

Charles Parker Archive

Annual Report & Accounts 2006 – 2007

CONNECTING HISTORIES Charles Parker Archive

Volunteer Programme

*Monday 16th April, Monday 23rd April, Saturday 28th April 2007
Birmingham Central Library, 10.00-4.30*



Copyright Bob Etheridge

*The oral and folk tradition
The richness of everyday speech
The power to capture the human voice on tape
Poetry and beauty in working life*

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, number 326082

The Trustees are:

Pam Bishop, musician
Tim Blackmore MBE, producer
Philip Cox, Q.C
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 3HQ
(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 members interested in
radio, political theatre and folk culture.

1.

Chairman's Report

Gillian Reynolds

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Charles Parker Archive. The past twelve months have seen the digitisation of the rest of our collection of tapes through the completion of the the splendid *Connecting Histories* project (see Siân Roberts' report, p5) The original tapes are now kept in safe storage, for reference use by future historians and students of broadcasting.

How far away that goal seemed even a decade ago. We thank most sincerely all the people who have made this possible, principally the Archives department of Birmingham Central Library and the Heritage Lottery Fund, main funders of both our own digitisation programme, *A Future For Ordinary Folk*, and the Library's own pioneering venture, *Connecting Histories*. We also thank our own generous donors, ShareGift, the George Cadbury Trust, The Grimmitt Trust, Davenports Charity, Tim Blackmore MBE and, of course, the Friends of the Charles Parker Archive. Without them, and the hard work of all Trustees over a quarter of a century, we could not have achieved the necessary support and funds to make the entire project happen.

The Song of Steel, one of the six Radio Ballads 2006, commissioned by and broadcast on Radio 2, won a Gold Award in the Feature category of this year's Sony Awards. John Tams, musical director of the whole series, sang alongside Kate Rusby, Barry Coope, Julie Matthews, Lester Simpson, Chris While and Jim Boyes. Another of the Radio Ballads 2006, *30 Years of Conflict*, with Tommy Sands, Seth Lakeman and Cara Dillon among a remarkable line-up of singers, won Bronze in the Community Awards section. I was very touched later to receive a card from John and Sally Tams, thanking us for the support and inspiration we gave them in the making of these new Ballads. "The Gold Sony Award," they wrote, "was a fabulous cherry on a delicious cake – I hope they let us bake some more."

The Fourth Annual Charles Parker Day was hosted in March by the University of Central England. Seán Street, who conceived the whole idea, made my heart stop earlier in the year when it seemed his health would prevent him from continuing involvement with it. I am delighted to report that not only did he get off a plane (from Canada, where he had been recording material for a Radio 3 feature) and come straight to the Perry Barr campus to lead a splendid session, he was so inspired by what he heard from other speakers and participants that he will be producing a special *Archive Hour* next year for Radio 4, marking the 50th anniversary of *The Ballad of John Axon*. Professor Street's report on this year's Charles Parker Day is on p6.

In this, the centenary year of the birth of Edward Elgar, it proved impossible to place another feature, one based around *The Fifteenth Variation – a Portrait of Elgar*, produced by Charles Parker in the BBC's old Broad Street studios in 1957. This programme featured unique personal testimonies from Elgar's daughter Carice, composers Ralph Vaughan Williams and Arthur Bliss, conductors Adrian Boult and Hamilton Harty, violinist Yehudi Menuhin and the founder of the Malvern Festival and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Sir Barry Jackson.. A disc of it is in the Archive, presented by Barry Lankester, studio manager for the production and a long standing Friend. A full page article by Terry Grimley on this historic broadcast and how it was made appeared in the *Birmingham Post* in May. But, in spite of the best combined efforts of Professor Street, Sara Parker, several leading features producers (both BBC and independent) and me, nagging from the sidelines, it proved to our chagrin impossible to interest the BBC. We should have started pitching a lot sooner, somewhere around 2002 perhaps. Who knows? They may get the message by Elgar's 150th anniversary, in 2057.

Secretary's Report**Ian M. Parr**

Since publication of the last Annual Report the Trustees have met twice, first for the 2006 Annual General Meeting, then in January 2007.

Last year's AGM set the scene for the change in direction and emphasis of the Trust's activities. *Connecting Histories*, then coming to a close, is now complete (see elsewhere in this Report). Dissemination and access to the Archive are now the main concerns of the Trustees.

For comparison, prior to the first Lottery bid which made possible *A Future for Ordinary Folk* the Trustees committee, or a special sub-committee, met at intervals of less than three months. By 2005 three or four meetings a year were being held. At that time *Connecting Histories* topics dominated the agenda of meetings. Two meetings a year are now thought to be sufficient.

