In a sense I write under false pretences because the BBC possesses no special archives devoted to folk music. For the purposes of broadcasting, the BBC began to make recordings at the end of 1931 and over the last thirty years has built up a general Sound Archives of some 30,000 accession numbers: recordings mainly selected from its own broadcast programmes, ranging from variety to grand opera, from the squeak of a door to full-length radio drama, from the noisy actuality of war commentaries to the stately sonority of Coronation ceremonies.

The primary aim of the Archives as a whole has been to collect and preserve documentary sound of firsthand interest for future broadcasting. The work of selection, processing, cataloguing and library service is carried out by a non-technical staff, numbering at present twenty-five persons, assisted on the technical side by a small group of specialised recording engineers who transfer selected material from tape to disk (for subsequent manufacture of matrices) or from tape to archive tape. The majority of holdings are at present in the form of processed recordings, standard groove 78 rpm pressings for the early years, followed in the last decade by micro-groove pressings at 33 1/3 rpm. The matrices are stored by the BBC. With appropriate precautions it is believed that this remains the surest method of long-term preservation, although in the last two years the BBC has begun to preserve a number of full-length programmes on tape, again with many precautions and reservations as to the ultimate durability of this medium.

The BBC department responsible for the Sound Archives has always considered the recording and preservation of folk music, custom and dialect as an important part of its assignment, a point of view that has received every encouragement from the BBC management. Extensive field operations were not undertaken until the advent of portable tape recorders in the 1950's. In earlier years, field recording, although increasingly carried out by the BBC for documentary programmes, involved heavy recording vans and a technical
team. This was unduly expensive and the outfit as a whole was cumbersome and unsuited to the needs of the folk music collector, who needs to make his approach with the minimum noise and fuss.

Nevertheless, a few recordings have been preserved from the earlier era, and some of these are of exceptional value. They include folk songs from a singer, Mrs. Louisa Hooper, of Hambridge, Somerset, from whom Cecil Sharp, some thirty years earlier, had collected numerous songs and whom the BBC recorded in 1942, just before her death; a recording made in 1944 of 'Brigg Fair' sung by the son of Joseph Taylor from whom Percy Grainger originally heard it; and also recordings made in 1937 and in 1949 from a South Wales singer with a large repertoire of English songs, Philip Tanner. A few songs from him had been recorded earlier by The Gramophone Company at the instigation of Maud Karpeles, and the BBC helped to resuscitate them when it was discovered the commercial matrices had been destroyed.

By 1952 the BBC had gained some experience with portable and transportable tape machines and was satisfied they could be handled by a suitably trained non-technical person. The BBC at that date was probably the only organisation in Britain that could command suitable facilities.

A pilot recording expedition of several weeks had been supervised in Ireland in 1947, and another in 1949, by the Head of Department, R. V. A. George, himself a Donegal man and a singer, whose personal interest and enthusiasm were largely responsible for persuading the BBC to take the initiative. The results of the Irish trip (about a hundred recordings) confirmed the belief that much material of interest to broadcasting, as well as of scientific folklore value, still remained to be recorded, even in these over-urbanised islands.

A five-year scheme for systematic field recording throughout the British Isles was therefore planned and carried out between 1952 and 1957. In this enterprise the BBC worked in cooperation with the folk music and folklore societies and with the one or two universities who were beginning to interest themselves in these aspects of field study. The BBC was fortunate in securing the full-time services as collectors of Peter Kennedy, seconded by the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and of Seamus Ennis, an accomplished performer and also an expert in Irish song and lore and in the Gaelic language, who had previously worked for the Irish Folklore Commission. Other experts with local experience were invited to cooperate from time to time.
In the words of the brief given to our collectors, the aim was to collect in recorded form, for the purposes of broadcasting, as much of the surviving folk music and local forms of speech as possible. The material to be collected included folk song, instrumental folk music, folk custom (in so far as this proved suitable for sound recording), folk tale, local speech and dialect. The collectors, in judging whether material merited their attention, were advised to ask themselves two questions: First, is it authentic from the folklore point of view? Second, is the sound produced likely to be acceptable for broadcasting? They were however told that an item judged to be particularly valuable as folklore would be acceptable despite a comparatively low rating from the second point of view.

As will have been seen, stress was laid on the eventual purpose of broadcasting as a guiding principle in the enterprise. It may be interesting to note that although by no means all the field recordings made by the BBC have appeared in programmes, many have done so. In particular, while the five-year scheme itself was in progress, the collectors were given the opportunity of reporting personally on their travels, in several series of weekly programmes entitled ‘As I Roved Out’. One such series ran for twenty-six weeks consecutively and met with appreciative response from listeners.

