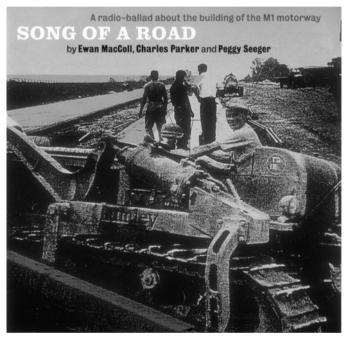
Charles Parker Archive

Annual Report & Accounts 2008–2009

Celebrating more than Fifty Years of the Radio Ballads and another programme anniversary.



Courtesy Topic Records

Thanks to Birmingham Central Library and all the help from our friends. The Charles Parker Archive is owned by the Charles Parker Trust established by Mrs. Phyl Parker as grantor on 3rd March 1982.

It is a registered charity, No. 326082.

The Trustees are

Pam Bishop, musician Tim Blackmore MBE: Trust Chairman, producer Philip Cox, QC Helen Lloyd, oral history radio producer Catherine Mackerras, community arts worker Matthew Parker, maker of musical instruments Ian Parr: Hon. Secretary Gillian Reynolds MBE, journalist and broadcaster Dave Rogers, Banner Theatre Robert Whitworth: Hon. Treasurer

The Objects of the Trust are:

The advancement of education and knowledge in folk language, lore and music.

The collation of the material and its maintenance and preservation The administration of the material including the making of it available to those members of the general public indicating an interest therein. Any other purpose consistent with the first item above.

> The Charles Parker Archive is held in the Archives Department of the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3 HQ (telephone 0121 303 4217)

It holds some 5000 tapes, Charles Parker's files and papers and a small library of books on folk culture, music and politics. The Archive is open for research by individuals, especially Trade Union member interest in radio, political theatre and folk culture.

Chairman's Report

Tim Blackmore MBE

This has been a significant year for the Trust. After 20 years at our helm, Gillian Reynolds decided to stand down as Chairman, but thankfully to continue as a Trustee. She's been a trustee since 1982 replacing Richard Groves as Chairman in 1997. Under her leadership, the Trust achieved its objective of the digitisation of all its audio recordings, a daunting task of both fundraising and organisation. Gillian is an exceptional human being. She brings a great breadth of knowledge understanding and commitment to everything she does. Her professional life as Britain's leading radio critic is but one aspect of a list of involvements that have encompassed Oxford University, the British Library, the Sony Radio Academy Awards and more. Her contacts are to be found in virtually every sector of public life and her championship of talented people has helped the growth of dozens of creative careers. Our gratitude is substantial and her continued input will be one of our strongest assets as we move to the next stage of the Trust's development.

As a fan of Charles Parker's radio programmes since I first heard 'The Big Hewer' in the 1960s, and as a former radio producer I feel honoured to have been appointed as Gillian's successor. With the completion of the digitisation project we are now addressing the most effective ways in which the Trust can promote even greater use of the Archive's resources. In June this year BBC 7 commissioned Gillian and I to present a three hour celebration of the Radio Ballads and which included 'The Ballad of John Axon' in its original 45' form, together with 'Travelling People' and 'The Song of Steel' – the Sony Award winning ballad produced by John Leonard in 2006. As John writes elsewhere in this report, his company 'Smooth Operations' is producing its seventh radio ballad to mark this year's 25th anniversary of the 1980s miners' strike.

In April Professor Sean Street organised this year's Charles Parker day at the National Media Museum in Bradford. He put together a fascinating programme but sadly confirmed that it was the last that will be organised under his name. Next year the day will be held in Sunderland and will be put together by Andy Cartwright. We are enormously grateful to Sean for all that he's done to further understanding and appreciation of Charles Parker's work.

Thank you for your support of our work and if you believe you may have identified further ways in which we can exploit the Archive then do please contact our secretary Ian Parr (<u>ianmparr@gmail.com</u>) and share your thoughts with us. It isn't possible that the Trustees are the only people with good ideas, so we look forward to hearing from you.

