackie Patten have been looking at the evolution of some folk traditions, notably carols. Bob gave the example of the wassail party at Drayton in Somerset where the family who had led the activity for several decades. New people came in and Bob has discovered that they have learned the songs from the recordings that he had made and which are on the British Library website – as strange, circular process. At Hatherleigh where they had adopted a carol some years ago and which is now heard regularly. At Landkey in north Devon the carolling tradition had a near-death

experience, because it had been a wholly oral tradition with a principle that they would not use written music. In fact some scraps of paper survived and it has proved possible to reconstruct many of the carols. They are now working with Wren Music and the next Festival of Exmoor Carols will feature the Landkey repertoire. They have also met a group called the Owls of Pill. Pill is a village on the Somerset coast and, after the First World War a group of ex-soldiers started a tradition of singing carols for charity. They dressed up in Capes and top-hats to perform. The carols themselves are not particularly interesting but they are celebrating their centenary this year and, in 2016, raised £16,000 for local charities.

Lewis Jones is working on a paper for the EFDSS conference – ‘Traditional Tunes and Popular Airs: History and Transmission’ to be held at Cecil Sharp House 6-7 October 2017 (details on the VWML website). In preparation he and his colleague, Simon Furey, have put a paper on Folkopedia about ‘Scales and Musical Modes in Celtic, Anglo-American and English Folk Songs’. They are continuing transcribing the tunes in VWML Digital Database and is now working on the Lucy Broadwood collection. Many of these tunes are from Sussex and he offered his help to the Sussex Traditions project to put them on their website. He will talk to Tina Smith (who is transcriber-in-chief for the project) about this. Tina added that if anyone else is interested, please let me know. He reported that his book about Lucy Broadwood, *Sweet Sussex*, can be downloaded from the IMSLP website, as can a number of other folk song collections.

Paula Nicholson belongs to Sussex Harmony and asked about the scope of TSF’s work – does it include sacred song, psalms, canticles, glees etc? Vic Smith replied that they have been in contact with Rachel Jordan of Sussex and he will be meeting with her to talk about finding a place for this sort of material in the project. All forms of music are of interest. Paula went on to say that Sussex Harmony are a costumed group performing the music which was sung in rural churches before 1850. They also perform patriotic music. She described four of the group’s research projects. The Catsfield manuscripts contains 175 items, some of which are unique. McDermott was a vicar of Selsey and, in about 1917, wrote to all the 200 parishes in the diocese asking what information they had about the old bands and their music. He made an interesting collection of old church music manuscripts. Another person of interest is Nathaniel Cook who was the organist of St Nicholas, Brighton and composed some excellent material for his church. They have also sought patriotic anthems and found an excellent group written by the Fig Family of Lewes. Steve Roud added that a number of TSF members are interested in West Gallery and other early forms of song.

Stuart Walker talked about his experience of performing a show of Sussex carols. They have a collection about 17 local carols, based mainly on the work of Vic Gammon. They do about 5 performances each year, each including a short mummings play.

Jill Thompson said that there is also a group of pub carol singers working in Brighton. They have started with Sheffield carols but are introducing more local carols.

Ron (and Jenny) Day had brought copies of the latest of the reprinted Frank Purslow books based on the Hammond and Gardiner collections – *Southern Harvest*, which has recently been published. A promotional tour has been organised involving Bryony Griffiths, Paul Sartin, Jackie Oates and Jim Causley singing music from the book.

Simon Harmer is a step dancer from Hampshire who has worked on the Alice Gillington’s collection, trying to identify who her sources were and looking into her background. He is also interested in

Scott's 1910-13 expedition and Edward McKenzie who danced in Herbert Ponting's film of the expedition. He grew up in Portsmouth and Simon has discovered that he was a musician, dancer and singer who sang a lot on the voyage. He is engaged on a project to bring McKenzie's dancing to life. There were two other singers on the trip that are of interest. Bob Patten added that Ponting in his book, *The Great White South*, quotes 3 shanties. His notes preserved with the records of the expedition in Cambridge.

