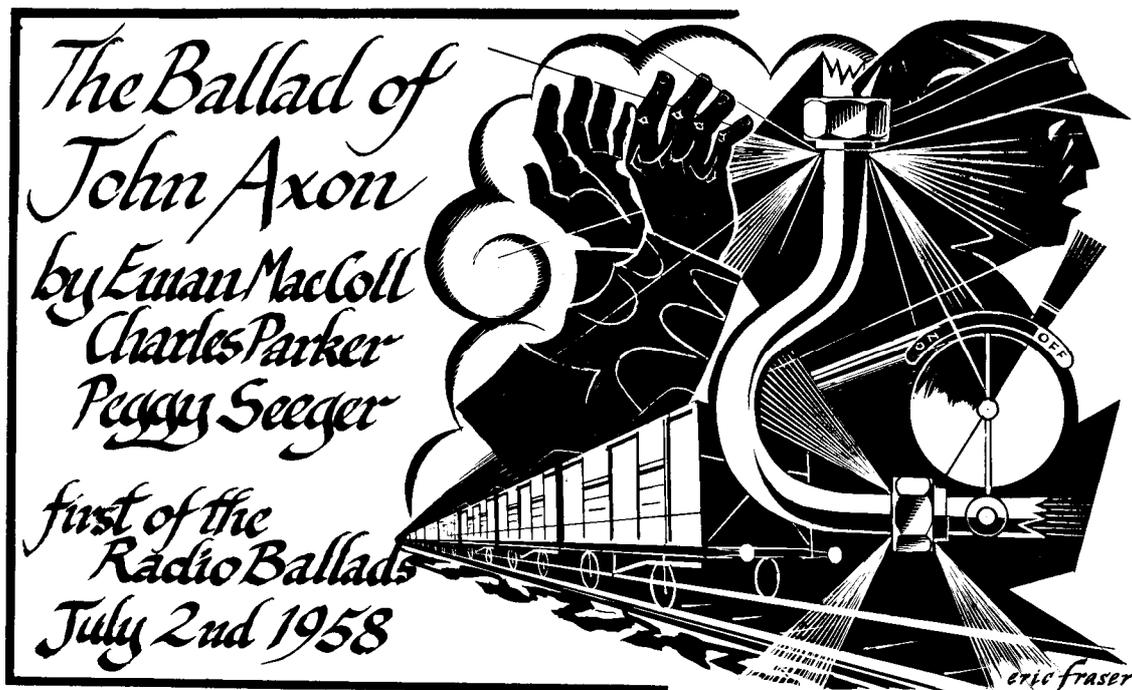


Charles Parker Archive

Annual Report & Accounts 2007 – 2008

Celebrating Fifty Years of the Radio Ballads
with a lot of 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, 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.

Chairman's Report**Gillian Reynolds**

In the 50th anniversary year of the broadcast of *The Ballad of John Axon*, I am delighted to report that this landmark in radio history was remarked everywhere - on radio, in print, in the academic world and even in a Radio 1 record of the week.

On page 5 Sara Parker writes about *Like Blackpool Through Rock*, the Radio 4 *Archive Hour* feature she made with Sean Street. It lit up the airwaves, as did Alan Hall's sequel *The Ballad Of The Radio Feature*, the next week. Tim Blackmore writes on the future for the genre on p7.

Sean Street, meanwhile, not only contributed other features to Radio 3, including an acclaimed one on Ezra Pound, but also continued to produce outstanding graduates of his MA course in radio at Bournemouth University and, on 4th April gathered together academics, singers, film makers and broadcasters past, present and future to celebrate the 5th Charles Parker Day. You'll find his account of this on p12. The Charles Parker Archive Trust became co-sponsors of the Charles Parker Prize this year.

We are particularly pleased to note that Katie Burningham of Goldsmith's College, University of London, the 2007 Prize winner, had her first full length feature, *City Messengers*, broadcast on Radio 4 on Monday, 18th August. This vivid half hour portrait of the adventurous lifestyle of city cycle couriers drew much praise in the press. I will lodge my copy in our Archive, in the expectation that it will be the first of many fine programmes from our more Prize winners.