Secretary's Report

Ian M. Parr

Since publication of the last Annual Report the Trustees' committee has met three times, the first being the 2008 AGM in September 2008. An Extraordinary Meeting of the committee was held in January when a new Chairman was elected and a number of changes were introduced including a review of production and timing of the Annual Report. A further committee meeting was held in May in which many of the changes were consolidated.

The immediate effect upon Trustees, committee members and Friends of the Archive has been the revised date of publication and circulation of this Report.

Dissemination, Education and Use, (DEU) topics which arise from the objectives of the Trust, continue to be at the forefront of our thinking and future plans. Trustees will continue to develop policy in this area of activity.

The Secretary is now responsible for following up web site contacts. Pam Bishop continues to run our web site and enquires. Contacts which arise from hits on the web site are now considered as correspondence. In consequence the Secretary has responded to two interesting enquires amongst those received.

One enquiry related to Ewan MacColl's activities associated with Scottish Theatre. It brought about an exchange of correspondence and material with The Working Class Movement Library, see http://www.wcml.org.uk/ based in Ewan MacColl's home town of Salford.

The second enquiry concerned the failure to hold the Charles Parker Prize this year. It is an important event for the Trust and it is intended to reintroduce the prize in 2010. Further details should be available for the AGM.

My thanks to the Library staff for their help this year as in previous ones. Also, I'm grateful to the Trustees and members of the committee for their support.

Treasurer's Report - year ending 28 April 2009

This year we are especially grateful to a number of the Friends of the Charles Parker Archive who have made donations far in excess of the normal subscriptions. With only minor expenditure this year, these donations have resulted in an increase in the balance held at the Bank. This balance places us in a better position to launch a new initiative, but it would be very easily used up and a significant new venture will require specific fundraising.

RECEIPTS	£
Friends' subscriptions and donations	1,175
Tax refunds on gift-aid contributions	238
Bank interest	39
Total	1,452
PAYMENTS	
Printing, postage etc.	302
Website	41
Total	343
Excess receipts over payments	1,109
Balance statement at 28.04.09	
Opening balance in Barclays Bank at 29.04.08	£3,032
PLUS excess receipts over payments	1,109
Closing balance in Barclays Bank at 28.04.09	£4,141
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3

Robert Whitworth

Charles Parker Day 2009, National Media Museum, Bradford, in Association with the Centre For Broadcasting History Research, Bournemouth University by Professor Seán Street Director, The Centre for Broadcasting History Research

The sixth annual Charles Parker Day event was held on Friday 3 April in the splendid setting of the National Media Museum in Bradford. The venue proved to be an ideal one for the varied presentations and screenings, and the NMeM staff handled the logistics with great efficiency and courtesy.

The day began with a fascinating insight into the early development of the Radio Ballads from location to studio by Peter Cox. Taking as his starting point The Song of a Road, the author of Set Into Song - Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and the Radio Ballads explored the evolution of the production process towards the optimum methodology as exemplified in Singing the Fishing.

Peter's presentation was followed by Gerry Harrison's intriguingly titled talk, "The real Guy Pringle". This was the name that R. D. (Reggie) Smith's wife, Olivia Manning, gave him when she wrote her Balkan and Levant trilogies. After the war, recruited into the BBC by MacNeice and in spite of his Communism, Reggie enjoyed an almost legendary career as a producer in Features and Drama, working with MacColl, Parker and Donnellan as well as "the knights and dames of the stage". Gerry is working on a biography of Smith, and his talk certainly whetted the appetite for this!

Paul Long and Mary Irwin turned our attention to Philip Donnellan with a presentation focusing on the insider view of the production, professional culture and politics of BBC radio and TV documentary as provided by Donnellan in his (as yet, unpublished) autobiography 'We Were the BBC: an alternative view of a producer's responsibility, 1948-1984'. Donnellan was Parker's colleague, friend and collaborator as well as producing several TV adaptations of the Radio Ballads. Paul followed this with an introduction to Donnellan's "Omnibus' film of 1977, Pure Radio, which gave a fascinating insight into the personalities of the BBC Radio Features department at its height, including footage of Charles Parker at work on location. A Tribute.: Charles Parker Day has always celebrated the art of the feature maker past, present and to come and this year Simon Elmes, Creative Director, Documentaries and Features, BBC Radio, remembered one of the most gifted practitioners of recent times, Nigel Acheson, who died just before Charles Parker day in 2008

The day ended with a presentation by Jacqeline Contre of Banner Theatre, in which she explored the subject of Multiculturalism onstage, discussing the process of connecting with audiences through cultural diversity. In doing so she provided evidence of a pleasing continuity between the work of Parker, MacColl and Seeger, and current projects and concerns. Jacqueline is a former performer and administrator with Banner, at present undertaking doctoral research into the work of the Company, at the University of Warwick.

