

Cross Border Raids: *Conflicting interpretations of folk music collected in the borderlands of the Tamar Valley and Dartmoor.*

There is an underlying “received wisdom” and “common sense” about the nature of traditional music and community identity in the British Isles, which continues to be defined by the cultural aspirations and backgrounds of a small group of enthusiasts active in collecting and publishing folk material during the early part of the last century. From the perspective of Cornish identity this is thrown into sharp relief by the contrasting interpretations of material collected in the borderlands of the Tamar Valley and Dartmoor. This paper will consider three different ways in which this material has been perceived and interpreted.

In the British Isles the genre of music we call “folk” or “traditional” has its roots in the activities of a small group of enthusiasts in the late 19th century. Certainly a leader and arguably the first folk song collector in the modern sense was Rev Sabine Baring-Gould who worked in the Dartmoor / North Cornwall / Tamar Valley area that also provides the geographic backdrop for the subject of today’s conference. It is a delightful, and perhaps informative, irony that Baring-Gould’s work might be seen as pioneering the English Folk Song revival and yet the geographic area of his work is being considered by this conference as a contested border between England and Cornwall.

Baring-Gould

Although he maintained an interest and continued to add material to his collection for a further ten years or so, Baring-Gould’s main period of collection activity was circa 1888 to 1893. His collection provides us with a snap shot of the songs popular at the social events and in the pubs and Inns of the farming and working communities of Dartmoor and North East Cornwall. These songs are a mixture of broadside balladsⁱ, music hall songs and material of much earlier originⁱⁱ and taken down from singers who were often celebrities in their locality. It is important to recognise the “pick and mix” nature of the material collected, with lyrics and words frequently interchanged and adapted. Baring-Goulds rough copy notebooksⁱⁱⁱ illustrate this with a large number of variants being collected for some songs such as “Flowers and Weeds”.

Baring-Gould’s collection in Cornwall is summarised by Martin Greabe: *“Baring-Gould’s ‘Personal Copy’ manuscript contains nearly 100 songs collected from about 35 singers in Cornwall In round terms, though, we are talking about a quarter of the singers that Baring-Gould collected from and about one seventh of the songs. The majority of the songs were collected by Baring-Gould himself, sometimes alone, sometimes with Frederick Bussell who would take down the music while Baring-Gould concentrated on the words.”^{iv}* Although there were subsequently a number of folk song collectors active in Cornwall none were so prolific as Baring-Gould in the amount of material they as Baring-Gould and only a handful of songs were further collected in the North and East. *Illustrate with table of who collected what, where and when.*

Baring Gould provides an insight into his own view of the nature of the material he collected in his introduction to "Songs and Ballads of the West":

"But what I find is that songs and ballads sung to their traditional melodies in Somersetshire, in Sussex, in Yorkshire, and Northumberland, are sung to quite independent airs on Dartmoor and in Cornwall. How is this? Because the same process went on in the West as in Scotland.

The Celtic tongue retrograded and finally expired in Cornwall. Then English ballads and songs found their way into Cornwall, as they found their way into Scotland and Ireland, and were set to already familiar melodies thenceforth dissociated from their no longer understood words. Take an instance. There is in Welsh a song on the pleasures of the bottle, "Glân meddwod mwyn." Now precisely the same melody was sung in Cornwall, almost certainly to words of a like nature. When the Cornish tongue ceased to be spoken, then this melody was applied to a broadside drinking song, Fathom the Bowl." But "Fathom the Bowl" has, everywhere else, its own traditional air.