Paul Davenport mentioned that, over the Easer weekend, there will be the Sheffield Folk Sessions Festival – possibly the biggest free folk song events in the western hemisphere. It takes place in 10 pubs, who pay the organisers to put the festival on

Bob Askew looked into the history of publication of Hampshire songs and has discovered that there were a number of collections made in the early years there was little published more recently, so he welcomed the re-issue of Frank Purslow's books and asked people to recognise the value of the songs from Hampshire. He is currently conducting a study of the singer Patience Vaisey, who came from Hampshire though she later lived in Oxfordshire, where she was collected from, and later in Gloucestershire, where she died. He is hoping to organise a CD of songs that she sang.

Steve Roud passed on some messages from Laura Smyth, The VWML Library Director, who could not be present, as she was involved in running a conference in London. The VWML Digital Archive will shortly be expanded to include the Ken Stubbs collection, bringing in recorded material for the first time (Some of this material is already available on the Sussex Traditions website). It will be followed later this year by the vast collection made in Britain by James Carpenter. Richard Mellish asked what the relationship between the Carpenter collection at the VWML and the Library of Congress, and Steve explained the transatlantic co-operation on the project. The EFDSS conference on folk tunes was mentioned earlier, and Steve emphasised its importance. The VWML has also agreed to take in a collection of 4,000 pieces of sheet music, mainly music hall material, which was made by John Earl. This is very welcome, as the library does not have much sheet music at present. Plans to produce a subject index of English folk song are being carried forward.

Malcolm Taylor reported that there is a film about George Butterworth, made by Stuart Morgan, which will to be released later this year.

Gwilym Davies gave an update on the Gloucestershire Traditions project with 750 songs and a number of tunes, including some from the Carpenter and Grainger collections. They have a committee of trustees including some young(er) people who will ensure future continuity. Since the project was launched they have heard from descendants of singers, who were delighted at the celebration of their ancestor's songs and were often able to offer new information about them. Steve Roud reflected on the number of different county websites now available, and suggested that there is a need to find a way to bring them together through some sort of portal website that enables a seamless search for material across all the different sites. There have been some discussions at EFDSS about the software that might enable this to be done

Martin Graebe reported that, shortly after the last meeting, he secured a publishing deal for his book to be called *As I Walked Out, Sabine Baring-Gould and His Search for Song in Devon and Cornwall*. It is expected to be launched in the autumn as a reasonably priced paperback, with illustrations (some in colour). Sabine Baring-Gould taught in Sussex for eight years and though he never noted any songs here, he did record a number of items of folklore.

Vic Elliott asked whether there was an archive of W H Gill's collection of folk songs, some of which he heard in Sussex. Stephen Miller has been working on his work, though his focus has been mainly on his Isle of Mann songs. Vic has a copy of the book and is interested in finding out more.

Paula Nicholson asked whether anyone has looked at the songs associated with the ironworking industry in Sussex. Steve Roud said he was not aware of any. The difficulty lies with the oral tradition

Sandra Goddard wondered whether there had been any research into the hidden repertoire of LGBT songs in the tradition. No-one was able to offer any thoughts. The discussion moved on to look at the question of what women sang away from male company and the choices made by female singers generally.

Archives, Collections, and the Grim Reaper

At the Liverpool meeting there was (not for the first time) a discussion about the disposal of collections at the end of the collector's working life (or death). It was agreed that Steve Roud would prepare a set of guidelines for discussion and adoption by TSF. He presented these to the meeting and a copy of the draft recommendation is appended at the end of this report. Comments would be welcome, and should be addressed to Steve Roud (steveroud@gmail.com). And it would be great if you could copy me on it as well (martin.graebe@btinternet.com)

This is an important thing that needs careful consideration. Not all collectors or enthusiasts make adequate arrangements for disposing of their collection while they are still alive. Often these collections need to be dealt with rapidly, as relatives are anxious to settle the estate and need to clear the house. There have been a number of instances where plans made have gone astray.

Sandra Goddard described her own situation as an example. Vic Smith offered to come round and copy all Sandra's material.

When people have had a chance to comment and improve on this draft it will be adopted by TSF and a copy placed on our website for ready reference.

