



Abstract

Canadian Journal for Traditional Music (1997) E. David Gregory **A. L. Lloyd and the English Folk Song Revival, 1934-44**

Abstract: E. David Gregory outlines the genesis and events of A.L. Lloyd's 1944 history of English folk song, *The Singing Englishman*. Focusing on Lloyd's working-class childhood, subsequent jobs in Australia, London and Antarctica, contact with A.L. Morton, studies at the British Museum, leftist journalism, and BBC broadcasts, Gregory counters criticisms of Lloyd's writings by Maud Karpeles and Vic Gwynne and demonstrates Lloyd's importance for the post-1945 Revival.

It is now 30 years since the publication of A.L. Lloyd's magnum opus, *Folk Song in England* (1967). Although currently out of print, the book remains the most systematic survey of English traditional song, and the most detailed account of its evolution from the 14th century to the 20th. Essentially, Lloyd broadened, in a legitimate and necessary way, Cecil Sharp's conception of folk music as a product of oral tradition. Lloyd recognized urban and rural song traditions, and explicitly extended the study of traditional music to include ritual songs, carols, sea songs, industrial songs and political songs.

Placing these disparate genres in their social and economic contexts, Lloyd provided the first comprehensive analysis of how they had emerged and developed historically. Although he presumed an interpretation of English social history derived, in the main, from Leslie Morton's *People's History of England* (1938), he relied on Morton more for his conceptual framework than for specific historical details.

Folk Song in England was in truth an intellectual achievement of the first order. Nonetheless, the book's weaknesses, more readily apparent now than in 1967, should not be denied. In particular, despite the valuable bibliography, the reference list for musical examples is quoted, some in-text citations, and the occasional fascinating footnote, Lloyd failed to document his sources adequately. His explanatory paradigm, too, has been questioned.

Recently, Vic Gammon has argued that "the central problem with Lloyd's project ... was to attempt to synthesise two traditions which were incompatible: radical. history and folksong scholarship.... The project was doomed to failure" (1986: 151). However, the jury is not yet in on this controversy. Indeed, Lloyd blended a Marxist approach to cultural history with Cecil Sharp's analysis of folksong melody and oral tradition. But this approach was not necessarily doomed to failure.

Gammon premises his critique of *Folk Song in England's* methodology on his dismissal of Cecil Sharp's legacy as a middle-class misappropriation of working-class music, a perspective apparently derived from David Harker's polemical history of folksong collecting, *Fakesong* (1985). If one rejects such Marxist post-modernism, a more judicious assessment of Lloyd's *magnum opus* is possible. Of course, Lloyd's 1967 work now needs updating, and this will be achieved by further detailed criticism, of the kind that Gammon has provided. Yet, as Gammon himself remarks, *Folk Song in England* is still a book from which we can learn a vast amount (1986: 151). Indeed, whatever faults we now detect, *Folk Song in England* remains a pioneering work of cultural history that changed the way we conceptualize folk song and comprehend its development.

No one had written the history of English folk song in so detailed and systematic a way. Its only real precursors were Sharp's *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907), Frank Kidson's half of a joint publication with Mary Neal, *English Folk-Song and Dance* (1915), Reginald Nettel's *Sing a Song of England: A Social History of Traditional Song* (1954), and Lloyd's own earlier writings. Moreover, no one has done it better, although, 30 years on, it is high time someone tried.

The Genesis of Lloyd'S Analysis of English Folk Song

How and why did A. L. Lloyd come to write *Folk Song in England*? A full answer would require a book-length analysis of Lloyd's entire intellectual career before 1967, and, above all, a detailed examination of the part he played in Britain's post-War folk music revival. But *Folk Song in England* was in fact a greatly expanded and updated version of an earlier attempt by Lloyd to sketch and explain the evolution of English folk song: *The Singing Englishman* (1944).

As Lloyd remarked in the preface to *Folk Song in England* (1967: 6), the commercial folksong boom of the early 1960s stimulated a renewed demand for this out-of-print booklet. But he did not want it reprinted nor

did he feel a "mere revision could make it adequate for current needs." So he accepted an invitation to write a new book "based on' the old one." Hence the first step in understanding the genesis of Lloyd's mature analysis of English folk song is to investigate how and why he came to write *The Singing Englishman*. Accordingly, this study explores Lloyd's early involvement with folk song, up to 1944, the year in which *The Singing Englishman* was published.¹

Lloyd'S Early Years, 1908-23

Albert Lancaster Lloyd was born in London, February 29, 1908, the year the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* devoted an entire issue to Percy Grainger's epoch-making article "Collecting with the Phonograph" and transcriptions of 27 songs Grainger had gathered using the new-fangled technology. Grainger collected mainly in Lincolnshire and Gloucestershire, but as the fieldwork of Cecil Sharp (1904-09), Alice Gillington (1907, 1911.), Lucy Broadwood (1908), Ralph Vaughan Williams (1908), Henry Hammond (1.908), George Gardiner (1909), Percy Merrick (1912), George Butterworth (1913), and Clive Carey (1915) demonstrates, before World War I the south of England also was fertile ground for folksong collectors, whether equipped with phonograph, or more usually, notebook and pencil.²

Lloyd later said his first exposure to English folk song was in Sussex when he was a child of five. He remembered both his parents' singing (cf., however, Arthur 1994) and the singing of "gypsies" camped near his Sussex home (1.966a). Lloyd's father was a jack-of-all-trades, experienced as a trawlerman, docker, draper's assistant and poultry farmer before serving in the trenches during WWI Lloyd remembered him as "a fair singer of comic pieces and familiar folksongs of the 'Barbara Allen' 'Bailiff's Daughter of Islington' kind," who successfully "entertained the neighbours" with an unsophisticated "folky style of singing" his wife decried as sounding "ignorant" (1966a). Lloyd's mother evidently was "a sweet singer" and the better musician, but she did not sing often, and rarely or never sang folk songs in public (1966a; 1966b).