We're delighted that the next Charles Parker Day will be held at the National Media Museum in Bradford. It's a great honour for us but it also shows how the NMM takes radio as seriously as it does tv, film, photography and new media. Read NMM's Director, Colin Philpott, on p13. At this stage, there's even talk of an accompanying film festival. How many movies featuring radio can you name? See how many you can add to our list on p14.

Peter Cox's book, *Set Into Song, Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and the Radio Ballads*, came out, on time and in spite of all the incidental hazards of deadlines, elusive interviewees and many a month spent diligently tracing sources. It's a splendid read. He writes about it about it on p8. In his research Peter also turned up a striking piece by Ewan MacColl, hitherto unpublished. It's on p9, carries on through pages 10 and 11 and is rivetting.

I took my copy of Ben Harker's biography of *Ewan MacColl, Class Act*, (Pluto Press: £15.99) to the Sheffield Documentary Festival where, for the first time, radio documentaries were featured alongside tv and film. The man sitting next to me on the train couldn't take his eyes off each page. It, too, is a wonderfully rich, rewarding and surprising read. Their work continues to spark new thoughts: see Ian Parr on p4 and p15.

And now that Radio 1 airplay. It's the result of the *Radio Ballads* crossing over into dance music through a CD, *Primary Transmissions*. It's the work of Broadcaster, aka dj Lewis Atkinson, who discovered the *Ballads* when ex-girlfriend Kirsty MacColl gave him a copy. It took him five years to make the album, mainly due to the BBC's reluctance to grant permission for him to "sample" the *Ballads*. The *Guardian* quoted him as saying "I'd virtually given up - I didn't think it would ever happen." Copyright remains a minefield for anyone looking to bring old work to new life. Still, I really like this CD (but then my youngest son works in this kind of music.) So does Peggy Seeger, (but then co-producer Calum MacColl is her son.) I'll bring my copy to the AGM.

There is a big regret at the end of this year of celebration. At the Charles Parker Day we saw a short film by Andrew Johnston, a pilot for a possible longer documentary on the making of *John Axon*. It really was impressive, beautiful, thoughtful, the kind of proper documentary that would appeal to audiences all over the world. David Attenborough even offered to front it. BBC tv turned it down.

There's a great sadness, too, in noting the death of Bob Etheridge, a good man and a great Friend of the CPA. Pam Bishop speaks for all of us in her tribute on p6. We will miss him.

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

Since publication of the last Annual Report the Trustees' committee has met three times, the first being the 2007 Annual Meeting. There was a full meeting of the committee in January and a special meeting was held in May to discuss the future promotion of the Archive. This was triggered as a result of a topic arising from the January meeting.

As reported last year, meetings of the Trustees' committee have increasingly focussed upon three topics; Dissemination, Education and Use. These arise from the objectives of the Trust which are set out on the inside cover of every Annual Report.

The projects "Connecting Histories" and "A Future for Ordinary Folk" have led us to accomplish, substantially, the Trust's objectives in relation to collation, maintenance and preservation of the Archive. Thus there has been a shift in our attention from preservation and recording in connection with the Archive to its application.

Such a readjustment does not come without its own difficulties. As well as new opportunities there are priorities and capabilities to consider. Cash, as always, is one issue which limits the extent of our reach, as is copyright.

Dissemination, Education and Use (abbreviated by this secretary to DEU) is now an important item on the agenda of Trustees' committee meetings. Several topics associated with it have been discussed and can interlock:

- The future of the travelling exhibition, conceived initially in 1993 and used since 1994 when it was state of the art. Does it require updating? How might it be used to further DEU? And other similar questions.
- The Trust website and its content and population
- Links between the Trust website and the Archives website of the Library and the Library's project to have an on-line catalogue of all archive material
- Successive anniversaries of the Radio Ballads
- Contacts with the National Media Museum
- Copyright issues, especially in relations with the BBC
- Promotional opportunities
- Fundraising

Putting all these subjects into some sort of perspective has meant going into the history of the Archive and the work of the trustees and many other people associated with Charles Parker. There's a huge stack of such material and it is quite diverting. So it should be!