Forum Focus Session

The 'Forum Focus' session included four presentations on Sussex singers and collecting. The presentations were:

Vic Smith – 'The life and Songs of Gordon Hall'

Vic played his recording of an interview with Gordon Hall from 1991, illustrated with a large selection of photographs. The transcript of this interview can be read on the Musical Traditions website – go to www.mustring.org.uk/articles/g_hall.htm

Elizabeth Bennett – 'Searching for a Quiet Grave'

This presentation was based on Elizabeth's PhD study of Sussex folk songs. She has walked the whole length of the South Downs Way and talked with a number of people and exchanged songs. She has considered what walking and singing means and also looked at archives as a place where encounters are recorded. She has consciously tried to move away

from a white male perspective. She has been particularly interested in the work of Dorothy Marshall, and provided new information about her life and work, some of which has been attributed to George Carey. Much of this was gained from her correspondence, particularly that with Carey. She was an early adopter of the phonograph as a way of collecting songs. Her ill-health and early death prevented her from achieving her full potential as a collector and is a factor in the lack of recognition for her work.

There was some discussion about the way Marshall's phonograph cylinders were neglected and 'lost' (though it seems possible that some have been rediscovered recently). Steve Roud suggested that the original collectors did not regard their cylinders as archiveable in themselves (as we might) – they were just a means to an end.

Reg Hall – 'Finding Traditional Music and Song in Sussex in the Late 1950s'

Reg gave a fascinating presentation on his adventures collecting in Sussex at a time when informed interest in traditional song among the establishment of English folk song had waned. He met many well-known singers and musicians in Sussex, such as Scan Tester, George Maynard, and Walter Bulwer. This was an illuminating account that added Reg's personal views on contemporary figures to a valuable history of his work and description of the people that he met, played and sang with and also shared some interesting observations on the nature of folk song, music and dance.

Steve Roud – 'The Sussex Traditions Project'

Because of a shortage of time it was, unfortunately, not possible to give more than a very brief overview of the Sussex Traditions Project. For those interested, it is recommended that they look at the Sussex Traditions website - <http://sussextraditions.org>

I will be editing the recordings of the talks by Elizabeth Bennett and Reg Hall and will make them available to paid-up TSF members in the usual way via my DropBox. If anyone wishes to listen to them, please let me know and I will send them the link.

Thanks

Thanks to Steve Roud, Laura Hockenhull and the Sussex Traditions team for organising the meeting and to all the speakers. There was also a very well attended and enjoyable singing session in the evening.

ARCHIVES AND COLLECTIONS

Compiled by Steve Roud (3rd draft 21 March 2017)

Part 1 - What you can do with your material

This section is concerned with what to do while you are alive to ensure the preservation and orderly succession of your collection. See Part 2 for what happens after you've gone.

SUMMARY

- Be practical
- Be realistic, not sentimental
- Be flexible
- Plan ahead
- and, most important of all
- Find a friend**

BACKGROUND

Our subject is of interest to people in many fields, but is essential to none. All libraries, archives, and other such institutions are under immense pressure these days - for staffing, money, space, and their very existence. Material which is peripheral to their core interest often stands a poor chance of being accepted.

PLAN AHEAD

The biggest danger to a smooth transition comes quickly after your departure. Your family must know what to do. If they care nothing for the subject, need to get things sorted quickly, cannot cope with the logistics of getting the material boxed up and stored, or simply don't know who to turn to for advice and help - that's when things go badly wrong.

It is nearly always best to put some things into action while you are still alive so that you can manage it yourself. But be aware that things change. Re-visit and update your instructions periodically. Assess your collection realistically. Identify its strengths and weaknesses - ask around for who might want it. Decide whether a local, regional or national repository would be the best fit. And so on.

FIND A FRIEND

By far the best thing you can do is to find someone you trust who will sort things out for you, *as best they can*, after you have gone. In many cases it is advisable to simply will the whole lot to them, with no strings attached, and trust them to do right by you. It may be necessary to find a new friend from time to time, as circumstances change. And make sure your family knows who your friend is and that they should contact him/her when the time comes.