As a result the AGM of the Trust (hence also Friends of the Charles Parker Archive) has been moved to late September. The aim is to divide our meetings around the year, the other being held in January or February, and thus to bracket the Charles Parker Day held each April.

The number and experience of Trustees have been strengthened by the addition of Tim Blackmore. Robert Whitworth and Ian Parr, Honorary Treasurer and Secretary respectively, have also joined the Trustees.

The objects of the Trust are set out inside the front cover of this Report. An important principle arising from these is seen as dissemination of the existence and content of the Archive and its use in learning. The focus of the Trustees, therefore, is now on best achieving that end. In this connection, Pam Bishop has set up a web site for the Trust, www.cpatrust.org.uk which links and is linked to the Archive as it features on the Birmingham City Libraries website www.birmingham.gov.uk/charlesparkerarchive

Of long term concern has been the issue of copyright which very much affects how we carry out policies relating to dissemination. The 2006 Annual Meeting of Friends of the Charles Parker Archive produced a lively debate on copyright. One outcome of this has been a comprehensive guide by Alex McClure. It has been circulated to the Trustees committee and has been abridged slightly to ensure it is specific to the Trust's needs. Alex's contribution is greatly appreciated.

Other work and areas relating to the Trust include:

- Charles Parker Day, which we continue to support. It was held this year at The University of Central England.
- Financial details of the Trust are available on the web site of Guidestar UK which acts on behalf of the Charities Commission, see www.guidestar.org.uk
- assistance to Peter Cox who is writing a book on the MacColl/Seeger/Parker Radio Ballads
- Philip Cox has uncovered two letters by Charles Parker from the early 1960s dealing with Charles' views on broadcasting.

Finally, my thanks to the Library staff for their help and perseverance. Also I'm grateful to the Trustees and members of the committee for their support.

3.

Treasurer's Report: year ending 28 April 2007

Robert Whitworth

This year we have made our final contribution of partnership funding for the *Connecting Histories* project at the Birmingham Central Library. This has been made possible by generous contributions made for this purpose during the previous year.

We continue to be grateful to the Friends of the Charles Parker Archive, whose subscriptions and donations are now included in the funds of the Trust. In many cases we have benefited from Gift Aid on these contributions. The support of the Friends will provide a base for the next stage of our work using the archive.

Financial Statement for the year 29.04.06 to 28.04.07

RECEIPTS	£
Friends' subscriptions and donations	431
Tax refunds on gift-aid contributions	87
Sundry	50
Total	<u>568</u>
PAYMENTS	
Birmingham Central Library - <i>Connecting Histories</i>	3,000
Printing, postage etc.	270
Total	<u>3,270</u>
Excess payments over receipts	2,702

Balance Statement at 28.04.07

Opening balance in Barclay's Bank at 29.04.06	£5,732
LESS excess payments over receipts	£2,702
Closing balance in Barclay's Bank at 28.04.07	<u>£3,030</u>

The past year has seen great changes for the Charles Parker Archive. The most important of these has been the completion of the digitization and cataloguing of all the reel to reel sound recordings, a task which has been part of the 'Connecting Histories Project', which came to an end in July, 2007.

The Connecting Histories team is to be congratulated at their achievement of this mammoth task. There are over 10,000 catalogue entries in this part of the collection, in addition to those that were previously catalogued as part of *A Future for Ordinary Folk*, and several thousands of CDs available for people to listen to. The full descriptions will soon be available on the internet as part of the new on-line catalogue for the City Archives.

The 'Archives 4 All' strand of the National Archives' 'A2A' internet information service is putting the catalogue of the project "A Future for Ordinary Folk" onto the internet and this should be completed in October. 'Archives 4 All' has allowed archives to expand into new areas, particularly using digital technology to make sound and visual archives available. Many thanks are due to Amanda Thomas of the City Archives for her skill and hard work in making this happen.

This year has also seen considerable use of the archive. For example, Peter Merriman's new book *Driving Spaces: a cultural-historical geography of England's M1 motorway* has used research on the radio ballad 'Song of a Road' in particular. Researchers continue to work on the Radio Ballads and on Ewan MacColl.

There have been further new accessions to the archive, including correspondence about Charles Parker from Brian Vaughton, radio producer with whom Parker worked on 'The Jewellery' and 'Cry from the Cut'; a CD copy of recordings made with people who attended Charles Parker's funeral; a memoir of Charles Parker from Eileen Whiting.