Lloyd's father was severely wounded in the War. Although he worked for a while as an Automobile Association patrolman, he became more and more an invalid and died while Lloyd was still a child. Supporting the family financially fell mainly on the shoulders of Lloyd's mother. On her death from tuberculosis in 1923, Lloyd, 15, was left an orphan. His relatives' response was drastic: in 1924 the youth sailed for Australia as

an "assisted migrant," his passage paid by the British Legion. Lloyd spent the next 9 or 10 years in Australia, mainly in New South Wales, working as a sheep-and-cattle hand (1966b).

Lloyd in Australia, Ca. 1924-33

Lloyd's time in Australia was one of manual labour and self-education. There was little to do in the Australian bush except work, drink, and gamble, and he soon decided he had no desire to spend the rest of his life minding sheep. He saved as much as he could of his pay, with the aim of eventually buying a ticket back to England. Nonetheless, he purchased a wind-up gramophone and a number of 78 rpm records of classical music from mail-order catalogues (1970: 18). Making extensive use of the Sydney Public Library's distance education services, Lloyd borrowed by mail a variety of novels and books on art and music.

Lloyd also was exposed to a different kind of folk song: the songs of sheep-and-cattle hands, shearers, and itinerant swagmen who roamed from farm to farm., doing odd jobs, clearing timber or rabbiting, before moving on (1966b). His enjoyment of these pieces prompted him, to purchase a printed collection of Australian folk songs, A. B. Paterson's *Old Bush Songs*, first published in 1904 (1970: 21).

Lloyd later acknowledged the importance of his first-hand experience of folk song as functional work song in the Australian bush: "My conscious interest in folk songs began then. I liked what my fellow station hands and the shearers sang, and I kept exercise books for copying songs in; not to 'collect', just to learn them"(1966a). By the time Lloyd left Australia, these treasured exercise books apparently contained the words of several hundred songs (but no tunes). Still in his possession during the mid-1960s, when two student reporters from Oxford University interviewed him (1966c), they are unfortunately not among Lloyd's papers at Goldsmiths' College, London.

Lloyd retained his love of Australian folk song all his life, on several occasions recording songs he had first heard in New South Wales. He also made a most enjoyable and informative radio series for the BBC on the subject (1963). But he never claimed to be a professional collector of Australian song, nor that the versions he sang were "authentic" in the sense of exactly reproducing what he had heard and noted down in Cowra, Bethungra, Bogandillon, Condobolin, White Cliffs, and elsewhere on the western plains. On the contrary, in 1956 Lloyd.

explicitly said his interpretations of Australian songs had limited scientific value for folklorists and musicologists (Meredith 1983: 14; Lloyd 1970: 18-19). And in 1966 he emphasized that as a performer he found it impossible to reproduce folk songs exactly the way they were sung by a "source" singer. His explicit declaration on this controversial issue is worth quoting in full because it demonstrates Lloyd's grasp of the fluid, dynamic process of oral transmission, one of *Folk Song in England's* strengths (1966b):

I very much doubt if I sing any of the songs exactly as I originally learnt them. Some I've altered deliberately because I felt some phrases of the tune, some passages of the text, to be not entirely adequate. Others—and this has happened far more often—have become altered involuntarily, sometimes almost out of recognition, in the course of buzzing round in my head for thirty years or so and being sung whenever the buzzing became too insistent. Some people believe it a blasphemy to alter a traditional song, and think one should sing it just as it was sung by the singer from whom it was learnt. Not being an impersonator, I do not feel that. One day a traditional performer sings a song, and the next week he may sing it differently. What you hear is the performance of the moment, merely. So with me: I don't always sing the songs the same. I like to improvise a bit. Of course, in making your changes, voluntarily or involuntarily, you need a proper sense of tradition and a just respect for it, or the song is violated; we hear such violations day by day.

Lloyd in London, Ca. 1934-37

In early 1934 Lloyd seized an opportunity to leave Australia for a job minding merino sheep in the Transvaal. But his stay in South Africa was only a brief interlude, and he was soon back in England. There, Marxist historian Leslie Morton probably met Lloyd during the winter of 1934-35.³ The two young men, both hard up and struggling to find a foothold in the difficult London world, became firm friends (Morton 1984). Morton, an active Communist, was a member of an informal group of left-wing intellectuals who frequented certain Hampstead and Soho-area pubs and bookshops. Through Morton, Lloyd met radical writers, artists, philosophers, and historians, including Dylan Thomas, Jack Lindsay, Alan Hutt, George Rude, and Maurice Cornforth (Arthur 1994: 4).⁴

the foreign literature department of the large London bookstore, Foyles. Having a natural talent for languages, Lloyd quickly impressed Morton with his facility in learning new ones. Morton later recalled that Lloyd collected languages "the way some people collect postage stamps. He seemed to need only a few weeks anywhere to pick one up, and there appeared to be few European languages of which he had not at least a working knowledge. This gift proved invaluable to him later in the collection and comparative study of folk songs" (1984: 689).

By 1936, however, Lloyd was on the dole. Britain was still mired in the Depression, and jobs were hard to come by. All the same, Lloyd took advantage of being unemployed. He obtained a reader's ticket for the British Museum, and spent his time "shuttling" (his word) between there and the Labour Exchange. As he remarked later, "Nothing like unemployment for educating oneself: I learnt more than folklore then" (1966a). For Lloyd, "more" was the class struggle, and the mental universe that helped him understand why he and millions of others were unemployed: Marxism.

By then Lloyd had joined the British Communist Party. Like other new recruits, he was urged to become familiar with the basic Marxist classics. The required reading at this time usually included *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Engels' *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, and Marx's *Value, Price and Profit*. A promising neophyte in economics might then graduate to the first volume of *Capital*, while a budding historian might be encouraged to read *The Class Struggles in France* and then grapple with the first part of *The German Ideology*. Lenin was revered in Party circles as the leader who had most successfully put Marxist theory into practice, so selections from his writings were another must for a young Communist bent on self-education in the 1930s (Cornforth and Roiph 1972).⁵

How much of this Lloyd actually waded through is difficult to judge. In particular, did he join the Left Book Club and study, e.g., Hyman Levy's 1938 classic of British scientific socialism, *Philosophy for a Modern Man*? Was he aware of the discovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the beginnings of the debate about the young Marx's humanistic theory of alienation (cf. Adams 1940)? Where (if anywhere) did Lloyd stand on controversial Marxist issues the more independent-minded communist intellectuals were beginning to dispute? Hopefully David Arthur's forthcoming biography of Lloyd will help answer these questions. Meanwhile, the indirect evidence of Lloyd's

later publications suggests he was never much interested in economics, political theory, or debates about what Marx really meant.