The result of the five-year scheme, together with a number of other recordings made from time to time, both before and since, is a collection which now comprises some 3,300 items (approximately 150 hours). This total includes variants of songs and instrumental items and about 200 singing games (with variants) recorded from children. The material was gathered from over 700 informants. Apart from those involved in the children’s games, the informants’ ages ranged from about 16 to 96. Almost every county in Great Britain and Ireland is represented. Some areas proved exceptionally rich hunting-grounds, notably the South and South-west of England and East Anglia (for song), Northumberland (for instrumental music), the North-east of Scotland and the Hebrides (for song, especially Gaelic song) and the West and South of Ireland for everything, these last areas being especially notable for vocal style and virtuoso instrumental performance.

Although in many areas, especially in England, the older and more valuable tradition resided mainly in the often dim and scanty memories of the older people (many of our informants of the 1950’s are now dead), there were a surprising number of sizeable repertoires. Harry Cox, a Norfolk farm labourer of 68, for instance,
recorded more than fifty songs. Robert Cinnamond, recorded in Belfast in 1955 by Sean O'Boyle, scored seventy songs, ranging from local Irish love songs and political ballads to excellent, full versions of several Child ballads. Another extremely large and interesting repertoire was tapped when Seamus Ennis visited Thomas Moran, a 79-year-old farmer of Mohill, Co. Leitrim, who produced a version of almost any song the collector could mention.

BBC collector, Sean O'Boyle, recording Irish folk singer, Mrs. Sheila Gallagher, in her cottage in Middle Dore, County Donegal.

In these cases it was impossible to get to the bottom of the barrel. A further visit would always draw out more. Singers such as these, in good voice and with memory intact, were, it must be admitted, not typical but they were more frequent than many people had believed.

Apart from large repertoires, many singers and instrumentalists were sufficiently skilled to contribute items of great interest for the study of individual and regional styles. This was particularly true of the Irish and Hebridean singers and of instrumental musicians in Ireland and Northumberland. The range of instruments recorded is surprisingly varied: in England — fiddle, melodeon, accordion, concertina, mouth organ, Northumbrian bagpipes, tin whistle, piccolo, Jew's harp; Ireland — fiddle (in a great variety of virtuoso styles), melodeon, flute, Uilleann pipes, tin whistle, mandolin, whistling,
lilting (wordless mouth music), small ceilidh bands; Scotland — fiddle, tin whistle, accordion, melodeon, guitar (solo and in small combinations), mouth music.

In addition to songs and instrumental music the BBC has collected recordings of traditional customs (as performed or as described by local informants), folk drama (the Mummers' Play of death and revival), tales and legends, other forms of oral literature, such as rhymes, riddles, toasts, prayers, and descriptions of obsolescent crafts such as netting, thatching, heather besom-making, wooden plough-making, peat-lifting, Hebridean tweed processes. Our collectors were encouraged to record speech from their folk music informants, not only in order to obtain data for documentation, but also because this offered good opportunities for authentic dialect recordings and because of the value of such recordings as supporting material for programme presentation.

The dialect collection in the BBC Sound Archives comprises at present some 400 recordings. Although the standpoint here is to represent the speech forms of as many areas as possible, the dialect recordings have a bearing on the folklore collection, since even when not recorded from folklore informants, they frequently offer information about local customs and ways of life. Some of the dialect recordings have been made by the BBC itself, in the course of programme preparation or of the folk music collection; others have been acquired from university sources, in particular the Leeds University Dialect Survey whose organisers have been willing, with suitable safeguards and anonymity of informants, to allow some of their field recordings to be made available for broadcasting purposes.

It remains to describe the Library arrangements for handling, storing and cataloguing the folklore collection. Since these recordings form an integral part of the BBC Sound Archives, all techniques for accessioning, filing and cataloguing have been obliged to adhere to a general pattern previously laid down for the Archives as a whole. Because of the unspecialised nature of the Archives and the (sometimes idiosyncratic) specific needs of broadcasting, the methods adopted must necessarily appear somewhat elementary to the folklore specialist.