In these records of the last twenty-six years one keeps returning to a simple fact: if nothing else Charles Parker's work shows conclusively that we cannot generalise about people, their culture, race and class. Although issues of preservation, recording etc. may be part of the Trust's history, Dissemination, Education and Use of the Archive will remain with us because mutual understanding is the greatest challenge to all societies.

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 for the year ending 28 April 2008 Robert Whitworth

After the completion of our major projects on the conservation of the archive this has been a very quiet year. Our principal source of income has been from the Friends of the Charles Parker Archive, to whom we continue to be very grateful. In many cases we have benefited from Gift Aid on these contributions. The main use of these funds has been to provide half-funding for the annual Charles Parker Prize.

Financial Statement for the year 29.04.07 to 28.04.08

RECEIPTS	£
Friends' subscriptions and donations	393
Tax refunds on gift-aid contributions	91
Bank interest	43
Total	<u>527</u>
 PAYMENTS	
Charles Parker Prize	250
Printing, postage etc.	<u>255</u>
Total	525
 Excess receipts over payments	2

Balance statement at 28.04.08

Opening balance in Barclays Bank at 29.04.07	£3,030
PLUS excess receipts over payments	2
Closing balance in Barclays Bank at 28.04.08	<u>£3,032</u>

4.

Traditional Values

by

Ian M Parr

At our 2004 Annual General Meeting Dominic Delargy played his submission for that year's Charles Parker Prize. *John Axon knew my Father* didn't win but his interview with a grandson of Axon touched me deeply. Here was a family tradition associated with John Axon's life and death, a story drawn from family memory with all the change, variation and richness that brings.

Should I have been surprised? Had not the travelling community taken to themselves songs from *The Travelling People*? Wasn't the singing and pit-lore of the Elliotts of Birtley established before Louis Killen introduced them to Ewan MacColl? Did *The Big Hewer* give impetus to the contribution mining communities make to our industrial folk tradition?

So what of other people in other Radio Ballads and other programmes; could lives have been touched by Charles Parker and his insistence that the voice of human experience be central to art?

For twenty years I've been trying to locate the last resting places of our traditional singers. What a shame they have no National recognition! Sam Lerner is buried in Winterton churchyard beside his wife, Dorcas. Their adopted son is not there. He is commemorated in a tableau in the church dedicated to village fishermen who died at sea.

Arising from this I became interested in local people connected with *Singing the Fishing*. Eventually I found a book review in The Great Yarmouth Mercury, a local newspaper. "Out of Yarmouth Harbour" was by John Ball. From John Ball I obtained a copy of his book and met Lionel Balls, John's cousin and a son of Ronnie Balls of Yarmouth.

Like the Elliott family, the Balls have a tradition of social life and work going back long before Charles, Ewan and Peggy arrived. It seems to me that maybe the Radio Ballads coalesced into a reason for that tradition to continue. Perhaps the programmes reinforced for them a sense of value in the achievements of their family and society.

Lionel Balls tells me of a play performed by a local dramatic society based upon *Singing the Fishing*. Ronnie, himself, wrote technical articles for "World Fishing" magazine and various tales of fisher-folk. He was awarded the MBE (before the Radio Ballads) for his work in developing the echo-sounder so beloved in the Radio Ballad by the fishermen of the Moray Firth. He wrote a play for the BBC, "The First Train Home". The Balls family also made a video utilising clips from *Singing the Fishing* as a sound-track to family and documentary footage.

Having discussed all this with Peter Cox I can readily understand his decision to omit such detail from "Set into Song". It would have destroyed the balance of chapters in his excellent book and take the subject away from the ordinary reader.

However, it's worth asking if looking at the Radio Ballads from a different angle is not a worthwhile thing to do. Is it in keeping with Charles' work, this new tradition of values?

5.