Nonetheless, Lloyd had a strong interest in England's social history, and it seems likely that Leslie Morton taught Lloyd much about the history of the English working classes during their chats in London pubs during the '30s. Certainly when Morton published *People's History of England* (1938), Lloyd was one of its most avid readers. Morton's book provided Lloyd with the social-historical background he needed for his own research on folksong, an underpinning absent from the available literature on English folk music. All the same, folklore and folk song were the main focus of Lloyd's studies in the mid-to-late '30s.

What did Lloyd find in the British Museum's music Reading Room? The short bibliography appended to *The Singing Englishman* makes it clear he discovered Cecil Sharp's *English Folksong: Some Conclusions* and examined systematically the published song collections of all the major collectors from the Victorian era onwards, including works by William Chappell, Francis Child, Sabine Baring-Gould, Lucy Broadwood, and Frank Kidson (among others), as well as those produced by Sharp and his collaborators. Moreover, Lloyd went through all 8 volumes of *The Journal of the Folksong Society* (1899-1930). At this time Lloyd also began collecting English folk songs. As he put it, "Any singers I met I pumped for songs" (1966b).

The Beginnings of an English Folksong Revival

During the mid-30s Lloyd was not alone in developing an enthusiasm for English folk song. The movement to collect, revive, and popularize English folk song, which Broadwood, Sharp and others had spearheaded before the First World War, had petered out in the 1920s. The Folk Song Society had folded in 1932. But from the mid-30s onwards one can detect the first stirrings of a new interest in folk song that would eventually bear fruit in the post-1945 urban Folksong Revival.

In 1935 the BBC began making field recordings of English folklore, including some folksong performances.⁶ In the next year, the Workers' Music Association was founded and the magazine *English Dance and Song* commenced publication. In 1937 the first commercially released 78 rpm records of English folk songs performed in traditional, unaccompanied style by a source singer appeared on the Columbia label: Philip Tanner's renderings of "Young Henry Martin," "The Cower

Wassail Song," "The Sweet Primroses," and "The Cower Reel"(1937a,b).⁷ Lloyd's new-found interest in English folklore and folksong, and his decision to start collecting English folk songs came at a felicitous time.

However, it was a while before Lloyd's study of the first English folksong revival's legacy bore fruit. Meanwhile, another personal experience shaped his career as a singer of folksongs and folk-music commentator. In 1937, tired of being unemployed, the irpecumous Lloyd journeyed to Liverpool to sign on the whaler *Southern Empress*, setting out on a 7-month trip to the Antarctic.

Lloyd'S Work as a Mariner

In the sleeve notes to his 1967 album. *Leviathan*, Lloyd recalled. there were "a lot of Welshmen aboard who sang hymns and popular songs all the time, and in self-defence, some of us English also took to singing in parts, often without blend, but we found it thrilling. At foc'sle sing-songs we mostly sang film-hits or Victorian and Edwardian tear-jerkers; only a few whaling songs — 'Greenland Bound,' 'The Diamond' (Tich. Cowdray's special.), 'The Balaena' (many of the lads knew that one), and — of course 'Off to the Sea Once More'."

One night in the Antarctic when whales were scarce and a storm was blowing, Lloyd and his singing friends gave a concert over the ship's radio: "in that bloodstained ship we imagined ourselves to be radio stars throwing our voices on a spangled wind, and it was a memorable night for us" (1967a). The experience was clearly important; not only did he learn a few shanties, whaling songs, and other sea songs in a context that made them very meaningful, he also gained confidence in his own singing. it was probably at this point that Lloyd began singing folksongs regularly.

Concerning his stint on the Southern Empress, Lloyd also recalled: "A spell of iabou.ring in the Antarctic whaling fleet didn't teach me many songs, but it gave me a deeper insight into a number of songs I already knew, and not all of them about the sea, either" (1966a). Yet he noted elsewhere that "working in the Antarctic whaling fleet in the years immediately before the war I learned a number of fine sea songs, mostly from older workmates" (1966b). This contradiction can be resolved if we understand the latter statement as referring to Lloyd's entire period as a merchant seaman, which lasted at least two years. 1938 saw him again sailing out of Liverpool, but aboard a freighter, not a whaler, and it was

probably on this voyage that he learned "The Rambling Royal" from Liverpool seaman Frank Jeffries (cf. Lloyd 1962).

Lloyd put his experience as a merchant seaman to good use not only in his singing—shanties and other sea songs were to be his stock-in-trade during the post-war Revival—but also in his struggle for a livelihood. Leslie Morton has argued (with justice) that "Bert had all the qualities that it takes to make a first-rate journalist" (1984: 689), and in the late 1930s Lloyd decided to try his hand at making a living in radio journalism.

Lloyd'S Early Journalism

Lloyd already had written for an anthology of socialist art criticism, as well as *The Left Review*, and the *Daily Worker's* British edition. In the magazines *New Writing*, *The Listener*, and *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* he had also published articles on, and translations of, Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, whose poetry he translated for a book-length collection. (cf. Arthur 1986). But little money was to be made by such writing. Freelance work for the BBC looked more promising.

In 1938 Lloyd had his first radio script accepted for broadcast. Titled "The Voice of the Seamen," the program documented the daily lives and opinions of ordinary mariners. Written from the lower-deck point of view, Lloyd's script was lively and controversial, evoking considerable public response and even questions in the House of Commons. The BBC was pleased with the publicity, and the program launched Lloyd on his new career as broadcaster and journalist. He was given a contract, an office, and a secretary at Broadcasting House (Grosvenor 1982; Duran 1983). But if he now had a middle-class profession, his sympathies remained with the working-class from which he had sprung, and he remained an ardent Communist.

