

Patrick Shuldham-Shaw

HAMISH HENDERSON

'Gang doon wi' a sang, gang doon'

Patrick Noel Shuldham-Shaw—outstanding collector and maker, and 'Admirable Crichton' of the post-World War II English Folk Dance and Song Society—died suddenly on 16 November 1977. He was not yet 60. His loss is a major blow not only to international folk song and folk dance scholarship but also to the still developing and expanding folk revival scene, of which he was a generous and sympathetic if at times shrewdly critical friend.

Pat was in a manner of speaking born into the EFDSS. His mother, Winifred Shuldham-Shaw, was a tower of strength in the Society in its early days, particularly on the dance side, and Pat carried her work forward with quite spectacular virtuosity. After studying music at Cambridge—his preferred instrument while he was an undergraduate was the oboe—he made pioneer collecting trips to the Shetlands in the mid 1940s and noted down a considerable quantity of previously unrecorded fiddle music.

He also 'collected' the Papa Stour sword dance, and eventually became so much part of the North Isles scene that he was several times invited to play an official role in the flamboyant Viking ceremonial of Up-helly-a, the Shetland New Year.

His greatest *coup* in the Northern Isles was, however, his recovery of a version of 'King Orfeo' (Child 19) from John Stickle of Baltasound, Unst, in April 1947 (*Scottish Studies* 20:124). Bronson expressed the importance of the discovery very well when he wrote (in *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* vol. I, p. 275): 'That a tune should in the midst of the twentieth century be recovered for this whisper from the Middle Ages was as little to be expected as that we should hear "The horns of Elfland faintly blowing".' Pat's recording of this rarest of ballads can be heard on the Topic LP 12T 160 (Child Ballads, no. 1).

In England itself he went on collecting tours into the Forest of Dean with Maud Karpeles, the principal trophy of their forays being a beautiful version of 'The Cherry Tree Carol'.

Pat's foremost preoccupation at all times, however, was the dissemination—the 'ploughing back'—of what he and others had collected. An accomplished dancer himself—morris, sword, 'country'—he carried the standard of English folk dance not only through the length and breadth of the mother country but also as far afield as the USA, where he was a much-loved figure at such institutions as Berea College in Kentucky. He composed dances in the American idiom for the mountain kids in this

college, including one "Levi Jackson"—which won a prize in a special dance competition.

Pat was also a frequent visitor to the Netherlands, where he taught English folk dance to an enthusiastic Dutch society for a quarter of a century. (He was, in fact, due to spend Christmas with these Dutch friends, and to celebrate his sixtieth birthday among them. It would have been his twenty-seventh annual visit to Holland.)

It should be mentioned, in this connection, that Pat was a marvellous linguist, and that he was capable of picking up not only new languages but also dialects and *patois* with seemingly effortless ease. (When the cast of *Umabatha*, the Zulu 'Macbeth', visited the School of Scottish Studies recently, he was heard speaking to them in their native tongue.)

Among the English dances he composed were: 'Silver for the Matthews' (in honour of the Silver Wedding of old EFDSS friends in 1955); 'Margaret's Waltz' and 'Walpole Cottage' (in the 1960s); and 'Ganiford's Meggot' (1974). He had a truly amazing facility for composing tunes in a variety of idioms; they were mostly catchy tunes, and lay as close in to their dances as the skin to the apple.

A year or two ago Pat was invited by Aly Bain to a party in honour of a newly married couple, and there was a good deal of exuberant music making. At one point Aly told Pat he would play him a tune he had picked up in Canada, and he was surprised when Pat immediately joined in on his piano accordion. Aly's find was Pat's own tune 'Margaret's Waltz'! (I can personally vouch for the truth of this anecdote which already circulates in folk variants, for I was present at the party.)

In 1971 Pat was awarded the Gold badge of the EFDSS in recognition of his services to folk song and dance, and of his contribution to the over-all work of the Society. Nan Fleming-Williams received the award in the same year.

For the past five years Pat had been working on the great Greig-Duncan collection of Aberdeenshire folksong, and it is nothing short of a tragedy that he has not lived to carry this work through to its conclusion—work for which he was uniquely fitted—or even to see the first fruits of his labours in print. His friends at the School of Scottish Studies—and there has never been a more popular adopted member of the School staff—have good reason therefore for an added deep and poignant sense of loss.

Pat Shaw knew that he had a serious heart condition, but he went full speed ahead to the end, fulfilling (and enjoying) his manifold self-allotted tasks. Much love went out to him in many parts of the world. His friends here and elsewhere are bound to grieve for him, but they can be quite sure he would not have wished his death to come in any other way.