To deal first with physical problems of storage: the pressings are placed vertically in open metal racks, the risk of warping being controlled by upright supports fixed at 6" intervals. The store is air-conditioned but the working stock is open to daily access for the service of programme departments in the BBC. The recordings are
sent to studio centres all over the country and often get rough usage in transit and in busy studios. Exposure to wear-and-tear of this sort is accepted, since replacements can be obtained from the matrices which are stored by the BBC as part of the archive arrangements. Two unplayed pressings are also stored apart, one in London and one in the country, as a long-term precaution. The BBC thus relies for security on the stability of the matrix and also on a multiplicity of copies kept in different places.

BBC Sound Archives: record storage, trolleys for transport and filing.

Shelf arrangement is by accession number. No attempt is made to classify recordings on the shelves; “folk” recordings are not segregated from other types of recording. All the apparatus for locating material resides in the catalogue system. The BBC being in the
position of record manufacturer in relation to its own archive recordings, the Library drafts its own labels. One of the headaches of cataloguing gramophone records is thereby eliminated or, more precisely, is shifted from the shoulders of the catalogue staff onto those responsible for label drafting, in this case the collectors, on whose accurate information all that follows must rely.

In gathering information for documentation, the BBC collectors were instructed to follow the principles put forward in the Manual for Folk Music Collectors (pub. International Folk Music Council) so far as circumstances permitted. Every effort was made to note down the basic field data that would be indispensable for folklore study but our collectors also had to bear in mind the special needs of a broadcaster introducing the recordings on the air.

The general outline of the catalogue system of the BBC Sound Archives is as follows. Main entry cards are arranged according to a classification system developed specifically for BBC use, the basis of which is not a subject classification, since it is not designed to lead systematically to sources of knowledge. The aim of the classification has been rather to group entries in a way which will assist certain aspects of Library handling and control (such as statistics, preparation of handbook catalogues on a departmental basis, etc.) and at the same time encourage fruitful perusal by programme makers. At the same time, the system is intentionally as simple as possible in order to facilitate the rapid location of individual items.

The basis adopted is more akin to division by form than by subject. Some of the main divisions are as follows:

A Talks and speeches
B News
C Chronological events, commentaries, interviews, arranged in date order
E Folklore and custom
F Features (i.e. radio documentaries)
J Drama
M Music
N Light entertainment
P Sport
R Religious broadcasts
S Schools and other educational broadcasts

Dialect recordings are a sub-section of Division A, arranged by country, then by county. Folklore, Division E, is also arranged by
country with common subdivisions: (1) customs, in performance (2) folk drama (3) tales and legends (4) other oral literature (5) accounts of customs and beliefs (6) descriptions of crafts. A subdivision of M is Folk Music, MN, which is then subdivided by country, with further subdivision where appropriate for major territorial, linguistic or cultural grouping within a country, and common subdivision into (1) songs (2) instrumental music. There are further common subdivisions to provide for concert arrangements of folk music and also for cards under performers' names. This last section carries catalogue entries for speech by the folk music performers, where recorded, and also biographical or other notes about them.

A given item may, of course, be entered in more than one of the above sections (e.g. an interview about a folksong or describing a custom may also be appropriate under dialect). In addition, the classified card catalogue as a whole is supplemented by an Alphabetical Index which contains abbreviated entries under titles, persons and subjects. It is here that analysis of the material by subject takes place, if at all.

The first step in cataloguing is, of course, the preparation of the main entry. In the case of folk song, this is under title. Immediately problems of identification are involved, since the practice has been to enter a song under a "commonly accepted title", thus bringing together all recognisable variants and fragments. The choice of title usually follows that selected from published titles in Margaret Dean-Smith's Guide to English Folk Song Collections (University Press of Liverpool and English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1954). The title as given by the singer, however, is also added.

The main catalogue card, with its title heading thus selected, then follows the general pattern for the Library as a whole, with a sub-title paragraph quoting shelf number, duration, date of recording, name of singer, place of recording, name of collector. There follows a more detailed contents note, giving first line of song, any notes applicable to the variant in question and a précis of any speech there may be on the record, introducing or explaining the song, etc. When this main catalogue entry is placed in the catalogue card system, it will often be preceded by a separate "song-title" card which contains a general account of the song with biographical references, thus avoiding repetition on the actual catalogue entries for recordings of variants, which may run to a dozen or so in some cases. Notes on the performer, likewise to save repetition, are carried on a "performer's card" under name, in a separate section of the catalogue. No attempt has been
Sample Catalogue Entries, BBC Recorded Programmes Library

BITTER WITHY, The

18618 Traditional ballad/carl. Non-copyright. 22.8.52.
Back Singer: William Payne (aged 68), Gloucester, formerly of Bromsash, Glos.
4'25" B. B. C. Collection (Maud Karpeles and Patrick Shuldham-Shaw)

"As I walked out on a bright holiday
Small rains from the sky did fall..."