Charles Parker Day was first organized by the Centre for Broadcasting History Research at Bournemouth University and sadly 2009 is the last event with which I will be directly involved. Charles Parker Day 2010 will be hosted by the University of Sunderland, and directed by Andy Cartwright. My own part of this enterprise has been a joy, and I thank everyone who has contributed to the event over past years. I wish Andy and his team great success for the Seventh Charles Parker Day next year.

The RADIO-BALLADS were re-released by Topic Records in May 2008 by public demand. Each of the eight Radio-Ballads CDs has a 20 page booklet with information about the individual Radio-Ballad as well as details about the series and biographical details of Charles Parker, Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger. They are available from <u>www.topicrecords.co.uk</u> at mid-price (£8.50 each including VAT plus a small postal charge.) The full set is available at a special price (£46.27 including VAT plus postage.) They are also available from all good retailers including Amazon.co.uk, HMV.co.uk and others.

The Ballad of the Miners' Strike by John Leonard

When Smooth Operations made six Radio Ballads for BBC Radio 2 in 2006 we tackled some genuinely controversial issues of British life: Hunting with Hounds, Northern Ireland's Troubles, People Living with Aids and HIV, the death of the steel and shipbuilding industries.

Radio Ballads are documentaries of lives put to song, their currency emotions. As a radio form they were invented by Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and Peggy Seeger in the late 1950s. They are labour intensive but can offer insights that are often not possible in other forms of documentaries.

Deliberately during the 2006 series we didn't revisit any of the subjects covered by Ewan, Peggy and Charles in the original series as we felt they had already made the perfect programmes. However we knew a big subject was the Miners' Strike of 1984/5 and we felt it could be a genuine companion to The Big Hewer. The strike was a terrible time for mining communities, more like a civil war, with the miners turned against each other, the police dubbed 'Maggie's Bootboys', families torn apart and bitterness lasting to this day.

So when BBC Radio 2 commissioned us to make a further Ballad to mark the 25th anniversary of the strike, we knew there would be no shortage of material. The mines and the lives they supported are in the main long gone but the shock waves the strike sent through British society are still there. We reassembled songwriters John Tams, Jez Lowe, Ray Hurne and Julie Matthews.

Within minutes of starting to listen to the interviews people were in tears. John Tams had to constantly take breaks from listening to reflect on the feelings that have been carried for 25 years. Pain flowed out of men and women in south Wales, County Durham, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire.

Having fathers and brothers labelled 'the enemy within'; the hardship of a year without wages - still shocked at the confrontation with the police on that hot summer day at Orgreave. The men on the other side of the shields also told their stories. Some believed Scargill had to be stopped - others couldn't believe their eyes. But when the blood ran at Orgreave Britain was never the same.

Proud women kept homes running for a year without wages, fed and clothed children and explained why there were no Christmas presents: "Santa doesn't cross picket lines."

Empowered, politicised and on a bigger stage, some felt, at the end of the strike unable to return to their previous lives of having the tea on the table. Many went onto lives in politics or academia.



In Mansfield, men who worked explained the consequences. Scabbing meant running a gauntlet of abuse, intimidation and ostracism from former friends, now held back by a line of police.

Working miners,

striking miners, police, miners' wives: different stories, all needing to be heard. Our songwriters listened, and their gift of sensitive observation has yielded remarkable and beautiful results.

Such a complex knot of hopes and frustrations has had to be distilled to a matter of minutes, but this Ballad is a tapestry of music and an outpouring of emotion from a conflict that is still unresolved for many.

A quarter of a century later, with little evidence of mining now to be seen around Britain, these are like voices from a time past ...