Another well-known song is "Tobacco is an Indian weed," another is "Joan's Ale is New," both wedded one would have supposed indissolubly to their traditional airs known everywhere else in England. But not so in Cornwall and on Dartmoor; there these words are set to quite independent melodies—melodies that probably had accompanied words in the old Cornish tongue in former times. To descend later. Broadside ballads, and songs in "Warblers," and "Apollo's Cabinets," &c., got down into the West, unassociated with music. Then, again, the local composers went to work and set them to tunes of their own creation. Thus, "Sweet Nightingale" was a song by Bickerstaff, to which Dr. Arne wrote music in 1761, and it was sung in an opera in London. The words got into a song-book, "The Syren," which found its way into Cornwall. Some village musician—no bumpkin at the plough tail—set it, and it was sung by the miners in their adits and the labourers in the fields to the locally produced air, not to that by Dr. Arne.^v"

So this is our first "cross border raid" of Celtic territory claimed from Devon. What is interesting here is not just whether or not the difference between melodies found "*everywhere else in England*" and those found "*in Cornwall and on Dartmoor*" actually were the result of Celtic influence, but also Baring-Gould's perception of a border between the English of the East, and the Britons / Celts of the West, and identification of that border with Dartmoor.

Cecil Sharp

5 years later, however, Cecil Sharp makes a quite different interpretation in his editorship of the fifth edition of Baring-Gould's "Songs of the West"^{vi}. The Celtic links originally espoused by Baring-Gould are toned down considerably in the introduction and explanation of some of the materials

origin. The notes provided for the song "Lord Arscott of Tetcott"^{vii} but Cecil Sharp's position could not be better illustrated by the complete reversal of explanation given for the origins of Lord Arscott of Tetcott.

In Songs and Ballads of the West Baring Gould writes:

The author of the song is said to have been one Dogget, who used to run after Arscott's fox hounds on foot. If so, then he probably followed the habit of all rural bards of using for his purpose an earlier ballad, and spoiling and vulgarising it; such poets are incapable of originating anything. I think this because along with much wretched stuff there are traces of something better, and smacking of an earlier period. As Dogget's doggerel has been printed, and I have taken down from ten to twelve versions all widely differing, I have not considered it worth preserving except only where there are pre-Doggetian verses, incorporated by him into his copy; and I have ventured to recast the conclusion. The tune was obtained through the assistance of Mr. J. Richards, schoolmaster at Tetcott. The same tune is found in Wales to the words "Difurwch gwyr Dyfl" (E. Jones' Musical Relicks of the Welsh Bards, 1794-, I., p. 129).

It-or rather half of the tune-was introduced by D'Urfey into his "Pills to purge Malancholy," to the words "Dear Catholic Brother" (Ed. 1719-20, Vol. VI., p. 277). From D'Urfey it passed into the "Musical Miscellany" (1731, Vol. VI., p. 171), to the words "Come, take up your Burden, ye Dogs, and away." D'Urfey was a Devonshire Man, and he probably picked up the tune when a boy in the West, and used as much of it as he wanted to set to his song. The air is much older than the age of D'Urfey; it probably belongs to an early stock common to the Celts of Wales and Cornwall. ^{viii}

Whereas under Sharp's Editorship we find:

"The author of the version of the song as now sung is said to have been one Dogget, who was wont to run after the foxhounds of the last Arscott. He probably followed the habit of all rural bards of adapting an earlier ballad to his purpose, and spoiling it in so doing. I think this, because along with much wretched stuff there occur traces of something better, and smacking of an earlier period. As Dogg-el's dog-gerel has been printed, and as I have taken down a dozen variants, I have retained only what I deemed worthy of retention, and have entirely recast the conclusion of the song.

John Arscott is still believed to hunt the country, and there are men alive who declare positively that they have seen him and his hounds go by, and have heard the winding of his horn, at night, in the park at Tetcott.

Mr Frank Abbott, gamekeeper at Pencarrow, but born at Tetcott, informed me, concerning Dogget: "Once they unkennelled in the immediate neighbourhood of Tetcott, and killed at Hatherleigh. This runner was in at the death, as was his wont. John Arscott ordered him a bed at Hatherleigh, but to his astonishment, when he returned to Tetcott, his wife told him all the particulars of the run. 'Then,' said Arscott, 'this must be the doing of none other than Dogget .where is he?' Dogget was soon found in the servants' hall, drinking ale, having outstripped his master and run all the way home."