Caught up emotionally in the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War, Lloyd, like so many left-wing English intellectuals and militants, was a passionate anti-fascist long before the British government abandoned its policy of appeasement. Lloyd's next major project for the BBC, a radio series, recreated dramatically, but at the same time analyzed, the rise of Nazism in Germany. Cowritten with Russian historian Igor Vinogradoff, "Shadow of the Swastika" was broadcast by the BBC during 1939-40. Earlier in 1939, *Reynolds News* had published a series of Lloyd's newspaper articles on the same subject. Lloyd and Vinogradoff then published a book-length version of the radio series (1940).

Despite his new job with the BBC, and his involvement with political campaigns for Republican Spain and against Nazi Germany, Lloyd was still taking every opportunity to pursue his interest in folk song. As a fortunate by-product of working on "Shadow of the Swastika," Lloyd had ready access to the BBC sound archives. There he could browse among the folklore and folksong recordings made since 1935. These included not only the field recordings made at the 1936 May Day ceremonies in Oxford, Minehead, Padstow, and Heiston, but also (in 1937) William Wells' fiddle music for the Bampton Morris, quarrymen's work songs from Portland, Dorset, and Phil Tanner's very first recordings, made before his two Columbia 78s. The next year's crop of BBC field recordings included Somerset singer Cornelius Godwin, a Gloucestershire harvest festival, a Berkshire Hocktide ceremony, and an Orkney wedding.⁸

Interesting though this material was, Lloyd suspected there was much traditional song yet to be discovered—not only in the countryside, and not only in England. Lloyd began to explore more systematically various types of sailors' songs and became fascinated with American folk song, especially cowboy songs (cf. Lornax, Lomax, Waters 1938), which he felt were similar to the bush songs he had encountered in Australia.

As a Marxist, Lloyd was also interested in songs of the labour movement, both American and British. In 1938 the Workers' Music Association published Alan Bush and Randall Swingler's collection, *The Left Song Book*, but it contained few, if any, folk songs. Undoubtedly useful for labour militants, this songster did not satisfy Lloyd. He already suspected there was a wealth of British traditional industrial, occupational and political song to be collected and reclaimed for the labour movement. Events in the USA seemed to confirm his hunch. Lloyd later recalled the influence of American political song on himself and on the Workers' Music Association (1967: 6):

In America, late in the Depression and early in the War years, traditional song and its topical imitations were coming into vogue, particularly among young radicals, as a consequence of the stresses of the time, and the rumble of newly-found or newly-made 'people's songs' was rolling towards us across the Atlantic. The Workers' Music Association, that admirable but over-modest organization, sensed that similar enthusiasm might spread in England, and they were eager to help in the rediscovery of our own

lower-class traditions.

By the end of the decade, Lloyd was an amateur folklorist and singer with a small but growing repertoire that consisted of Australian bush songs, American cowboy and topical songs, Anglo-American sea shanties, and English ballads and folk-lyrics (the latter learned mainly from printed sources). As yet he knew few British industrial or occupational songs, but he was eager to find and learn them. Leslie Morton remembered the Lloyd of the late 30s as quite eclectic in his approach to folk song (1984: 689):

From time to time he would drop into our house for a meal, bringing odd records he had discovered or some new-old song that he had picked up and would sing. He was developing his own distinctive singing style in these years, taut and unfussy. On the whole he preferred the traditional English style of unaccompanied song, but he was never pedantic about that or anything else and was prepared to accept an instrumental accompaniment if it seemed to add anything of value. Shortly before the war I took him to the Eel's Foot at Eastbridge, in Suffolk, a pub whose regulars had long maintained an excellent song school. Out of this visit came a historic broadcast—historic because it was, I think, the very first in which authentic traditional singers, as distinct from collectors and arrangers, were heard on the air.

At The Eel's Foot in 1939 Lloyd found part of what he had been looking for: a living tradition of rural English folk song. He was so impressed with the singing of Velvet Brightwell and other regulars at the pub that he returned with recording equipment on March 13, accompanied by BBC producer Francis Dillon, to record songs, music, and conversation. Lloyd and Dillon recorded "The Foggy Dew," "The Blackbird," "Indian Lass," "Poor Man's Heaven," "Little Pigs," "There Was a Farmer in Cheshire," and "Pleasant and Delightful" plus a concertina solo called "Jack's the Boy." The singers included a Mr. Goddard (his first name was not obtained) and Jumbo Brightwell. Titled "Saturday Night at the Eel's Foot," the resulting program was broadcast July 21, 1939. This was A. L. Lloyd's first substantial contribution to the Folk Song Revival, a radio broadcast demonstrating that English folk song had not died out but lived on, in full vigour, in the villages of East Anglia.

World War II

Despite the quality of Lloyd's research and scriptwriting, the BBC did not renew his contract, probably because his political affiliations were thought too embarrassing. Yet Lloyd's warnings about Nazi aggression proved only too true, and Britain was soon at war.

After a brief spell of unemployment, Lloyd found journalism work with the *Picture Post*. An article on New Zealand in February 1940 was the first of many dozen he would write for the magazine during the next ten years, often in award-winning collaboration with photographer Bert Hardy. Several of Lloyd's *Picture Post* stories took him to different parts of the country to investigate how the war was affecting the lives of ordinary people.

Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 meant that there was once again no conflict between Lloyd's communism, and his anti-fascism. In March 1942 he enlisted in the army and began training as a tank gunner in the Royal Armoured Corps. But before Lloyd could fire a shot against the Axis forces, he was seconded by the Ministry of information to work as an Anglo-Soviet liaison officer, writing material for a Russian-language newsheet that promoted British culture. As this task hardly consumed all Lloyd's mental energy, he resumed his study of both English and American folklore and folk music. One of the first results was an article on "The Cowboy and His Music" which first appeared in a student magazine in May 1942, and then in an expanded version with musical examples in *Our Time* in April 1943. Meanwhile, Lloyd used his journalistic skills in 1942 as co-editor of *The Turret*, a left-wing service newspaper (Arthur 1994).