The Ballad of the Miners' Strike will broadcast on BBC Radio 2 in September.

Lodgingturners? A Contemplation on the Language of the Radio Ballads by Ian Parr

Charles Parker Day 2009 caused me to think hard about the language and lore of the people in the Radio Ballads and similar programmes Charles produced.

I've been researching Singing the Fishing and the Birmingham Ballads for a while, captivated by the closeness of language to peoples' work. But it's been at the cost of something much closer to home. If you read my contribution to the 2005/6 Annual Report, "Train Spotting and the Radio Ballads", you'll understand.

Three idioms are used in The Ballad of John Axon. The first is associated with work, the job of being a railwayman, technicalities and colloquialisms. The second is the vernacular. It's sometimes lyrical, sometimes straight and direct as Stockport's terraces, the language of hearth and street. The third, well listen to those little boys again on Stockport Station; "It's a winnie.....it's a semi....waaaay....stinkie...." boohs and cheers.

I wonder if the driver of the electric loco named in February 1981 "Driver John Axon GC" (definitely not a steam locomotive) turns up with his train at Euston from Manchester and expects to book a lodgingturn?

In 1957, for a good many years before and I guess for a few afterwards, every Thursday the Manchester to London train, the Comet, leaving London Road Station in late afternoon would change the loco type from a run of the mill, "winnie" often a Jubilee or Patriot Class loco with wind deflecting shields (winnies) at the front of the boiler, to a "semi". Semis were semi-streamlined Coronation Class locos, definitely superior hardware, probably the most powerful locos ever to run in the UK. The vernacular of those little boys seems to have no parallel in the actuality of the railwaymen. For some reason Ewan MacColl and Charles Parker chose to have the technical language in songs and recitative, like "firedropper", "lodgingturner" and loads of others. The actuality tells us about a railwayman thinking nothing of going to London and booking off. There's nothing about the financial and domestic benefits and drawbacks; a narrative to build, a story to tell!

The actuality of Axon progresses this narrative through the accents of the people of Stockport and in their speech patterns. It's different to other industrial Radio Ballads and to some extent most of Charles' work around 1956 to 1962.

However, the technique in the Radio Ballads of mixing speech styles is an important one. It's often missing in modern feature documentaries on both radio and television.

Nevertheless, there are hints of industrial idiom in Axon. Deep in the actuality, "Blackpool goes through rock" phraseology, are the hidden colloquialisms of the railwayman. "What time's your broadsheet please"; "Hello Bobby". Not a "Robert" but any signalman.



Life after the Charles Parker Prize by Katie Burningham



In 2007, I was fortunate enough to win the Charles Parker Prize for student feature- makers for a five minute piece about the people who regularly visit Trafalgar square to feed the pigeons. *Lieutenant Pigeon* (the title came from one of the self-named characters in the piece) was my first attempt at feature making and since winning the award and graduating from the MA Radio course at Goldsmiths, I have

gone on to work for Falling Tree Productions, where I have produced a number of features for BBC Radio 4 and the BBC World Service. Without doubt, the Charles Parker Prize has been one of the most important factors in shaping my radio career so far, both as a springboard into the industry and a source of inspiration.

The prize also included a two week placement at the BBC Radio Documentaries Unit which gave me a unique opportunity to listen to a range of the best programmes and meet other programme makers. This was where I first heard seminal pieces such as Mairi Russell's *Jason and The Thunderbirds* and had the time and opportunity to discuss the creative process with producers such as Julian May and Simon Elmes.

As I helped in the production of the Radio 4 series, *Last Word*, I also gained an insight into the day-to-day business of programme making. Furthermore, the opportunity to have my five minute feature critically assessed in a group play back session helped me to recognise some of its strengths and weaknesses. This was particularly useful when I came to develop the idea into a programme for the BBC World Service, as the feature idea was subsequently commissioned as one of a three part series called *Public Places, Private Lives*.

The Charles Parker Day Conference itself was my first introduction, outside of the university environment, to a forum for discussing radio features, and it has continued to be a source for new thinking about the form. At the 2008 year's conference, for example, I was particularly intrigued by the similarity between some of Charles Parker's innovative editing and American composer and radio producer Glen Gould's polyphonic work, as highlighted in the lectures given by Andy Cartwright and Piers Plowright.