Like Blackpool Went Through Rock *by* **Sara Parker**

It hardly seems possible that it is fifty years ago since the first Radio Ballad – *John Axon* – was broadcast on what was then the BBC Home Service. A great deal has changed in broadcasting since then but for me, the Ballads have remained a constant of artistic complexity and originality as well as fundamental honesty, integrity and belief in the voices of real people. The Ballads are inspiring – and indeed did inspire a new series for BBC Radio 2 in 2006.

So it was with some trepidation that I agreed to produce a BBC Radio 4 *Archive Hour* about the making of the Ballads. I didn't expect it to be easy. There are many views and even versions of events and three larger than life personalities, my father, Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger.

There was also the fact that I had never really come to terms with Charles' death and somehow in the midst of all this I had to maintain a cool professionalism. Over the years I'd put my father's memory to the back of my mind and found it difficult to look at a photo or listen to his voice such is the gaping hole he left in our lives when he died in 1980.

My journey started in a windowless back room in Birmingham Central Library where I began by listening to CDs of some of Charles' lectures – thanks to Fiona Tait and Sian Roberts accessing the recordings for me even though the library was undergoing major building work. The lectures were a revelation, not only to hear his voice again (through the wonders of digitalisation) but also to hear thoughts which resonated with my own ideas of programme-making and experience of interviewing and editing.

There are also hours and hours of un-broadcast material revealing how Charles and Ewan gathered interviews and sound recordings for *John Axon* and worked together with Peggy and the other musicians in the studio. Material rescued from family and friends' homes and garages where Charles had squirreled away the reel to reel tapes which I remember so well as a child.

The paper archive was equally interesting – a mixed reaction to the Ballads both in newspaper reviews and letters to Charles with comments ranging from 'genius' to 'confusing'. Certainly nothing like the Ballads had ever been heard on radio before – this rich tapestry of music, sound and voices proved too much for some listeners. My father's replies were always thoughtful and sometimes lengthy. It was remarkable to see his handwriting again and read his responses, and in later files to gain insight through correspondence into the difficult time when he left the BBC.

The Charles Parker Archive was also a starting point for my own interviews for the programme – and in true Parker style I did hours of additional recordings. With the help of Peter Cox – author of *Set into Song* about the making of the Ballads – I tracked down railwaymen whom Charles had interviewed, musicians, engineers – and even Axon's granddaughter Melanie.

6.

Perhaps my most memorable recording session was with presenter Sean Street on Chapel-en-le-frith Station where Axon's train crashed into the back of a freight train also killing the train's guard. Sean is director of Broadcasting History Research at Bournemouth University and the 'architect' of the annual Charles Parker Day. Bournemouth was my father's home town. Chapel en-le-Frith station is where it all began.

It was a misty April morning when we stood there with the birds singing on this quiet remote platform and it put us in mind of the unknown man who goes there every year to mark the day and the hour that the crash happened.

The Radio 4 *Archive Hour* was broadcast on June 21st this year – Midsummer's day which is also my wedding anniversary. How my life has moved on. It was called ***Like Blackpool Went through Rock*** which comes from the words of a train driver who said that "railways go through my spine like Blackpool goes through rock"

I wonder if this can be said of me and radio. Certainly making this programme has been self-affirming. It has given me a unique opportunity to discover a new connection with my father and perhaps finally come to terms with his untimely death.

A Tribute to Bob Etheridge

Bob Etheridge, who worked closely with Charles Parker from the time of his Centre 42 productions, died earlier this year. I remember seeing him for the first time behind a slide projector, as he followed one of Charles' scripts to complement live performance with a montage of effects – demonstrating skill that only Powerpoint could match nowadays.

Bob was a lifelong friend, a socialist, Banner supporter, a singer, a raconteur, a car worker and a shop steward - in short, a true working class hero. He was also a man of many talents, and hobbies, involving photography, DIY for all occasions, knitting machines and many other things beside. It is his photographs of Charles that grace the Trust and the Library's publications, and we will miss him.

