



Freda Black [with Kathleen Hawkin]. A Romany Gypsy singer now living in Hampshire, Freda has possibly the largest repertoire of songs of any Traveller singer alive today, including a few rare gems! *Photo © Sam Lee*

Folklife Societies

An Introduction to 'The Song Collectors Collective'

by *Sam Lee & James McDonald*

The Song Collectors Collective celebrates the people who conserve rare oral culture within their communities in Britain, Ireland and beyond. It aims to empower a new generation of collectors while inspiring the ongoing exploration of and creativity within these communities.

Despite wide assumption that all traditional source singers have long passed away and no more songs or stories are being transmitted orally, it has become quite clear lately that there is a wealth of unrecorded material with singers who have never before encountered the wider traditional music community. Within the Gypsy and Traveller communities, and especially amongst older singers, there is a memory of the days of life on the road, in tents and the music, song and dance that went hand-in-hand with this way of life. Over the last five years, several individuals encountered by members of the SCC have since passed away, taking with them stores of songs and memories never to be heard again. It is a common plea for the songs and stories to be recorded and shared as the old ways are not being passed on and this huge store of knowledge of an ancient way of life is forgotten. In the current era of accessible recording technology there is no excuse for not documenting and sharing this rich but fragile lore.

One of the core aims of the SCC is to record more than just songs, but stories, family histories, yarns, knowledge, lore and experiences of social change. The recordings will then be edited, indexed and freely shared on Song Collectors website and social media sites with unrestricted access for both the participants and others. Copies of the indexed recordings will also be donated to the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA), the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (VWML) and the National Sound Archive (NSA) at the British Library for safe-keeping for future generations to enjoy and learn from.

The aims of the Song Collectors Collective are to:

- **Meet** Tradition Bearers including singers, tellers and musicians and to conserve the traditional oral culture alive in Britain, Ireland and beyond
- **Record** the repertoires of songs, stories and lore of Tradition Bearers, with initial focus on the old traditional songs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities of Britain and Ireland
- **Share** these recordings freely with as many people as possible to encourage appreciation of the Tradition Bearers and their repertoires and to help conserve traditional oral culture
- **Return** copies of the recordings to the individuals, families and communities who have contributed
- **Provide** an archive of these recordings as a resource for the public to use for personal enjoyment, education, social work, and performance
- **Empower** a new generation of song collectors to meet, record, share, return, provide and empower others to ensure the future of Song Collecting and the conservation of traditional oral culture

The **Song Collectors Collective** is a united community of amateur collectors, editors, archivists, academics and enthusiasts all supporting and empowering each other to fulfil the aims of the group.

This SCC website has two overlapping aspects:

1. An ever-growing archive containing the songs, stories, and knowledge of the Tradition Bearers that have contributed. Most recordings are downloadable and free to share with the understanding that the copyright of the performance therein remains the property of the Tradition Bearers themselves. The sharing of their repertoires to the wider world should always be honoured with their name and an acknowledgement of their generosity in sharing it.
2. Information about being an active part of the Song Collectors Collective, how to gain the skills to become a confident song collector, resource material to help your research, policy on good practice and safe collecting techniques to protect both contributors and collectors.

The recordings made and received by the SCC, including all those published on the internet by the SCC, are intended to be freely copied and shared for the purpose of benefitting the tradition and the Tradition Bearers of today and tomorrow. Learn them, burn them, share them, care for them. Give CDs to your friends and family and most importantly of all – sing the songs, tell the stories, learn the lore and become a keeper of the flame and a Tradition Bearer to the next generation.

For more information and to keep informed of SCC events and happenings visit the website: <http://songcollectorscollective.co.uk>
If you would like to get involved or have any questions please contact the SCC at songcollectorscollective@gmail.com.

Sam Lee & James McDonald