This year I attended the International Features Conference in Dublin – where I was presenting a programme called *City Messengers* which I produced for BBC Radio 4 about the daily life and motivation of cycle couriers. I believe strongly in the importance of forums such as the Parker Day Conference and IFC in developing a critical and analytical language with which to approach radio features.

This consideration of radio features as a ' art form' in its own right is essential for its development and continued presence, and in the words of one IFC delegate, is the key to '*keeping the craft memory alive*'.

So I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Charles Parker Prize judges for selecting my programme for the first prize in 2007, and all those involved both in the Archive and the Charles Parker Day for their work in keeping going this celebration of the radio feature as an art form, and an art form that has a vital social, cultural and historical role to play.

Archive Trust Website

Pam Bishop

The Trust's website, launched in 2007, complements the pages hosted by the Library at www.birmingham.gov.uk/charlesparkerarchive – these describe the material held in the Central Library and will eventually link into a full catalogue of its contents.

The Trust's website cpatrust.org.uk links directly to the Library pages but also has information about the Trust itself and its activities. AGM minutes and agendas are regularly included, also online versions of the Annual Report. New pages added this year relate to the annual Parker Days:

•News of the Parker Day in April was published on the website, and it still maintains a copy of the day's programme

•We have recently added advance news about the seventh Parker Day, which will be held on Friday 9 April 2010 at the St Peter's Campus of the University of Sunderland.

•It also included announcements about relevant radio programmes. The Radio 4 Archive Hour featuring American folk-singer Pete Seeger who turned 90 in May this year. This year, Seeger unexpectedly came into the limelight again when he performed the Woody Guthrie song This Land Is Your Land, with Bruce Springsteen, outside the Lincoln Memorial for Barack Obama's inauguration.

•The Radio 7 programme "Charles Parker and the Radio Ballad" which was broadcast in June, when Tim Blackmore and Gillian Reynolds celebrated the radical documentary series including full length versions of The Ballad of John Axon (02/07/58) and The Travelling People (17/04/64)

The website also contains links to other interesting sites, related organisations, academic sites relating to Parker's work, and people associated with Charles Parker or the Radio Ballads. The Trust would welcome ideas for expanding the website, and suggestions for further links.

Project Archivist's Report 2008-2009

As readers of previous Annual Reports will know all the sound and paper components of the Charles Parker Archive have now been catalogued and are available for consultation in the Archives and Heritage Searchroom on floor 6 of Birmingham Central Library. The catalogue of the sound recordings digitised and catalogued as part of the *Future for Ordinary Folk* project can be searched online via the A2A website (www.a2a.org.uk). Work is currently underway on a new online catalogue which will make the list of all the material in the Parker Archive available over the Archives and Heritage website, and it is anticipated that this work will be completed before Christmas this year in early winter.

As a result of this increase in the availability of the collection we continue to receive many enquiries about the archive, and new users are also discovering the collection due to the A2A website and information available on the Connecting Histories website. Examples from the past year include researchers working on material relating to the critics group and *The Travelling People*.

The Archive continues to be used with school and community groups as reported last year. One key development this year has been the use of the Archive as part of the *Birmingham Stories* project. This is a partnership project with the University of Birmingham funded by the Arts and Humanities Research council where events and workshops have been organised in community venues, and learning guides on various topics previously under researched in Birmingham's history have been prepared.

A recent example of the use made of the Parker Collection by the project staff is the use of material from *The Travelling People* and the West Midlands Gypsy Liaison League in the learning guide on Travelling Communities which can be downloaded from the Connecting Histories website on http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/birminghamstories/ research_guides.asp. This activity formed part of the events marking 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Month' in June and Dr Andy Green launched the learning guide in an event attended by over 70 people in the Central Library Theatre. A week earlier Fiona Tait also gave a talk on the Parker Archive and played extracts from *The Travelling People* to an audience of around 50 people as part of the month's activities.