Pam Bishop

The Radio Feature Past & Present. But Future?

by
Tim Blackmore

For many of us the radio feature represents the peak district of audio creativity. I recall the first time I heard 'The Big Hewer' and how I was captivated by Parker's portrayal of mining communities. I grew up in the North East and most of my contemporaries came from mining or shipbuilding families. I was taken by the total accuracy of the atmosphere and the magically sympathetic blending of traditional sounding musics.

I knew that this kind of radio was real and that I wanted to try my own hand at such endeavours. I moved from audio engineering to audio production and although my own efforts never hit those same creative heights, many years of making documentary features did generate a much better public understanding of the origins of popular music and its continuing evolution.

Beyond the BBC Networks, the opportunities to hear such creative work are few and far between, but this year has seen a significant commitment by at least one of the commercial groups; the Guardian Media Group (GMG) has commissioned several projects with budgets that have enabled a serious commitment of production resources. The 'Rolling River of Rock' was one such series that explored the various musical styles spawned along the meandering route of the great Mississippi River.

The key resource needed is an allowance of sufficient time for serious research and preparation. With that in place, interviewees can be carefully chosen, their conversations developed in an unhurried way, the results carefully reviewed and sensitively edited. The final and often most exciting stage is the assembly of all the elements: the final blending of actuality, with illustrative music tracks, and usually some degree of imaginative scripting.

In spite of a healthy current BBC feature output and a potentially improving commercial embrace of the form, I remain realistically concerned that its future may not ultimately be a healthy one.

Whatever the precise nature of its future, the BBC's ability to invest in lengthy production schedules for UK Radio will undoubtedly be more limited. Even if the advertising slump eventually reverses, commercial radio will never be able to justify significant investment in this particular audio form. Any successful business needs to invest sufficient budget to deliver enough listening hours to attract advertisers, and not too much more. As long as listeners prefer an entertaining Breakfast Show to a carefully crafted documentary feature, then the Breakfast Show is exactly where shareholders will expect their money to be spent.

As readers of this report will be well aware, last year saw the creation of a new series of Radio Ballads produced for Radio Two by the same company that has this year delivered some of the most successful of those series commissioned by GMG.

As for the prospects for another series of Radio Ballads, the proposal has been made, but so far BBC Radio's budgetary restraints make the outcome uncertain.

In the meantime, happy listening to as many features as you can find, across as many stations as are bold enough to invest in what remains audio's highest form of creativity.

Set Into Song
Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and the Radio Ballads
by
Peter Cox

I met Peggy Seeger for the first time after a concert in 2006, and took the opportunity to ask her about the *Radio Ballads*, which had fascinated me since I first heard them a dozen years earlier. After two hours of animated conversation I asked her if anyone had written about them. ‘Nope, but they should.’ Hmm...

Armed with Peggy’s enthusiastic support and the contents of her address book, I tentatively phoned a few names on the list – young/old folk singers and young/ancient jazz session musicians. I wasn’t quite prepared for the stories tumbling down the phone. ‘Wait, wait’, I said. ‘I want to come and record you.’ First up was Jimmie McGregor, now living in Glasgow but spotted, bizarrely, in a North London street, and happy to be captured for several hours of reminiscence. Some were too far away to meet: Jim Bray in Hyderabad and Fitzroy Coleman, in Trinidad. Some fifty in all, including a clutch of Grey Cock habitués telling tales of Charles Parker’s hectic year of 1962, somehow creating and performing six different new plays for Arnold Wesker’s Centre 42 in six different cities – while also assembling three Radio Ballads.

Just like Peggy, everyone who had taken part in the Radio Ballads thought it one of the most stimulating creative periods of their lives. That applied to the radio engineers and producers just as much as the performers. In one week I went from Bromsgrove to Norfolk to the New Forest to interview Gillian Ford, John Clarke and Alan Ward. The first two worked in the studio on the prizewinning *Singing the Fishing*, respectively playing in sound effects on ‘grams’, and fishermen’s voices on the ‘TR/90’. The young John Clarke was Charles’s studio manager, awed to be taking part, amazed by the musicianship and stamina of the performers, and by Charles’s perfectionism (and explosions...).