Already an active member of the Workers' Music Association, in 1943 Lloyd published a brief article on "The Revolutionary Origins of English Folk-Song" for its *William Morris Musical Society Bulletin*.⁹ This was a first attempt to sketch the Marxist interpretation of English folksong history Lloyd had been gradually working out since his days at the British Museum. Colleagues in the WMA greeted Lloyd's ideas with enthusiasm and encouraged him to develop them at greater length. The result was a sixty-nine page booklet the WMA published in 1944: *The Singing Englishman*.

The Singing Englishman, 1944

The Singing Englishman was intended as a manifesto, a gauntlet thrown

down by the Workers' Music Association, a serious challenge to the English Folk Dance and Song Society that folk song could be, and would be, reappropriated from its middle-class guardians and returned to the workers who had created it. Written from an overtly Marxist point-of-view, it was conceived as a radical alternative to Cecil Sharp's *English Folksong: Some Conclusions*.

By the time he wrote the booklet, Lloyd was thoroughly familiar with the work of the great Victorian collectors, with the researches of Lucy Broadwood, Frank Kidson and other Folk Song Society stalwarts before World War 1, with the achievements and opinions of Cecil Sharp, and with the rather feeble efforts made by the English Folk Dance and Song Society to continue the work of these pioneers in the 1930s. He respected, although he by no means always agreed with, Kidson, Sharp and company. But he was clearly unimpressed with the EFDSS's lethargy about collecting, its indifference to work songs, its unwillingness to use the now decades-old technology of the phonograph, its hostility to non-Sharpian perspectives on the nature of folk music, and its penchant for dressing up folk songs in elaborate arrangements and performing them in *à l'canto* style as drawing-room entertainment.

The Singing Englishman encapsulates Lloyd's early views on folk song, views that he later regarded as simplistic and rather dogmatic. All the same, in 1944 he tried to make his booklet as solid and scholarly as possible. He quoted from 47 folk songs, referred to several dozen more, and provided a select list of the most useful 19th- and early 20th-century folksong collections (including those by Chappell, Child, Baring-Gould, Broadwood, Kidson, and Sharp), singling out the 8 volumes of the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* as the most valuable source of all.

Lloyd commented wryly that readers specially interested in the social aspects of folk music would find little in his bibliography that would directly meet their needs since English folksong had been much collected but little commented upon. He also pointedly remarked that only two commercially recorded 78 rpm discs of authentic English folk songs were available, namely Phil Tanner's Columbia releases, adding "[there] are several discs of folksongs and near folksongs recorded, with piano accompaniment, by concert singers. These are so far from the real thing that we need not list them here" (1944: 69).

Lloyd's booklet was highly original: nothing like it had ever appeared before on the subject. Leslie Morton was hugely impressed by it in 1944, and always regarded it with "special affection." in his memoir on Lloyd

he singled it out as having "a sparkle and spontaneity and a boldness of attack which make it a model for the application of Marxist ways of thinking to cultural questions. It looks squarely at folk song 'as music and poetry, the peak of the cultural achievement of the English lower classes" (1984: 690).

Maud Karpeles' Response to *The Singing Englishman*

Non-Marxist adherents to the rather conservative, neo-Sharpian, view of English folk song then dominating the English Folk Dance and Song Society were not so impressed. In reviewing the booklet for the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Maud Karpeles, who had worked with Sharp on his major study of Appalachian songs (1932), found herself unable to agree that Lloyd's "sociological" (a euphemism for Marxist) perspective was "the best method of approach" to folk song and denounced Lloyd's theories as oversimplified, inadequately supported with evidence, and redolent of "special pleading." Above all, Karpeles rejected Lloyd's attempt to understand folk songs in the light of the historical period and socio-economic circumstances that produced them (1944: 207-08):

Times and circumstances have undoubtedly affected the songs, but the songs as we know them are the cumulative expression of many ages, and it is therefore misleading to regard them as the product of any particular age, or to identify any particular song too closely with any particular circumstance. It is, for instance, difficult to accept the statement that in the melancholy which is characteristic of many English folk songs we see the stamp of the bitter sadness of the time of the Black Death or the baronial oppression of the fourteenth century; or to believe that an idyll such as "Searching for Lambs" or "The Rosebud in June" necessarily springs from an age of stability and comfort. Fundamental emotions such as are expressed in the songs are not peculiar to any particular period of our history. Again, one would like further evidence that "The Cutty Wren" quoted on pp. 7 and 8, with the accompanying tune of "Green Bushes," has any definite association with the outbreak of lawlessness following the peasant revolt of the late fourteenth century and that the wren had been taken as a symbol of baronial property.... There is, too, a danger of making false deductions in the association of songs with a particular locality.... The fact is

that the best folk songs are concerned with matters of personal or local interest only •in so far as these serve as pegs on which to hang subject matter with a universal appeal.

Karpeles' explicit championing of an ahistorical methodology in the study of folk song illustrates clearly the kind of scholarship Lloyd was challenging. It also demonstrates his opponents were quick to zero in on the weaknesses in his argument, at least as presented summarily in *The Singing Englishman*. For example, Lloyd's suggestion that "The Cutty Wren" was a late 14th-century song associated with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 was a plausible hypothesis but one he had failed to prove. Lloyd later took such criticisms to heart, and came to regard *The Singing Englishman* as unsatisfactory, a youthful extravagance that had served its purpose and should be given a decent burial.

As shown above, one of Lloyd's motives in writing *Folk Song in England* was to replace *The Singing Englishman* with a better researched, more comprehensive work he could stand behind fully. He commented in the preface to *Folk Song in England* that *The Singing Englishman* was "put together mainly in barrack-rooms, away from reference-works, in between tank-gunnery courses. It wasn't a good book, but people were kind to it perhaps because it was the only one of its sort: like the okapi, not much to look at but cherished as unique"(1967: 6).

The Singing Englishman's Merits

Nonetheless, *The Singing Englishman's* merits demand emphasis. In this, the first attempt to write a social history of English folk song, Lloyd presented an overview unobtainable elsewhere. He packed into the booklet a great deal of factual information about a wide range of different kinds of folk songs. And his love for the songs shone through on every page. This combination of wide-ranging perspective, fascinating detail, and enthusiastic advocacy made *The Singing Englishman* an attractive and effective introduction to its subject. One came away from the booklet with a strong sense of the variety of English folk songs, how and why they came to exist, a reinforced conviction of their beauty and worth, and a willingness to believe Lloyd when he claimed them as "the peak of cultural achievement of the English lower classes" (1944: 3-4).