A Parker Archive Reminiscence By Julie Henigan

In 1986, when I was still working on a Master's degree in Folklore at the University of North Carolina, by an improbably circuitous route, I was hired as archivist by the Charles Parker Trust, which had just been awarded a grant by the British Library.

Highly elated by the prospect of living again in England where I had spent a happy year as an undergraduate, I secured a student visa to work in the UK and in December found myself in the Midlands, where I stayed initially with friend Susie Stockton near Kidderminster. My first visit to Birmingham, in December, was memorable not only for my introduction to the Parker collection, but also for my lack of protective footwear as I trod through the icy slush of Centre City. I soon discovered that I would shortly be treading through deeper waters.

Until I arrived in Birmingham, I had assumed I would be working with others on the collection; instead I discovered I was the whole show. My first sight of the collection with its voluminous contents--and conspicuously featuring a work table covered with miscellaneous material (including Critics Group transcripts, post-production memos, and comical correspondence between Dave Swarbrick and Peggy Seeger)--did nothing to relieve my sense of having gotten in over my head. Fortunately for all concerned, I am possessed of 'a rage for order', and after acquainting myself thoroughly with Parker's life and work and with the general makeup of the collection, I set myself the goal of coming up with an organizational framework for making the materials as accessible as possible to the public, thus serving the research interests of those interested in media history, folklore, oral history, political and social history, and the folk revival--the principal subjects encompassed by the collection.

I did a huge amount of 'housecleaning': consolidating materials, getting rid of flannel sheets and lace curtains (literally!) and I devised a plan for cataloguing, accessioning, and preserving the tapes by dubbing reel-to-reel originals to cassette 'listening' tapes, while also writing accompanying cover and 'contents sheets' briefly but comprehensively describing the material on each one.

All of these were, of course, coordinated with relevant files. I started with 'The Travelling People', the programme for which the largest number of field recordings existed, visiting Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger to see if

they knew anything about the gaps in the field recordings for that particular project.

And gaps there were in the archive--as well as tapes spliced together out of their original sequence, chaotic files, etc. In fact, it is only in looking back at the procedural manual I wrote for the Archive that I remember the complexity of the project, and I'm a bit surprised at my ability to create an organizational system that encompassed so many diverse elements. In addition, I indexed and cross-referenced the books, trained a volunteer assistant (the adept Chas Whiting), and managed to help some visiting researchers—including, Niall McKinnon, author of *The British Folk Scene-*-find material for their own projects. All in all, despite the fact that my cataloguing and preservation methods have been superseded by the digital revolution, I'd like to think I laid the groundwork for making the collection the valuable public resource it is today.

Of course, the support and input of then-Head of Archives-John Davies helped me enormously, as did that of the members of the Trust and archives staff. And since then, the work of Fiona Tait and others has carried the Archive to new heights.

My years in Birmingham were some of the best in my life, and if the British Library grant hadn't run out, I'm sure I would have stayed indefinitely. During my time at the Archive I got to know some of the most interesting and congenial people I've ever met—many still close friends—including members of the extended Parker community, as well as the general archives staff especially Fiona Tait, Chris Upton, and John Davies and numerous musicians. I also got to play a lot of music, not only solo in folk clubs and festivals, but also at Irish sessions in Digbeth, old-time and French jams at Pam Bishop's house, and community events, like the local women's festival at which Pam and I performed together.

I will always remember my time in Brummagem with affection--and gratitude that I got the opportunity to be an honorary Brummie, if only for a time. Thus, although I haven't visited in a while, I'd prefer to think it's not 'adieu' but only 'tarra-a-bit'!

Editor's note: Through no fault of Julie's this copy was too late for our print run. But it is too good and too important to omit altogether. We hope Julie will develop her story for our website. For further information about using the archive contact 0121 303 4217, e-mail <u>archives.heritage@birmingham.gov.uk</u> or see <u>www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage</u> and <u>www.connectinghistories.org.uk</u>

Tragic End Note to the 50th Anniversary of the Ballad of John Axon. His grandson, also John Axon, a noted TV and stage actor and subject of Dominic Delargy's entry for the 2005 Charles Parker Prize, died in Stockport, October 2008 aged 48. A sad loss to us all.