WRITE A WILL

Wills can be tricky things, because people don't update them, and setting binding conditions which cannot be met can complicate things immensely. But, however much you tell people of your wishes, or make lists and plans, if you haven't put something in your will, your executors will not be bound

by your wishes. This is particularly relevant if your collection includes items of monetary value on the open market.

If you have a *formal* agreement (in writing) with a repository that they will take your collection, definitely put it in your will. If not, will it to your friend, or at least make it explicit in your will that your material must be offered to public institutions and not simply sold off.

MONEY TALKS

If you are in a position to do so, try to leave some money to go with the collection. Repositories might be more willing to accept material if they have some money to help re-package, sort and catalogue it.

TOGETHERNESS

The biggest stumbling-block with people's plans is that we always want the collection to *stay together*, but this is often not possible (or even desirable for later users). In the real world, your prized collection of jazz, folk and early Italian opera records may well be better split into three. It is unlikely that any repository will want them all, and the golden rule is that things should go where they will be best used. Accept and allow for flexibility in what is kept and what is discarded.

DUPLICATES

All collections will include many common-or-garden items, and if you expect repositories to keep all those in your collection you may well put the whole transaction at risk. When space is at a premium, don't try to force them to choose between ownership of your gems and a ton of things they don't want. Cherry-picking always sounds bad but it is often the best option.

FORMATS

Many repositories are only interested in particular formats, which can be a problem for a subject like ours. A 'sound archive' will not want quantities of printed materials, a standard library may not want items in formats which need special (usually old-fashioned) technology to access them. If you have specialist or difficult formats, consider getting them transferred to a more accessible future-proof format *now*.

OWNERSHIP

Ownership is often a tricky subject, especially for your family. Family members often have an inflated idea of the monetary worth of collections. Repositories are understandably unwilling to take in collections which they do not own, as they are reluctant to devote space, time and money to material which somebody might take away at any time. Repositories also don't want to face future problems of collections tied up in restrictive caveats, or of simply not knowing who can have access to the material, who can take copies, who can give permission for publication, etc.

Again, the best advice is to designate your Friend as your 'literary executor', with powers of permission, disposal, etc.

BE PATIENT AND PROACTIVE

'I gave my collection to ----, and they have never even unpacked the boxes...' - again, be reasonable. It was a wonderful collection to you, but just one of many for the repository, and they will certainly

have other priorities - *and other people saying the same thing*. You can help things along in several ways. Sort and label the material. Provide a handlist or catalogue so that repository staff can find things if asked for. Encourage people to become interested and ask to use the material. Create a market for the information. Give money. Repositories take a long view. If it takes ten years for your material to become fully available, that is better than it not surviving at all.

CONDITIONS AND CONSERVATION

It is unlikely that any of us can achieve professional storage conditions, but we can make an effort. Cool steady temperature, and dry, is the basic rule, but different materials need different handling. Much can be done with common sense - store photos out of the light, keep fingers off them, don't store vinyl in piles, etc. Photos can be put into plastic sleeves to help protect them, but beware, many standard plastics will stick to glossy photos after a time. Archive-quality sleeves do not cost the earth.

The VWML will be happy to advise and tell you where archive-quality materials can be bought. The EFDSS also gives small grants to individuals and small organisations, in honour of retired librarian Malcolm Taylor, specifically for the purpose of encouraging people to look after their materials.

RE-CIRCULATION

In the final analysis, it is not necessarily the end of the world if your collection is broken up. You, presumably, derived a great deal of pleasure putting the collection together, and if the material goes back onto the open market it will allow another generation of enthusiasts to do the same.

You can also combine your approaches. Donate your book or CD collection to a repository, with the condition that they keep what they need and sell the rest, using the money to pay for storage materials for your manuscripts or digitisation costs for sound recordings that they want to keep. In these cases, make sure your instructions are worded so that the money raised definitely goes to the library or archive, not the organisation that runs it (unless that's what you want), but don't make unrealistic demands.

ARCHIVES AND COLLECTIONS

Part 2 - What TSF can do to help

See Part 1 for advice to individuals on ensuring the preservation of their collections.

In the current climate of austerity, the commercialisation of higher education, the decimation of public services, and other pressures, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find repositories to take in, and make available, our kind of material.