In addition, listening copies on CD, of the DAT tapes of recordings of various people made by the BBC producer Sally Flatman for 'A Ballad of Charles Parker' in the Radio Lives series in 1995 have now been made.

We have also been given a full set of the Radio Ballads 2006, as broadcast on Radio 2 last year.

**The Topic CDS of the original Radio Ballads
are all available to buy at
Birmingham Central Library,
either individually at £13.99 each
or as a complete set of eight,
at the discount price of £100
Details: Fiona Tait in Archives.**

**We also have a small stock of postcards of the famous Eric Gill *Radio Times* illustrations for
The Ballad of John Axon, Singing the Fishing and The Big Hewer.
Discount price to Friends is 12p each, 30p for a set of all three.
Details: Pam Bishop, 35 Waterloo Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7SD**

The Connecting Histories project formally came to an end on 31 July, two and a half years after we began the project in February 2005. As readers of the past two reports will know, the project was a partnership between Birmingham City Archives, the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, the Sociology Department at Warwick University and the Black Pasts, Birmingham Futures Group and was supported financially by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

I am very pleased to report that the project met all its targets and, indeed, exceeded many of them considerably. Further information about the project's activities and the archive collections it catalogued can be found on www.connectinghistories.org.uk

In terms of the Charles Parker Archive the project had an extremely busy year. It completed the transfer of over 3000 of Parker's reel to reel recordings on to CD-R format thereby securing the preservation of the recordings and making them available for people to listen to for the first time. Together with the *Future for Ordinary Folk* project this now means that all the sound recordings in the archive have been preserved through digitisation and are available to listen to for the first time. I would like to thank our digitisation contractors, Inflight in Dublin, for completing the work on time and budget and to an extremely high quality and standard of accuracy, a fact which made the work of the archivists on the team much easier.

Once the reels were digitised they were catalogued and this work was also completed by the end of July. Huge thanks is due to the team of archivists Anna Riggs, Helen Fisher, Jim Ranahan, Aishling Fox and Arike Oke who spent over a year cataloguing the recordings on their return from Dublin. Thanks also to Peter Doré and Amanda Thomas from the City Archives who undertook a large part of the conservation packaging of the all original reels, boxes and the new CD-Rs, and all the individuals who participated in the Charles Parker Volunteer Programme, which was co-ordinated by Anna Riggs and Izzy Mohammed, and who helped with the packaging and the cataloguing of the material whilst developing new skills and getting a taste of what working as an archivist entails. The completed catalogue is now available in the City Archives' research room and a searchable version of the database used for cataloguing will be available online via the City Archives and the Connecting Histories websites later this year.

The project team also produced a new promotional leaflet for the archive and copies are available from the City Archives. In addition Dr Andy Green has produced introductory learning materials aimed at adults based on the collection. Andy has also included short sound extracts of Charles Parker giving a lecture about the radio ballads although unfortunately the BBC refused permission to include sound extracts from the actuality recordings themselves. This material is available online and can be found in the Performing Resistance pages in the Learning section of the Connecting Histories website or by using the following address.

http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/Learning%20Packages/Performing%20Resistance/performing_resistance_menu.asp

The intention is to add to this material by selecting sound extracts from the non-BBC copyright material from the *Future for Ordinary Folk* project to include in the sound gallery and some of that will be available soon.

The fourth annual Charles Parker Day Conference was held on Friday, 30 March, 2007 at the University of Central England's Birmingham Perry Barr campus, under the auspices of the Centre for Broadcasting History Research in The Media School, Bournemouth University.

As in previous years it was a packed day, bringing together like minds from the world of media and academe. The day got under way with a welcome from Gillian Reynolds and Seán Street, and we were pleased to welcome Professor Bert Hogenkamp from the University of Utrecht, who introduced film maker/producer Derrick Knight. He and Bert discussed Derrick's acclaimed 1966 film about The Watsons, *Travelling for a Living*. Folklore chronicler 'Doc' Rowe also spoke, and gave an idiosyncratic presentation which provided some unique insights into what it was like to work with Charles Parker in the studio and on location.

This year there was a new development in the presentations, in that contributions were invited from writers and scholars working on subjects of interest to Conference. Thus Peter Cox talked about his planned book on *The Radio Ballads*, Ben Harker discussed research behind his eagerly awaited biography of Ewan MacColl, and Bournemouth PhD student, Ieuan Franklin outlined his initial work on Vernacular Radio and Community. Since the Conference Ieuan has spent a fruitful time in Newfoundland, further exploring his subject.

