

An Integrated talk to Local History Societies in North Gloucestershire

Quite by accident I was delighted that for the 2024-2025 THS Season I booked these talks which integrated very well together

A. Richard Sermon, Archaeological Researcher, "The Leather Bottle: Cecil Sharp 1859-1924) and his Tewkesbury folk song collection" £50.00 fee; email wes_hal@yahoo.co.uk 01684 298752

Richard is well known in the Tewkesbury area and beyond as the leader of a folk song group and I booked him to give a PowerPoint presentation on **collectors of English folksongs c 1900** – examples are **Percy Grainger and Cecil Sharpe** who linked up with W H Watts and a Mrs Smitherd, folk song enthusiasts of Tewkesbury.

I enjoyed the talk very much and was left with the query about whether Richard could do a presentation where THS members could sing folk songs. He did not reply - but I had heard good reports of *Shepherd's Crook Folk Choir*, whose well-received presentation I missed with *GLHA*

B. Shepherd's Crook Folk Choir "Songs from the Workhouse" £50.00 fee; email: carol@sweetsofmay.co.uk 01242 603094

It turns out that they provided the follow up talk so that of Richard Semon. This choir started off by wishing to sing Christmas Carols but hit upon the idea of these songs to meet and carry on singing together at other times of the year. It so happened that their repertoire included songs from **Grainger and Sharpe etc** who apparently were sung in workhouses but were older than that having been sung by agricultural labourers.

This folk choir was a skilled *a Capella* group who sang the songs unaccompanied. They can be accessed on www.glostrad.com. This was the result of a major Lottery-funded project which transcribed and put up on the web all the songs and traditional tunes from Gloucestershire which we could find for the use of choirs, schools and singers etc. This is our choir's charity of the year, and any donation is going to this organisation.

Each member also read a story mainly about Winchcombe workhouse [but would be relevant elsewhere] which put the songs into historical context – what was much appreciated by members. **It is essential that the host venue provides a microphone and advises on its use before the meeting officially starts.**

We meet in a Methodist church and the choir sat outside the communion rails facing the audience; we provided a central microphone which was very important for the readers and the audience.

We agree with Carol that we would show a backdrop photo of the **workhouse in 1910 by H. Taunt** – which was the time when the folk song collectors were operating. I regret that I also did not put up a picture of the work house today which is offers residential apartments to be bought by the over 55s – because not all members knew that was the fate of our former workhouse, known colloquially as the *Grubber*.



Tewkesbury's *House of Industry*, 1910
By H Taunt [from rear]



Architect Restored Workhouse of today
now known as *Webber House* [front view]

John Dixon