In the Charles Parker Archive, in breaks from poring over his BBC correspondence, I listened to Charles and Ewan MacColl interviewing Sam Lerner – ‘Say it again, Sam’ – and Charles questioning Ewan’s mother, the indomitable Betsy, about MacColl’s childhood. (Now on CD, thanks to the recent work of the Trust). Long days at the MacColl/Seeger archive at Ruskin College, Oxford, and the BBC archive at Caversham. Three days with Peggy Seeger in Boston catching her resurfacing memories as she listened again to each of the eight programmes. *Set into Song* was published in May 2008, just in time for the start of Peggy’s UK tour. By happy accident, I was able to launch it with a presentation in the Central Library, home of the Archive, on the day she was performing in Birmingham.

The book has proved a wonderful chance to tell the story of a groundbreaking radio series, and of three remarkable people. Charles, a devout Christian and (then...) a conservative, Cambridge and the BBC and a voice to match. Ewan, a communist, atheist, actor, writer and folk singer, who left school in his grimy Salford at 14. And Peggy, a brilliant American musician, twenty years his junior. An unlikely team, but magnificent.

Purchasing Information

Set into Song : Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and the Radio Ballads.

Labatie Books ISBN 978-095518771-1

NB The best place to get the book is from www.setintosong.co.uk. The price is £20, but you can buy a signed copy from the website for £15. The website also carries the first two pages of each chapter, the complete transcripts and cast lists for each programme, bibliography, footnotes and reviews.

Some reactions to *Set Into Song* by Peter Cox

English Dance and Song - Autumn 2008 by Verity Sharp

“This highly readable book isn’t just the fascinating story of a groundbreaking radio series, it also tells of a remarkable time in broadcasting history and how individual lives were changed forever.”

From Eileen Whiting, poet, author and Friend of the CPA

“The motto of the BBC is becoming”Charles Parker lives” wrote a critic in *The Listener* after seeing Philip Donnellan's film of *The Fight Game*, and I rather felt the same after reading Peter Cox's excellent book **Set Into Song**. Not only “Charles lives” but Ewan and Peggy and many other singers, actors and musicians depicted therein.

It is a complex, readable and, as far as I can judge, very accurate history of what went into the making of the Radio Ballads. It paints a wide picture of working class struggles in the '30s, radio history, the development of the tape recorder, skiffle, the re-emergence of British folk music, the Critics Group, Arnold Wesker's visionary Centre 42 festivals, Banner Theatre and Philip Donnellan's films to the new series of *Radio Ballads* created by John Tams, John Leonard, Vince Hunt and Sara Parker in 2006.

Peter gives all credit where it is due but also a selection of adverse criticism that innovation always attracts. There is the clash of creative personalities but also the tremendous co-operation that produced works of art against the odds and the underlying economics. He manages to credit most of the contributors to the Ballads including the back-room people without whom.... People like Mary Baker for instance – and who would have thought that Charles and Barbara Cartland would have found themselves allies where the Gypsies were concerned.”

.....

During his research for *Set Into Song* Peter Cox unearthed some hitherto unpublished material on Charles Parker by Ewan MacColl which throws fresh light on their partnership.

This is an extract from it. Manchester University Press will publish a new edition of MacColl's autobiography, *Journeyman*, next year

“To credit Charles with achievements other than his own is to diminish his real worth and detract from his real achievements which, in my opinion, were more significant than the creation of this or that piece of work or the development of this or that new approach to the art of documentary. Charles re-created himself and that is a very great achievement indeed.

(contd. pp 10 & 11)

10.

Most people, by the time they have reached their mid-thirties, have settled into their intellectual, ideological and political moulds. If they have *a successful war* behind them, a successful career at one of Britain's most prestigious universities and are well placed to ascend the promotional ladder in the hierarchy of the B.B.C., then the chances are that they have (to quote Dot Dobby of Salford) 'cracked it', or (as my father would have put it) 'they'll never have to shit in a bucket'. Well, Charles had cracked it; he was a senior producer in B.B.C. features, good at his job and energetic, young enough to have ambitions and old enough to know how to keep his nose clean. His politics, too, were eminently respectable, a trifle High Tory perhaps but with enough leftish shading to make him occasionally outrageous. A splendid future! Providing that nothing untoward happened.