Learned from singer's father, who died in 1937 at the age of 73.

BITTER WITHY: Main entry card

BITTER WITHY, The

The legend which forms the basis of this ballad (said to be one of the few traditional ballads that have come to light since the publication of Child's English and Scottish Popular Ballads, is found in a pseudo-gospel of the second century containing apocryphal stories of the childhood of Jesus. E. K. Wells in 'The Ballad Tree' draws' attention to a description of a fresco at Lucca, Italy, depicting the punishment of the Child by His Mother as recounted in the ballad (see Notes and Queries, Third Series, III, 334 ff.). See also: Gerould: The Ballad of the Bitter Withy, in Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXIII (1908) and Journal of the Folk Song Society, 9, 300-2 (notes). A version of the ballad is published in Sharp: English Folk Carols, p.5.

In another carol on similar lines, 'The Holy Well', it is Mary who urges that vengeance should be taken on the other children, but Jesus declines to use His power in that way.

BITTER WITHY: Song title card (see text of article)

GALLAGHER, Sheila

Folk singer. Living, at an advanced age (over 90), in her own double-roomed cottage at Middle Dore, near Gweedore, Co. Donegal. Father a Gweedore farmer, mother Kathleen Boyle, from Bunbeg. Gaelic speaker. Education from parents and local "hedge schoolmasters" - no local school. Has reared family of nine, of which five now dead. One daughter recently returned from America to look after her, but she still takes care herself of her own cow and chicken.

During summer of 1953, in less than three hours, Mrs. Gallagher sang 30 songs to B. B. C. Collectors, Peter Kennedy and Sean O'Boyle, 10 in English and 20 in Gaelic, all of which she explained and translated into English, a language she seldom used in her youth. She remembers the period when the Irish Gaelic was severely discouraged in her area.

GALLAGHER, Sheila: Singer's card
made in the BBC Sound Archives to undertake musical notation or analysis of the material gathered, this being a matter beyond the scope of broadcasting archives.

It cannot be claimed that the BBC field work brought to light a large body of folklore material not known about before. Indeed it is doubtful if any new song (i.e. unknown to previous printed or private collections) was unearthed, especially in the field of English song. What the collection does offer, I believe, is a fairly representative cross-section of folklore survival in the area covered during the middle decades of this century. The most concentrated effort of the BBC was made at a time when practically no other institution in the country was equipped to undertake extensive field work. The Irish Folklore Commission, which had made a fine beginning in Ireland but had latterly concentrated on custom and tale in Gaelic, generously supported the BBC scheme by passing on its chief musical collector. The School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University, was embarking on its fieldwork in folk music about the same time as the BBC and has always been ready to cooperate. The English Folk Dance and Song Society in London seconded a member of staff to work as collector and much help and advice was received from them, from the Welsh Folk Song Society and from many others. Although the BBC continues to make recordings as opportunity offers, the work is now being carried on by these specialist bodies who are able to pursue more serious scientific research and detailed analysis of the results, which the BBC has been unable to undertake. Copies of the recordings made by the BBC have been deposited with them for study and reference (since unfortunately it is not possible to open the BBC Sound Archives to all comers for this purpose, much as we would like to). With the consent of the BBC (who as collector holds copyright in the recordings made under its sponsorship) some of the recordings are being transcribed and published and a few have been published as gramophone records.

Apart from a recording expedition undertaken by the present writer in Portugal in 1956 (in collaboration with Professor Artur Santos of the Lisbon Conservatory), when about a hundred recordings were collected in the provinces of Beira Baixa and Beira Alta, the efforts of the BBC have been concentrated on Britain.

Considerable progress has been made, however, with the building up of an international collection of folk music recordings, mainly by exchange or purchase from private collectors. The BBC is prepared to offer for exchange with other broadcasting organisations or folk
music institutes any recordings which lie within its own copyright control, i.e. mainly those made under BBC sponsorship in Great Britain and Ireland.

NOTES

1. For a general account of the BBC Recorded Programmes Libraries, including the Sound Archives, see article by Timothy Eckersley in *Recorded Sound*, No. 6, Spring 1962.


3. The machines eventually used were a mains-powered Ferrograph, supplemented later by a TR 50 and an EMI “Midget” battery-operated machine, all recording at either 15 ips or 7 1/2 ips.