

An Early Australian article on ‘English Folk Songs and Dances’

Clive Carey

Eds: There now follows, after an ‘Introduction’, the Australian links to the ‘English’ scholarship of Folk Songs and Dances. The ‘discoverer’ of this material is the fine South Australian historian and archivist authority on so many relevant folk works of that state.

[Brian Samuels:]

Could the article reproduced here be the earliest scholarly article on English folk song and dance published in Australia? Such questions are easy to ask but difficult to answer given the current state of scholarship. Whatever is the case, the article is certainly worth recovering from its most unlikely place of initial publication, namely *Advance! Australia*, a political journal published by the Theosophical Society in Australia.

I serendipitously discovered it while researching the history of the Folk Song and Dance Society of South Australia (FSDSSA), another early initiative [1926] in the Australian context. Thanks to the Theosophical Society having included a consolidated index to its journals on its website, a Google search on the former Society's founding President, Clive Carey, led me to it.

I have written about the foundation of the FSDSSA elsewhere,¹ but suffice it to say that Carey's background eminently suited him for both his role as President and the scholarly article he authored.

As I wrote in my second article on the FSDSSA:

Email correspondence with the Library Director of the English Folk Song and Dance Society led me to an entry on Carey in the recently published multi-volume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, and it immediately became clear what drove Carey to form the

¹ ‘The Folk Song and Dance Society of South Australia (formed c.1927) A Research Note’, *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, 33 (2005), pp. 120-123 and ‘Clive Carey and the Folk Song and Dance Society of South Australia: an update’, *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 38 (2010), pp. 118-123.

South Australian society. During a diverse career Carey (1883-1968) had been one of the pioneers of the English Folk Revival,

collecting songs and dances in Sussex, Essex, and Oxfordshire. Perhaps through his sympathy with the women's suffrage movement he supported Mary Neal in opposition to Cecil Sharp. Between 1910 and 1914 Carey organized the musical activities of Neal's Espérance Morris Guild, and he remained a lifelong friend. He contributed to part two of the Espérance Morris Book (1912) and published Ten English Folk Songs in 1915. (C.J. Bearman, 'Carey, (Francis) Clive Savill (1883-1968)', ODNB, vol. 10, 2004, p. 70.)

Later Carey was one of the original group of the English Singers who did much to revive madrigal singing. Carey's appointment to Adelaide's Elder Conservatorium (1924-28) was his first major teaching post. Adelaide was also where he met Doris Johnson (1891-1968), whom he married in 1929. From 1939 to 1945 he lived again in Australia, taught at the Elder Conservatorium and was co-director of the Melbourne Conservatorium 1943-45. Back in England, he was on the staff of the Royal College of Music, and professor of singing and director of the opera school at the Royal College of Music between 1946 and 1953, where his pupils included Joan Sutherland.²

Carey's 'English Folk Songs and Dances' was serialised over three issues of *Advance! Australia*: 1 July, 1 August and 1 October 1927; and is reproduced in facsimile with the Theosophical Society's permission from copies held by the Society's Campbell Theosophical Research Library in Sydney. Carey also gave a presentation on 'English Folk Songs' to a public meeting of the Society in its rooms at 334a King William St, Adelaide on 4 September 1927 with 'music by Signor Torre and Mrs. Lawry'.³

Brian Samuels

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'English Folk Songs and Dances'

Mr Clive Carey, B. A., Mus. Bac., has taken avail of the splendid opportunity which came to him as one of the Professors of Singing and Director of the Open Class at the Elder Conservatorium of Music to introduce into Adelaide folk dancing in its pristine beauty and gay simplicity. The movement is spreading in the Commonwealth, to its

² *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, 38 (2010), p. 120.

³ Advertised in the *South Australian Register*, 3 September 1927, p. 15f. I was alerted to the lecture by J. Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, University of NSW Press, Kensington, c.1986, p. 349.

moral and aesthetic benefit, and promises to furnish one antidote, at least, to the bizarre and devitalising dances which today dominate many of our dance programmes. Mr Carey founded the Folk Song and Dance Society of South Australia, which made him its first President.

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The Recent Revival in England

The revival of Folk Songs and Dances in England during the last twenty years and the increasing strength and popularity of the movement is a happening which is nothing short of amazing, but one is scarcely less struck with amazement when one considers the incredible indifference to the presence of such things among us that long persisted—indeed, a complete ignorance of the fact that we possessed any songs or dances at all. The English have been accustomed to look upon themselves as unmusical for many years, in spite of the fact that, at the end of the 16th century, they were noted on the Continent for both music and dancing, and during that period and the two or three decades that followed produced a school of music of a wealth and beauty that vied more favourably with any of the Continental schools, and took its place alongside our great literary achievements of that epoch. It was a Golden Age of both Music and Literature.

How came it, then, that three hundred years later all this achievement had been completely forgotten? The truth is that even during Elizabeth's reign foreign music was already finding popularity in England, and toward 1630 it showed signs of overwhelming native production. Then came the period of Puritanism which gave music (and, of course, dancing) a very severe setback, and when with the Restoration the theatres again opened their doors and the ban was lifted from music, there was but one leaping of the flame in our native art—the appearance of the great Henry Purcell—and it died down, overwhelmed by the foreign invasion, not to appear again. The same may be noted in the history of dancing. Our own native country dance gave way to the Quadrille and Waltz, both foreign importations, though the former was not entirely so, and these in their turn were ousted by the Fox-trot, Tango, and Jazz, on the exotic character of which one need not dilate.