The untoward did happen and Charles' future as a pillar of the Establishment was shattered. He abandoned rood screens and carved fonts in exchange for miners and navvies; he abandoned ritual and discovered reality. It couldn't have been easy. 'The snake which cannot change its skin perishes,' says Nietzsche. Charles was determined that he wouldn't perish, at least not in his old skin. But there were so many new concepts to be examined, so many old myths to be jettisoned, so many previously held views to be abandoned, so many exciting new roads to be explored. And because he was intrinsically honest (with himself if not with the press) he was forced to make a thorough reappraisal of society and his relation to it. He discovered that there was no resting place in his intellectual journey; there could be no line drawn between the work he did and the ideas he was wrestling with, no point of demarcation between thinking and doing, no boundaries marking the place where philosophy ended and action began.

The growth of Charles' passion for the recording of actuality, the discovery of Marxism, his first real contact with working-class people and his discovery of the class-struggle all happened within the space of two years. Having made his discoveries, he acted upon them immediately. He threw himself into the struggles of the Travellers and spent as much time as he possibly could, getting to know working people by recording them, questioning them about their lives and their ideas. Had he been content to keep quiet about his recording activities and his newly-born political enthusiasms, the higher-ups in the B.B.C. hierarchy would most likely have been prepared to look the other way. But that wasn't Charles' way; he must share his joys and his new-found knowledge. So he talked to anyone who would listen, face-to-face, over the telephone, in the B.B.C. canteen over the meat-and-two-veg, in the corridors of Broadcasting House and in the car park leaning on the roof of his clapped-out Morris.

He talked admiringly of the miners, Gypsies, gas-workers. Had they (his colleagues) ever thought about the terrible injustices suffered by travelling people . . . or the appallingly callous way we treat the blind? Why was the speech of working people so rich compared with middle-class speech? It would have been perfectly acceptable for him to have talked about Travellers and miners as 'characters' and as 'good chaps', but when he introduced *class* issues into his conversation he was crossing the boundaries of what was considered permissible.

His colleagues began to avoid him. It wasn't merely class prejudice that motivated them; it was the kind of hostility which is aroused when a member of a close-knit group ceases to belong to that group. An outsider who spoke as Charles did would probably have been tolerated as a rather tiresome eccentric, might even have been regarded as amusing. But Charles was one of *them* and had become a deserter.

11.

It was as if he was repudiating the loyalty of every individual member of the group. Such hostility begins as irritation or mild resentment and bit by bit develops into something more threatening. Had Charles ignored it, it might have dissipated itself in ironical comments; instead he argued, he attempted to reason with his critics and this was fatal. The resentment fanned into something more and those who had begun by dismissing 'poor old Charles' who had a bee in his bonnet about this 'folk-song thing', became impatient and began to call for vengeance against the apostate.

When his bosses could no longer reconcile themselves to the new Parker image, they sacked him - after twenty-four years' service. He continued to do full-time what he had been doing in his spare time, i.e., working in folk-song activities and helping to build Banner Theatre, a group specialising in the production of political documentaries in which actuality recordings, songs in the folk idiom and acted-out dramatic episodes were combined into an exciting whole. Charles succeeded in imbuing his co-workers in Banner with his belief in the value of recorded speech and, in addition, convincing them that a truly revolutionary theatre must be based on a working-class audience. He felt that this was the most useful contribution he could make. He continued to drive himself like a maniac until the day he died. Banner continues the uphill task of making political theatre; its plays come out of the struggles in the coalfields and steel towns and its actors return to those places and share in the struggles. They have recently lost their grants and subsidies but still they keep on. Not since the early days of Theatre Workshop have I encountered such a sense of dedication.