The Singing Englishman, then, was a brilliant piece of propaganda, both for English folk song (including occupational and political song) and for

the study of working-class social and cultural history. But was what Lloyd argued for in the booklet actually true? Leaving the details aside, did Lloyd reconstruct a generally accurate picture of the evolution of folk song in England from its medieval beginnings to the late Industrial Revolution? We are not yet in a position to give a full and clear-cut answer to that question. But it is now clear that Lloyd's embryonic social history of folk song is best thought of as a hypothesis in several parts, and that he was on firmer ground in some places than in others. It is important, nonetheless, to be clear what he was arguing in 1944, so that we can compare his opinions at this time with his ideas of the next 20 years.

Lloyd on the Medieval Origins of English Folk Song

In *The Singing Englishman* Lloyd had no definitive opinion on that most difficult of topics, the origins of English folk song. Surprisingly, perhaps, he made little effort to locate the birth of English folk song in pagan rituals dating back to the Celtic Iron Age or even to early, pre-Christian, Anglo-Saxon society. Instead he began his main discussion at the Middle Ages.

Lloyd was familiar with the Percy/Ritson debate about the role of medieval minstrels in the creation (or preservation) of the older narrative ballads (Percy 1765; Ritson 1783, 1790; cf. also Bronson 1938). He was equally aware of, and dissatisfied with, Gummere's thesis of communal folksong authorship in some dim, distant, unidentified past (1896, 1907, 1908; cf. also Wilgus 1959).

Committed to the idea that folk song was the product of the lower classes, Lloyd suggested English folksong emerged concurrently with the development of the English language during the centuries after 1066 when Norman French was the language of the Court and Latin the language of the Church. The oldest folk ballads, on this theory, may have had their roots in the more elaborate epics created by Anglo-Saxon minstrels for their regional kings and thegns, but they were transmuted into popular songs during the Central Middle Ages. Lloyd offered no proof for this speculation, but claimed his hypothesis was not only plausible but also synthesized the elements of truth in older theories.

After the Norman conquest, Lloyd argued, minstrel songs originally composed for the ruling class gradually filtered down to the peasantry in the villages but in the process were transformed, becoming "a communal

affair rather than an individual thing." Transmitted orally from village to village and from generation to generation, the words and tunes were modified extensively, sometimes beyond recognition, so that 200 years later the original song would often be "impossible to distinguish among a thousand variants; and sometimes the variants were so different from the original that they were really quite new songs" (1944: 13-14). Lloyd thus signaled his partial agreement with Cecil Sharp's thesis (1907: 16-35) that traditional song, as collected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was essentially the product of a long evolution that had involved the rural "folk" unconsciously reworking words and tunes.

If Lloyd was somewhat vague about the first phase in the history of English folksong, he believed he could say much more, and with much greater assurance, about the second phase, the 14th century. "What we nowadays call English folksong," he asserted confidently, "is something that came out of social upheaval" (1944: 4). Caused by the decay of feudalism, the rise of towns and trade, and the demographic collapse in the wake of the Black Death, this social upheaval found expression in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. In this climate, Lloyd argued, folk song was transformed into an expressive vehicle for the common people's discontent and their opposition to the status quo (1944: 6-7):

Now an ugly note of social criticism came into the English vernacular songs, and the Grimsby fisherlads and the Lancastrian scullery boys began to sing at work and after knock-off time about the tyranny and vice of their masters and about their own longing for a better world. They sang about the proposition the monk put to the girl and what she agreed to do and what came of it all and how he was never the same monk again and they sang about the knights who spoke all the time of brave quests and who never fought except with the wooden-pointed lances of the tournament field; and they sang about how heavy the taxes on the peasantry were, and how little of the money ever reached the Treasury. The *déclassé* minstrels were specially busy spreading anti-authority songs.... What are now the stock figures of comic pantomime, the villainous baron, the lecherous monk, the miserly miller, were at this time the symbols of a bitter and threefold class oppression, and songs running these down were sure of a good hearing in the kitchens and in the barns and round the campfires as well if they were not sung too loud. It was in the civil struggles of the barons' wars and in the years following

that the songs of the people really rose to the surface and crystallised into a style. Then you got ballads like the Robin Hood cycle which was about not only the adventurous life of the outlaw who was almost a guerilla, but also the anger of the downtrodden at the callous luxury of the rich... What strikes most people about English folksongs, once they get to know them, is their deep melancholy. Their style of tune comes from the Church modes of the Middle Ages and it often seems to have stamped them unmistakably with the bitter sadness of the time of the Black Death and the baronial oppression of the 14th century.

As a further illustration of his thesis, Lloyd explicitly identified the song "The Cutty Wren" with the Peasants' Revolt. Plausible though this may be, Lloyd failed to provide any specific evidence for the connection, or even any proof of the song's age. His case, however, was a more general one, and did not depend on the validity of his interpretation of "The Cutty Wren." He was, in fact, making two different claims: i) a significant number of important English folk songs dated from the 14th century and originated in the social and political upheavals of the time; ii) this century witnessed the birth of the true English folk song style. As he put it (1944: 10):

By and large, we know really very little about the folk music of this time, but it would seem just as the Lollard heresy was beginning its attacks on social abuses and on the established Church, just as the Great Society was preparing armed revolt on a national scale, just as the common people were emerging for the first time as free men or wage labourers and beginning their long fight for political freedom, a typical style of folksong came to life, and that style was to persist, with little alteration, right up to the time we live in now.

Lloyd'S History of English Folk Song: 14th to 20th Centuries

Having argued that folk song had emerged as the popular music of the common people by the Wars of the Roses, Lloyd traced its development through the next five centuries. The Tudor period he saw as the time when folk songs served as the prime vehicle of news reporting, and also

when most of the historical ballads were produced (1944: 38-39).