Up to the English Folk Song Society

Fortunately for us the peasantry were not so quick to accept the foreign forms as the upper classes, but the work of collecting and noting down both songs and dances was not begun until both were nearing extinction. Few seemed to recognize the existence of these beautiful old songs, and those few who did were quite indifferent to them. About

1860, the Rev. John Broadwood published a small collection of songs he had taken down in his parish in Sussex, but nearly thirty years passed before the English Folk Song Society was formed to encourage the work of preservation. Several enthusiasts, among whom were the Rev. Baring Gould and Lucy Broadwood (Mr Broadwood's niece), continued the task, but work went on slowly till the beginning of the century, when the Rev. C.L. Marson, the rector of a little village in Somerset, became aware of the fact that there were still sung in his neighbourhood a large number of songs which appeared to him to have great aesthetic value. He approached several musicians on the subject, but none of them encouraged him in his belief that he had made a valuable discovery. Eventually he asked Cecil Sharp down to hear the songs. Sharp, with great vision and understanding, instantly realised what this might lead to. He and the rector set to work to take down everything within range.

The Resulting Records Then Taken from Somerset

The result was a collection of Folk Songs consisting of five volumes from Somerset alone. Even so, the songs from Somerset were fast dying out, and were usually only obtainable from quite old people. It would be impossible to estimate the extent of their recovery, had the work of recovery been undertaken with such systematic thoroughness half a century sooner. As a matter of fact, any earlier notations of Folk Songs are, as a rule, quite unreliable, for musicians of the previous generation, not recognizing the old scales in which many of the melodies are written, considered it necessary to edit or correct them. The musician of our age had a greater understanding and more conscience in this matter, so perhaps it is as well that the work has devolved upon them rather than their fathers. For if our inheritance is not as great as it might be, we know that at any rate it has not been tampered with.

And The Recovery Of The Dances

The recovery of the dances began at an even later date; in fact, only just in time to be effectual. Here a gain of half a century would have preserved for us an art still virile if aged, at any rate not in the state of senile decay in which Sharp found it. In 1905 his first books of Somerset Folk Songs were just becoming known, and they were introduced by Herbert MacIlwaine (an Australian by birth) to a club of working girls in London whose music he was at that time directing. They were received with enthusiasm which it would be hard to describe. In the young mouths of these girls the songs took on amazing vitality. It was as if they had at last received their heritage, which had long been withheld from them. It had been for some time the custom of Miss Mary Neal, the manager of the Club, to have the girls taught the dances of some nation, and

combining them with songs from the same country to give a small private entertainment. This time she had songs—real English songs of the soil—taken down direct from the Old Country singers, and representing an age-old tradition. But where were the dances to come from? Macilwaine found an answer. He had heard from Sharp that during his folk song research in 1897 he had taken down the tunes of some traditional Morris dances at a little village near Oxford. Sharp's assistance was called. Miss Neal had two of the dancers up to London to the Club, and in an hour the three of them were watching a Morris dance gradually take shape on the floor of a London house. The dance was called Bean Setting, as representing the setting of the seed in spring. The name may be taken as an omen of the growth that was to follow.

Some Quick Expansions of This Movement

This time the entertainment was given by the Esperance Club in public. It aroused keen interest, and had to be frequently repeated. Demands for teaching came in from all parts of the country, and the Club girls began to go out as teachers. Cecil Sharp now saw his way clear. A dream, which he had not been in a position to realize, was coming true. He set himself to beat the country from North to South to capture the traditions of Morris dancing before they should entirely vanish. He realised that a more thorough organization was needed, and before long, after a rather distressing period of controversies, he parted company with the Esperance Guild of Morris Dancers, as it was now called, founded the English Folk Dance Society, and by reason of his indefatigable researches constituted himself the sole authority on Morris Dancing. This organization has since that time gathered to itself all the teaching of folk dancing throughout the Kingdom.

(to be continued)

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This text will now follow the order of the three segments in which it had occurred in *Advance Australia* in 1927. The issues were dated July 1, August 1, and September 1, each with a form of summary to the whole, and each of these is given in the head position where they were then placed.

There were no sub-headings in the original which was given in a rather dense text and too tightly spaced. Accordingly, we have made the reading of the text much easier, as well as supplying various summarizing sub-headings.

Contributor of these Researches

Brian Samuels recently retired from the position of Principal Cultural Heritage Policy and Project Officer in the Heritage Policy Unit of the SA Department of Environment and Natural Resources. He was one of the founders of the Historical Society of South Australia and has been a folk dancer and musician for over 30 years.

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Call for papers: "INTE-2012" is an international educational activity for academics, teachers and educators. It promotes the development and dissemination of theoretical knowledge, conceptual research, and professional knowledge through conference activities, and a conference proceedings book. Last year, INTE-2011 received almost 450 applications. The conference academic advisory board accepted 244 applications.

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Deadlines Abstract submission: 29th May 2012; Full paper submission: 30th May 2012; Registration: 30th May 2012.