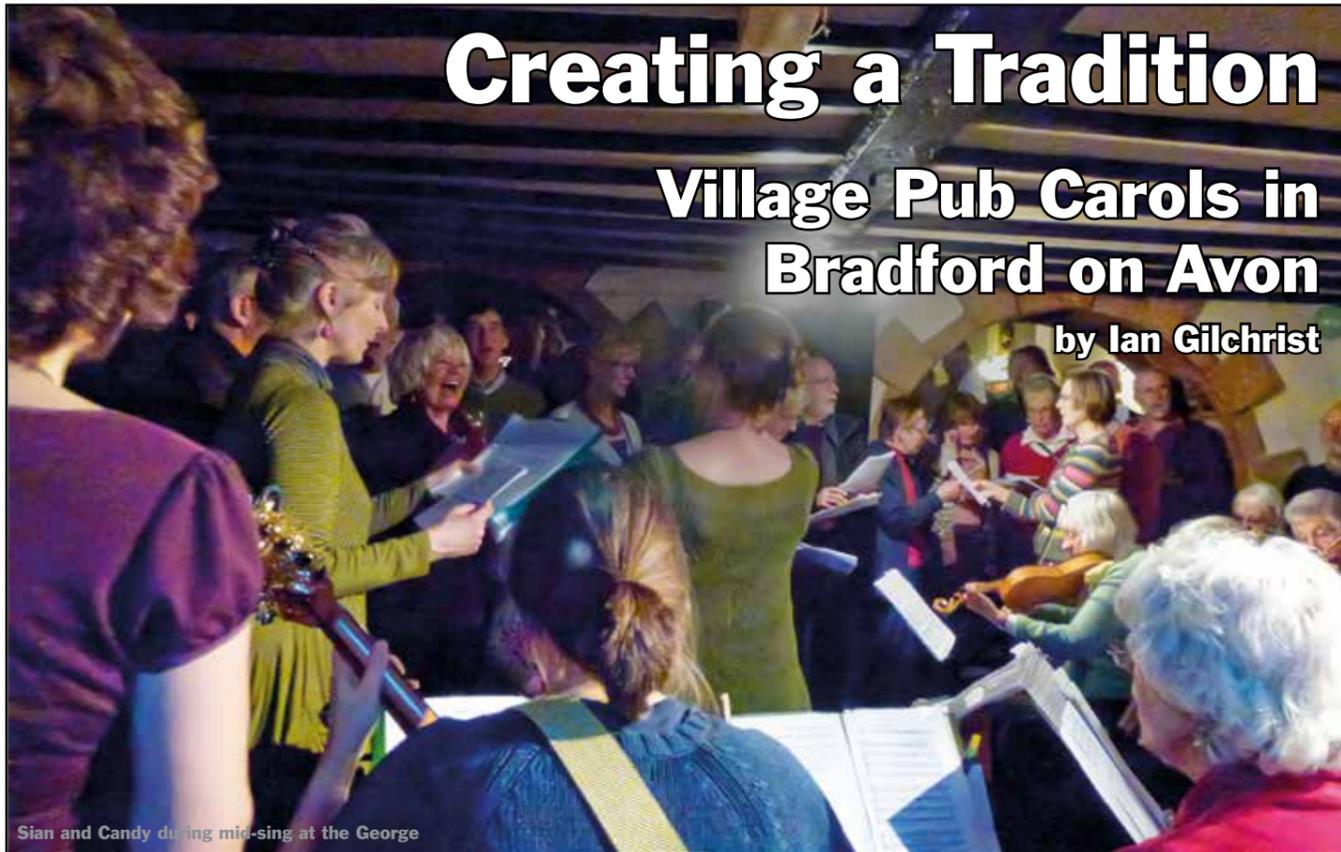


Creating a Tradition

Village Pub Carols in Bradford on Avon

by Ian Gilchrist



Sian and Candy during mid-sing at the George

the musical side to just a piano or organ, so having a band would be a definite departure. Chris Timson and Anne, being well connected with local folk and classically-trained musicians, undertook to assemble the band and get them rehearsed. And the last big decision made at the outset was a determination to create a tradition which would endure over the years as a community event. This would be eased by having a core of songs to remain at the heart of the repertoire but with a certain amount of chopping and adding to keep the repertoire fresh.