Lloyd next argued that during the 17th and 18th centuries an understandable but regrettable transformation occurred in English folk song. In this fourth stage, he contended that the "nature of the songs did alter a great deal, and much of the blackness and the singing-skeleton quality of the feudal time went out of them, no doubt partly because the struggle with nature had grown far less bitter, and partly for another reason" (1944: 34). The other reason was the deleterious impact of the broadsheet ballad which contaminated the oral tradition and adversely affected the poetry and singing style of rural song.

Lloyd considered the 18th century the so-called "Golden Age" of the ballad sheet, and while it may have been golden in its social stability, agricultural prosperity and business profits, the commercialization of popular song at the hands of the broadsheet publishers resulted in a severe decline in its quality. "Many, perhaps the greater part, of the broadsheet ballads were written by Grub Street freelancers and what they did in the way of debasing the style and convention of folksong should never be forgiven them" (1944: 35). Lloyd identified four aspects of the decline:

- a) the substitution of doggerel for lyrics of "great sincerity and beauty and passion";
- b) the making fun of country accents, manners, and values, which often took the form of burlesquing the old country songs and reducing them to "clodhopping bumpkin folderol";
- c) the introduction of bits of literary classicism "with sentimental shepherds and shepherdesses named Colin and Phillida, where the grass is called Flora's carpet and the sun is called Phoebus," all of which were conspicuously out of place in the songs of a labouring people;
- d) the production of a large number of new folk songs of the "Searching for Lambs" variety, with pretty tunes and pleasant, conventional lyrics but no depth or passion in them.

The lower classes, Lloyd contended, were having their own songs stolen from them and debased, while having foisted upon them an inauthentic substitute, "fakesongs" (to use David Harker's term), manufactured by the urban middle classes (1944: 35; Harker 1985). Lloyd recognized, however, that these new songs found an echo in the countryside and were

often taken up by rural singers and incorporated into oral tradition (1944: 36):

This was the great age of the sentimental travesty of lower class life, with its poems and paintings of romanticised cottage scenes. A great deal of this sentimental idyllic feeling came into the folksongs and not through the broadsheets merely. The stability and equilibrium and relative comfort was felt among the agricultural labourers too, and how could it be otherwise? And now you get that chain of folksongs of great conventional charm that are known so well and featured in every folksong recital by concert singers because the tunes are so pretty and the words so quaint and there is no depth and no darkness and no bitterness or offence in them as there is in so many of the folksongs which originated at other times.

These were the last songs created by an "Olde England" that was still predominantly rural, a complacent and relatively tranquil society soon to be swept away by the Industrial Revolution and the Agricultural Revolution. Following A. L. Morton, Lloyd saw the last decades of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th as a period of great social upheaval, one that eclipsed in devastation and turmoil even the catastrophic 14th century. And like the 14th century, these "interesting times" produced a great number and variety of songs.

The regression of folk song was temporarily halted, and a late flowering of rural song occurred, paralleled by an improvement in the quality of the urban street ballad. Lloyd emphasized the decline in farmworkers' living standards and their increasing difficulty in saving enough from their wages to obtain cottages and plots of their own. One result, he suggested, was a rural illegitimacy rate of 15% and songs of seduction and betrayal "as common as blackberries." Another was a massive increase in poaching in response to the widespread enclosure of common lands, and the outbreak of a veritable guerilla war between the lower class poachers and the keepers, the guardians of upper-class privileges, and this conflict in turn produced many new folk songs about poaching and transportation (1944: 41-42, 49-50).

The same decades saw the singing of ballads about the Napoleonic wars, Luddite songs about machine-breaking, whaling songs about the Greenland fishery, and work shanties that reflected the growth in the merchant marine after the East India Company lost its monopoly in 1814

(1944: 47-48, 60-66). For Lloyd, the early 19th century was the last great age of folk song, a period when many new kinds of songs were created, especially occupational songs that expressed the realities of everyday life for the working classes. In this phase of its evolution, folk song ceased to be primarily rural because the percentage of agricultural labourers was declining rapidly whereas other occupations were expanding. Nevertheless, folk song remained an expression of the culture and creativity of the mass of ordinary working men and women.

The sixth and last phase in Lloyd's social history of folk song was another time of regression, stretching from the mid-19th to the early 20th century. The working life of the new songs was short, he argued, because the Industrial Revolution was transforming the very occupations it had created or expanded in its more labour-intensive early days. The whaling songs and shanties, for example, were doomed by the technological advances that brought steam-powered freighters and factory-ships. Living conditions, too, changed, with inventions such as gas lighting and the railway destroying the isolated and communal way of life that favoured the making and singing of folk songs. Other factors in the decline were the daily delivery of newspapers, the appearance of the gramophone (and, later, the radio), and the growth in industrial and street noise. But above all, he contended, the decline in folk song reflected the development of a modern industrial society in which people's jobs were different and their ways of living were too, noting that (1944: 52-53, 68):

. . . there is no end to the occupational songs we have lost because the occupations have altered out of recognition. Some of these songs sprang from the rhythm of the work, and some from the description of it; and some are merely onomatopoeic recitals inspired by the noise made, or the names of the tools, or even the names of the different phases of the job itself... What we know for sure is this: many folksongs were closely related to a certain stage of technical development, and as modern times changed all that, the songs no longer applied. Most jobs have been revolutionized in the last 150 years. A change in the way of living destroys a folk song quicker than anything else, and a little quick progress and a little bad luck has destroyed whole categories of songs in a single decade.

Lloyd on the Future of English Folk Song

Lloyd's emphasis in *The Singing Englishman* on the decline of the older, rural folk songs in the 18th century and then on the decline of the newer, occupational, folk songs in the late 19th century, seemed to suggest a highly pessimistic conclusion about the future of English folk song. Like a host of collectors before him, he apparently believed the folk song of the past was on its way out, an anachronism doomed to disappear because it had lost its social function. In repeating this conventional wisdom, he was echoing a sentiment often repeated in the pages of the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* and its successor, the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*.

Nonetheless, Lloyd emphasized it was not too late, for anyone who took the trouble to look, to find English traditional folk songs still performed in a traditional style. Since his 1939 visit to the Eel's Foot he had spent more time song collecting in the pubs of East Anglia, and had discovered Norfolk singer Harry Cox at Potter Heigham. He regarded Cox and Phil Tanner as excellent exponents of a living, albeit frail, tradition, mentioning both in *The Singing Englishman* (1944: 26, 69).