Each year the Centre for Broadcasting History Research at Bournemouth awards *The Charles Parker Prize for Student Radio Features*. The judges, led once again this year by the BBC's Simon Elmes, were producer Julian May and *Sunday Times* radio critic, Paul Donovan. This year the prize of £500 and a placement in BBC Radio Documentaries and Features was awarded to Katie Burningham, a Masters radio student from Goldsmith's College, University of London, for her touching and amusing short feature, *Lieutenant Pigeon* about people from various classes, brought together by their desire to feed illicitly the pigeons in London's Trafalgar Square.

For many, the highlight of this year's conference was the presentation by Siân Roberts and her team from the *Connecting Histories* project, which brought together a number of fascinating strands of on-going research, and movingly demonstrated the value of the Parker Archive and its associated areas in Birmingham Central Library to the perception and interpretation of contemporary social issues. The session eloquently demonstrated the value of this pioneering work, which sets a model other archival resources of national importance would do well to emulate.

In 2008 Charles Parker Day returns to the great man's birthplace of Bournemouth, and will be held once again at the Miramar Hotel on the town's East Overcliff. It is likely that this will be the last day in its present form; it will also be marking the fiftieth anniversary of the first of the Radio Ballads, *The Ballad of John Axon*.

Professor Seán Street is the Director of The Centre for Broadcasting History Research, Bournemouth University

The Jewellery and *Cry from the Cut* were programmes compiled by Brian Vaughton, produced by Charles Parker and broadcast on the Midlands Home Service in March 1961 and February 1962 respectively.

In June 1960 *Singing the Fishing* was completed and broadcast two months later. *The Big Hewer* was broadcast August 1961 and *The Body Blow*, March 1962.

Gillian Reynolds in our 2004/5 Annual Report reviewed Brian Vaughton's programme, *Weaver's Tales*. Since then we've had correspondence about *Cry from the Cut* and *The Jewellery*, from Brian and from Rosemary Gentleman. Rosemary coined the title "Birmingham Ballads" when writing to me a few months ago. She sang in both programmes, though some of you might remember her as Rosemary Redpath.

The Trust website has a link to an article published by Musical Traditions magazine from Ian Campbell originally aimed at The Guardian newspaper. Ian's main concern was the relative neglect of these two "radio ballads" compared with the MacColl/Seeger ones. Ian wrote the songs for *The Jewellery* and *Cry from the Cut*. Music and songs were performed by a distinguished group of Folk Revival performers. Brian and Rosemary contributed information on their contacts with Charles and the programmes proving, if needed, that there's always scope for development of the Archive.

It's been interesting listening to these programmes again, reflecting on Brian and Rosemary's recollections and contemplating afresh Ian's comments. Initially, my thoughts are:

1. The programmes are not "Radio Ballads" in the sense used for the first four MacColl/Seeger/Parker productions. They are closer to the "Landmarks" series Charles produced with Alasdair Clayre and David Kennard in 1965 which Alasdair Clayre called "documentaries with songs". Each section of each programme is linked by commentary to provide continuity.
2. The field recordings and compilation by Brian Vaughton, especially when bound into the songs by Ian Campbell presage the most powerful Radio Ballad, *The Travelling People*. It's especially noticeable in Ian's song, "A hard life on the Cut" whose lyrics suggest MacColl's "The Terror Time". To my ears, the tune is similar too.
3. (Of potentially many more!); Brian Vaughton considers the passing away of a society, a homogeneous culture of life and work. Especially in *Cry from the Cut* we seem to hear the voice of alienation emerging industrially and socially, just as in *The Travelling People*. If Ewan MacColl's script is subtler and more powerful it's not merely the precision of his artistic genius.

Some further observations:

Why couldn't BBC Radio WM remind listeners of their heritage and future and regularly find time for *The Jewellery* and similar programmes?

Charles Parker wrote to Ewan MacColl after completion of *Singing the Fishing*;

".....if we chuck bel canto out of the window something has to be put in its place as a style and a discipline for the singer."

Listen to Ian Campbell, Rosemary Redpath and Lorna Campbell. Consider the radio ballads that followed and ask, what has happened to English folk singing since then, success or failure?

Websites associated with the Charles Parker Archive Trust

The Charles Parker Archive has had a website for some time, hosted by the Library at www.birmingham.gov.uk/charlesparkerarchive. This describes the material held in the Central Library and will eventually link into a full catalogue of its contents.