1 THREE STAGES OF PRESERVATION

There are three key stages of preservation, and each needs a different approach and different resources.

- 1 Make it safe
- 2 Keep it safe
- 3 Make it accessible

1.1 Make it safe covers the plans we make for future preservation, and is the critical question after someone dies. If prior arrangements have not been made, success depends on the right people being alerted in time; decisions being made quickly; transport and temporary storage being available, etc.

1.2 Keep it safe is concerned with long-term survival. Finding somewhere appropriate where it can be looked after, preferably in professionally-rated conditions, although this may not always be possible.

1.3 Make it accessible is how the material is treated once in safe hands. Sorted, catalogued, indexed, advertised, made available for consultation, digitised, etc.

In the real world, we may not be able to reach perfection in any of these spheres. But achieving something is better than doing nothing.

2 WHAT WE CAN DO

The following suggestions are concerned with the above three Key Stages, and the spheres in which our involvement could be beneficial:

- Advice and expertise
- Practical assistance
- Financial assistance
- Oversight and monitoring
- Support for what is already there

2.1

To a large extent we must continue to rely on individuals. The Folk world is actually very good at that - it's what we've always done. We must trust our members to do what is best - it is not ideal for someone to volunteer to store a collection in their garage. But if it allows survival it may be the only acceptable option.

Keep information networks flowing. Our strength is that we know people across the country, who know people. Alert others to the state of play - where things are, what's at risk, who needs help or advice.

2.2

We could have a fund for the **Make it safe** stage, to cover expenses of travel, transportation and perhaps temporary storage.

2.3

Give more support to what we've got. In England, the VWML is still the leading repository for our kind of material, and the current best hope for the future. Whether you agree with the EFDSS as a whole or not - the best way to ensure the Library's survival is to join the Society - and make sure those in charge never forget the importance of the Library and Archives. But a local or other specialist repository might be more appropriate for some collections.

We should support and encourage local initiatives such as the Glostrad and Sussex Traditions, who are at the forefront of gathering and making resources available.

2.4

We could have a fund for **Make it accessible** - pay to employ temporary cataloguers, people to scan things, digitisers, hire or buy specialist equipment: whatever is necessary to smooth the path.

2.5

Target our support. Quite rightly, institutions have professional standards to which they need to adhere. But employing a professional archivist to catalogue a major collection, providing acid-free sleeves and boxes, and so on, often takes serious money, and the collections which we think are important may not have priority within the institution. If we think a collection is important we need to fight its corner.

2.6

Initiate small-scale projects of our own. Where we know of a small collection (e.g. the broadside collection we saw in Liverpool Library) we should find someone local to index it or even take digital images. We can offer advice on how to do it. We could offer small grants to cover travel or other costs.

3 BE PREPARED

If we are to be effective, we should be aware of what often happens when somebody dies. The commonest scenario is that the family needs both *advice* and *practical assistance*, but what is

needed varies with each situation. Recent experience prompts the following pragmatic categorisation, but the overarching need for tact and sympathy goes without saying.

Fast action

Some families wish to get the material moved very quickly. They want to sell the house, they want to move on. In some cases the collection has already been a burden or even bone of contention for years. Swift decisive action is called for (but see **Later questions** below).

Deferred action

Some families wish to keep hold of material because of an attachment to their lost loved one. Moving too quickly may be painful. But there will come a time (months or even years later) when they do want to do something, and it will often be a *different set of people* (i.e. the next generation) making the move. Things agreed at the beginning will often have been forgotten or misinterpreted.

Inflated notions of value

Families often have a somewhat inflated notion of the importance of the collection - either of its monetary value, or because they naturally think their loved one was a very important person in our field. In the latter case they find it difficult to understand why repositories are not falling over themselves to take the material. It takes patience and tact to persuade them otherwise.

Later questions

In *many* cases, especially those which start with 'fast action', a family member later suddenly pops up and questions what was done, sometimes years later. This is usually based on the 'Inflated notion' syndrome - 'My dad's work is not being appreciated..', or 'Grandad had some valuable books - where did they go...?', and so on. Be aware that this is likely to happen. Document decisions. If possible get things in writing right from the beginning.