Lloyd also refused to draw the apparently inevitable conclusion that the demise of traditional song would mean the end of folk song *per se*. New social conditions in the future might bring about a resurgence of folk song, the emergence of a new form of working-class music that would again express the thoughts and feelings of the common people. For Lloyd the Communist, a folksong revival was unlikely to happen until the advent of a non-racist, classless, socialist society, but this could not and should not be ruled out. He closed *The Singing Englishman* with these guardedly hopeful words (1944: 68):

Some say things are changed and we will not have folksongs any more. They are the pessimists. And some try to revive traditional music that has nothing to do with social life any longer; and all that happens is they give you a recital of the popular songs of the past; and they try to make a living thing of it. They are the optimists. But that is not the whole story. Things do change, and they change again; and just because at this moment we have no great body of fine folksong that is bound close to our social life and the times we live in and the way we go about our work, that is not to say there never will be any more....

The first part of this passage refers to opposing currents of thought within

the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Some of Cecil Sharp's disciples, such as Maud Karpeles and Frank Howes, believed English folk song was an expression of a preindustrial society, and that Sharp and his contemporaries had already rescued for posterity the "last leaves" of a dying culture. Others, led by EFDSS Director Douglas Kennedy, were convinced that a new mass audience could be found for the tremendous legacy of rural folk song and dance bequeathed by the Late Victorian and Edwardian collectors. Lloyd's sympathies lay with the optimists, and he shared a common aim with Kennedy, and with Pat Shuidham-Shaw and Peter Kennedy, two younger enthusiasts who would be mainstays of the post-war revival: the resurrection of English folksong as part of the post-war reconstruction of English society on new, more democratic, egalitarian lines.

Lloyd disagreed with the EFDSS optimists on one crucial count. He believed firmly a folksong revival would succeed only if the songs themselves spoke directly and meaningfully to the post-war generation of working people. Although he loved the old ballads and folk-lyrics championed by the EFDSS, Lloyd recognized post-war Britain was primarily an urban, industrialized society in which songs about rural life no longer had the same resonance as they had only 50 years before. Lloyd was convinced the music of a post-war revival would have to be based in large measure on that body of traditional song which reflected the strains and stresses of life in the Industrial Revolution. In short, there would have to be a revival of occupational songs, industrial songs, political songs, protest songs, indeed any and all kinds of traditional songs that could be adapted to the needs of the city-based labour movement.

Conclusion

Lloyd's underlying motive in writing first "The Revolutionary Origins of English Folk-Song" and then *The Singing Englishman* was to point out some traditional foundations on which such a new kind of urban folksong movement could be based. The real importance of *The Singing Englishman* for the post-war revival was thus as a rallying call for an alternative vision of folk song. Lloyd spoke for the WMA and his appeal was addressed to the entire political Left in post-war Britain. Folk song, he was saying, had once been—and could be again—a music of the workers.

ENDNOTES

FOOTNOTES

1. Other treatments of Lloyd's pre-1944 folksong activity include Arthur (1983, 1986, 1994), Shepherd (1986), and Palmer (1986). Unfortunately, Arthur's 1994 account gives no sources for its information, although it is perhaps asking too much to expect footnotes on a compact disc insert. Because of its lack of primary documentation, I have used this item only for material I have not found elsewhere.
2. Unimpressed with the phonograph, Sharp made very few recordings. Vaughan Williams, although less enthusiastic than Grainger, was more persistent than Sharp: some of his wax cylinder recordings are preserved in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Cecil Sharp House, London; selections can be heard on Kendall (1995). Dean-Smith (1954) gives a more complete list of publications by pre-WWI English folksong collectors.
3. When Lloyd left Australia and when he arrived back in England are uncertain. Lloyd once said he spent it) years sheep-minding on the plains of New South Wales (1966a). According to a later interview, Lloyd said he left Australia in 1934 (1970: 17). But he seems to have spent nearly a year in South Africa, suggesting he did not return to England until early 1.935. However, Morton (1984:688) remembered first meeting Lloyd "about 1932". As 1932 is clearly too early, and the chronology would still be rather tight for a 1933 return (less than 10 full years away), a late 1934 return is most likely——and a little closer to Morton's "about 1932" than 1935.
4. Cornforth mentioned to me (1972) that he knew Lloyd, Morton, Hutt and other Marxist intellectuals in London during the 1930s but, unfortunately, I have no corroboration of this. (Incidentally, George Woodcock was also an occasional member of this left-wing intellectual circle, but I have seen no evidence that he and Lloyd met at this time.) It would also be interesting to know when Lloyd first met Russian historian Igor Vinogradoff, and whether he and Morton were familiar with the writings of the celebrated medievalist, Sir Paul Vinogradoff. Regrettably, nothing in the Lloyd archive at Goldsmith's College has shed light on these questions.
5. Ralph also took part in London Communist Party study circles of the 1930s. By the mid-30s, all the works of Marx and Engels mentioned here were available in English.
6. The first BBC field recordings of folk songs appear to have been "Sing

as We Go" by unidentified local singers at St. Giles Fair, Oxford, and "Sound, Sound Your Instruments of Joy," a traditional Cornish carol sung by the Mabe Male Voice Choir. They were followed in 1936 by recordings of various London street singers and musicians, of Harry Greening and the Dorchester Mummers performing "The Husband-Man and the Servant-Man" and "Wim-WamWaddles, or The Foolish Boy," and of Peter Sandry and various participants singing "Hal-an-Tow" and other pieces from the Heiston Furry Dance on May Day.

7. Although Welsh, Tanner came from an English-speaking district and sang "Young Henry Martin" and "The Sweet Primroses" in English.

8. BBC 78rpm discs of these performances are available for listening through the National Sound Archives, London, and there are copies at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Cedi Sharp House.

9. Apparently an internal organ of a London branch of the Workers' Music Association, the *William Morris Musical Society Bulletin* consisted of duplicated typescript sent to some or all WMA members. Although I have not yet located copies of this periodical, Lloyd's article was fortunately reprinted in 1945.

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