Having established these principles, the next step was to choose the songs. As mentioned above, the first place to look was the Sheffield carols, so some were picked from this tradition. Then, a few were found having a local Wilts/Somerset provenance. Lastly, it was decided to include a few more familiar carols, to ease the way for people who might just happen in late. The final mix for the first December sessions was approximately one-third of each sort, with a total programme length of approximately one hour, not including some very necessary intervals!

Thoughts on arrangements developed over the next few months, with it being decided to have most songs accompanied by the band, but leaving a few to be sung a cappella. Then, most songs would be choral but leaving space for a few solo or duet pieces. Part singing was of course to be encouraged, with the tunes being arranged to be played mostly in four parts – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The band practices started during the October, at Chris and Anne's house, which put a slight strain on their accommodation with approximately 12 musicians packed into their living room. There were melodeons, concertinas, fiddles, guitar, mandolin, plus a few wind instruments, so with the musicianly impedimenta of music stands etc, it was all a bit squashed.

The inaugural performances took place in December 2010, with two different pubs acting as venues on successive Sunday afternoons. The word 'performance' is, however, slightly misleading because this implies a separation of performers and audience. In this case there was

no distinction between performers and audience – the singers sang for their own entertainment and the musicians played their hearts out to be heard over the full-throated roar of all the singers. The first pub to be used was the Dandy Lion which was especially appropriate as the landlords, Steve and Shirley Garrett, were also enthusiastic members of the Wiltshire Wailers choir. Shirley said afterwards, "We could not believe how packed the pub was, with about 180 people squeezed in. Hanging off the rafters would be a good way to describe it!" The response from the choir leaders was equally ecstatic, with Chris Samuel declaring, "It was all that we'd hoped for and more. It was definitely something to be repeated, so we had met our goal, - to create a tradition."

Since that first time in 2010, the event has moved around a few pubs (though the Dandy Lion has remained a constant), songs have come and gone, and a new choir (Sing Alive led by Sian Penlington) has joined the fun, but basically the Bradford Carols is, for now, a fixture in the cultural calendar of the town. The leaders of the event put this down to the fact

they have put a strong emphasis on songs which are great to sing, and not omitting to leave plenty of time during the performance sessions to get to the bar for the all-important throat-lubricating drinks!

Note on the songs:

Traditional carols included in the repertoire have been *Ding Dong Merrily On High* (to familiar tune), *While Shepherds Watched, The Holly And The Ivy* (both to unfamiliar tunes) and *Silent Night* (first verse sung in German).

The 'Sheffield' songs included *Diadem, Jacob's Well, Sweet Christmas Bells, Hail Smiling Morn, The Mistletoe Bough* and *The Christmas Tree*.

Songs with a local provenance have included *Awake And Join The Cheerful Choir, Carlingcott, a Gloucestershire Wassail, I Hear Along Our Street*, and the *Nailsbourne Beasts Song*.

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Outside the Dandy Lion in Bradford on Avon
Chris Timson, Anne Gregson, Chris Samuel and Shirley Garrett

"...there was no distinction between performers and audience – the singers sang for their own entertainment and the musicians played their hearts out to be heard over the full-throated roar of all the singers..."

Village pub carol singing at Christmas time is an established tradition in places like Sheffield. This short article illustrates how such a tradition can be transplanted and created anew in other places, in this case Bradford on Avon in Wiltshire.

This particular story begins one springtime evening in 2010, when a couple of local community choir leaders, Chris Samuel and Candy Verney, got together with a few local folk musicians, Chris Timson, Anne Gregson and Nick Nicholls, in the Dandy Lion pub in Bradford. They shared some ideas on bringing the 'Sheffield carols' concept to the town, noting that something similar had already been achieved in Stroud in Gloucestershire. The germ of the

idea had got started at a chance encounter in the market a few weeks before, but now was the time to see if the idea 'had legs'.

Some common ideas were quickly identified, the first of which was that the chosen carols would tend to be a mix of Yorkshire/ Derbyshire carols, with some local to Wiltshire and Somerset if they could be found. Chris Samuel and Candy, leaders respectively of the Wiltshire Wailers and Singing In The Round choirs, would undertake to rehearse their singers, starting in the autumn.

Another big decision, and one which justifies the 'new' tradition title, was to make an accompaniment for the singers with a village band sound. The Sheffield tradition tends to leave



Chris Samuel leading the choirs in the Dandy Lion

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