Now the Trust has its own website at www.cpatrust.org.uk – this links directly to the Library pages but also has information about the Trust itself and its activities. The pages include:

- Information about Trustees and funders, and how to contact us
- Friends of the Charles Parker Archive - background and subscription form
- A description of the Digitisation project *A Future for Ordinary Folk*, and an account of the launch including photographs
- Annual Reports and notices of meetings
- Reports of Charles Parker Conference Days and the Charles Parker Prize for Student Radio Features run by the Centre for Broadcasting History Research at Bournemouth University
- Links to other interesting sites, related organisations, academic sites relating to Parker's work, and people associated with Charles Parker or the Radio Ballads

We would welcome ideas for expanding the Trust's website, and suggestions for further links.

Contact: Pam Bishop

Who was Charles Parker?

Charles Parker was a documentary radio producer at the BBC from 1949-1972, and a producer, performer, and founder member of the socialist theatre company, Banner Theatre of Actuality, from 1972 until his death in 1980. At his death, he left a huge archive of material relating to his activities as a producer, performer, lecturer, author, and activist, which includes over 4000 reel-to-reel tapes. The Connecting Histories project is looking for people who would like to spend a day working on the archive.

Why should I volunteer?

- Find out about Charles Parker's life and work
- Listen to copies of the recordings he made, some available for the first time in 50 years, and see the original tapes he used
- Learn how Birmingham City Archives is cataloguing and conserving the archive to make it available for research
- Find out how you might use the archive

What will I do?

- Listen to interviews recorded during Parker's work on his Radio Ballad, *The Travelling People*
- Repack CD copies of his original tapes into acid-free boxes
- Repack Parker's original reel-to-reel tapes into acid-free boxes
- **And most important, talk about Parker: his life, his work, his ideas, and what they mean for us today**

www.connectinghistories.org.uk

To find out more, or to volunteer on one or all of these dates, please contact Izzy Mohammed or Anna Riggs - izzy.mohammed@birmingham.gov.uk or anna.riggs@birmingham.gov.uk

**Central Library - Floor 3
Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3HQ (0121 464 1607/1608)**

The Archive began one windswept, miserable, East Anglian day in January 1981. I had picked up a hired box van to embark on the collecting of Charles' tapes and papers which he had distributed across the country, depositing it with any willing soul with space. Many years before he had, in an 'artistic' moment tried to burn it all in the garden at Park House and my Mother and I had to restrain him. Our actions then were to haunt us now.

Battling into a head wind, which caused a dramatic reduction in top speed, I headed into Suffolk to collect lecture notes and tapes left with Tony Schooling. My first pick up was disappointing, a modest box placed in the cavernous van. Next, to Herefordshire, to collect Phyl, my Mother. Then, to Birmingham, a rather better volume there, still not justifying my choice of van however. We then returned to Herefordshire rather late to unload and prepare for the next day.

Nottingham was the last pickup. When we arrived we were shown a garage, nicely shelved by Charles, which was full, with only very narrow walkways between the shelves. This took a few hours for my Mother and me to load into the van. We must have arrived back in Herefordshire around 7pm and after the essential cup of tea, started to unload the van and store the tapes and papers on the back landing of my Mothers 16th Century rented house.

By about lam we had moved it all and were now exhausted. It was only then, when we stood back to admire our work, we noticed the landing was rather lower than when we started but there was nothing we could do about it. Luckily it did hold for the few months it took to find a home for it.

That week end was probably the most tiring I have ever experienced, it was also charged with emotion for obvious reasons, which was added to by the suspicion and hostility we sometimes encountered. I can understand this; people were entrusted with a life's work and were suspicious of our motives, but if it had not been gathered together the creation of the archive would not have happened and the riches it contains would have been gradually winnowed away over the last 25 years.

My Mother and I then set about forming the Trust, something we knew nothing about, but with the help of Phillip Cox, a lifelong friend of Charles and our Family, we were directed to Bettinsons Solicitors and the invaluable help of Paul Pharaoh.

With a Trust deed we, Phyl, Sara and myself, then had to appoint trustees. Richard Groves was, as friend of Charles and Phyl, the Chairman, and similarly Phillip Donnellan, the secretary. We were lucky the Trustees we had then and in the following years have proved to be hard working, committed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic towards Charles work and the Archive. I should also add patient, since we had a few false starts with venues until the perfect and most appropriate place, Birmingham City library, stepped forward.

I would like to thank everyone who has over the years given a lot of time and effort and money to create the Archive and fulfil its goal of making Charles work available to all.

Over the years we have only had two Chairmen with Gillian Reynolds being Chairman for the lions share. The Trust owes all its progress to Gillian's, competence, vision, determination and hard work, and she deserves special thanks.

Most of all the Trust owes a debt of gratitude to Phyl, Charles wife who even after his death supported Charles and his work by setting up the Trust and providing the backbone of material.