Half of the tune was employed by D'Urfey, a Devonshire man,. in his "Pills to Purge Melancholy," to the words, "Dear Catholic Brother" (vi. p. 277, ed. 1719-20). From D'Urfey it passed into the "Musical Miscellany," 1731, vi. p. 171, to the words, "Come take up your Burden, ye Dogs, and away." From England the same half-tune was carried into Wales, and Jones, in his "Musical Relicks of the Welsh Bards," 1794, i. p. 129, gives it set to the words of "Difarwch gwyn Dyfl." ^{ix}

C# controversial figure on Folk Scene but came from a powerful discourse influencing the school curriculum and setting the scene for a series of English Based Folk Revivals leaving Cornwall invisible on the British Folk scene and the activity of Celtic revivalists represented by the Gorsed, and the OCS together with Dunstan, an essentially local activity. Cornwall did not really move from this position until the Peter Kennedy's collections and his use of songs in Cornish in "Folk Songs of Great Britain and Ireland.

1970s Celtic Revival

Inspired, perhaps, by notions of Cornwall's legitimacy in claiming ownership of a Celtic South West Culture and the fluidity of boundaries. Increasing understanding of Cornish Migration east in latter times and early fluidity of the Anglo Celtic border Border raids started again in earnest with the Celtic revival of the late 70s. Dick Gendal "borrowed" a song from Baring Gould's Dartmoor collection "Edhen Olow"^x the Golden bird for a translation into Cornish for entry into the Pan Celtic Trad song Contest in 1978 and Tony Snell produced a prodigious number of translations on folk songs including "Den Yowynk a Gernow" Young man of Cornwall from Cecil Sharp's Somerset collection^{xi} I have to admit to taking part in such raids myself with Mallard. It has after all, according to Baring Gould a Breton Connection.

Conclusion

Celebrating the fluidity of the border is entertaining and can be seen to creatively quite productive to Cornwall's advantage in promoting a distinct identity but there is a caution here. The perception of Cornwall within the Folk movement as an English rather than Celtic domain is not reflected in the reality of the substance of collection but in the discourse and power base of the protagonists. Cecil Sharp was the least engaged in Cornwall of all the collectors but has probably had the biggest impact on how Folk Music in Cornwall is perceived. Had Carpenters collection some 20 years later provided the corpus of "English" folk music Cornwall would have been presented in a very different light. On that note can I propose that CAVA look at obtaining digital copies of Carpenters wax cylinder collections in Cornwall?

ⁱ Broadside ballads were printed sheets of verse without music, intended to be sung to a given popular tune and might be seen as a form of "pop" music during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Royal Institution of Cornwall museum has a collection of Broadside Ballads with topics ranging from Wrecks of the Scilly isles to French Polish drinking at Goonhavern

ⁱⁱ For example "The Owl" collected from James Olver of Launceston is found in Deuteromelia published in 1609

ⁱⁱⁱ The Wren Trust Baring-Gould project 1998 produced Microfiches of all the extant Baring-Gould rough copy notebooks, fair copies and annotated copies of "Songs and Ballads of the West" and "A Garland of Country Songs"

^{iv} Graebe. Martin, "The Folk Next Door – Sabine Baring Gould and Cornwall " paper presented at the Baring Gould Study Week End October 2001

^v Baring-Gould. Sabine, Songs and Ballads of the **West**

^{vi} Sharp, C Editor; Folk Songs of Devon and Cornwall, Collected from the mouths of the people By S Baring Goud
H Fleetwood Shepherd, F.W Bussel, Under the Musical Editorship of Cecil J Sharp, Principle of the Hampstead
Conseratoire, 5th Edition in one Volume, Methuen & Co Ltd 36 Essex Street London 1905

^{vii} Lord Arscott of Tetcott is also known as the Pencarrow Hunt and was supplied to Henry Jenner by Baring-
Gould for inclusion in the Celtic Congress's publication National Songs of the Celtic Nations.

^{viii} Baring Gould, S, H Fleetwood Shepherd, Songs and Ballads of the West, Methuen, London, 1892, song
no 2:

^{ix} Baring Gould, S, Songs of the West, Methuen, London, 1905 (Ed – C J Sharp), Song no 2:

^x Pan Keltek Entry ...

^{xi} See Canow Wryn Hedhyu