Those who find it necessary to dress his memory in borrowed clothing are doing him a disservice and obscuring his real worth. He was a talented radio man and an editor of genius. More important, he was an explorer, a self-appointed Ulysses. The fact that others had been there before him does not lessen the importance of his travels. He undertook the journey with hope and determination and in the course of discovering and serving the class-struggle he discovered himself."

12.

Charles Parker Day, 2008

by

Professor Seán Street

Director, The Centre for Broadcasting History Research, Bournemouth University

The fifth Annual Charles Parker Day conference, organised and hosted by The Centre for Broadcasting History Research in The Media School at Bournemouth University, was held at the Hotel Miramar in Bournemouth on Friday 4th April, and this year formed part of the commemoration of 50th anniversary of the first Radio Ballad, *The Ballad of John Axon*.

The day began with a welcome from Gillian Reynolds. As in previous years, the event was a blend of talks and presentations based, not only on the work of Charles Parker, but on the broader field of the radio feature, past, present and future. Piers Plowright spoke fascinatingly about the radio work of Glen Gould, discussing the eccentric genius's thoughts on subjects as diverse as the Menonite Communities of Canada and Petula Clark. Independent producer Alan Hall explored the feature maker's art from a personal perspective, drawing parallels between shaping radio documentary and the act of composition. Seán Street spoke about the work of the distinguished US National Public Radio producer, David Isay, his 1997 NPR feature *The Sunshine Hotel* and subsequent developments in Isay's work, including the *Storycorps* oral history project. From Birmingham, Sian Roberts shared interesting material from the on-going educational work that is developing out of the *Connecting Histories* project, some of which has grown directly out of material in the Charles Parker Archive.

The main focus however, was as always, the work of Charles Parker himself, born in Bournemouth in 1919. Andy Cartwright discussed Parker's skill as an editor, and analysed examples from the *Radio Ballads*, eloquently demonstrating his ability to "set the speech like a jewel in a ring". There was this year, a strong visual element to the day. Ken Hall discussed some of Charles Parker's influences, as well as showing extracts from Philip Donnellan's television versions of *Radio Ballads*. Andrew Johnstone showed a draft version of his television documentary about the making of the *Radio Ballads*, and discussed movingly his own friendship with Charles, beginning with a fan letter, leading to a meeting which in turn proved to be a seminal moment in Andrew's development as a programme maker.

As in previous years, the future of radio was represented by the awarding of the Charles Parker Prize for Student Radio Features. The judges were Simon Elmes, Creative Director of the BBC Radio Documentary Unit, Clare McGinn, Head of Network Radio at BBC South in Bristol and Miranda Sawyer, radio critic for *The Observer*. The prize - £500, jointly funded by the Charles Parker Archive Trust and the Centre for Broadcasting History Research, together with a two week work placement in the BBC Radio Documentaries Unit – was awarded to Matthew Rogers of University College, Falmouth, for his feature *A Long Commute*, about Latvian migrant workers in Cornwall. After completing his work placement, Matthew wrote of the prize:

"It has greatly influenced my outlook towards my future career options. The whole experience was far wider and deeper than any I could have imagined. Thank you for facilitating the Parker Prize, it has really embellished my life in a wonderful way."

2009 marks what would have been Charles Parker's 90th birthday, and Charles Parker Day 6 will be hosted by the National Media Museum in Bradford on Friday, 3rd April. Plans are already in hand to make this yet another memorable event.

CHARLES PARKER DAY 2009

by

Colin Philpott

Director, National Media Museum

No less an icon than Marilyn Monroe once reportedly sang the praises of radio in these terms – “It's not true I had nothing on, I had the radio on.” She was not alone in her enthusiasm for radio. In an age of rapidly changing media technologies, radio remains in many ways the great survivor and its popularity remains undiminished.

It is the importance of radio in people's everyday lives and the contribution the medium makes to our cultural heritage that has led the National Media Museum to bring radio within its remit.

We have started collecting radio objects – the first being a British Thomson-Houston Radiola “Bijou” crystal receiver from 1923. In addition, the wider museum group to which we belong (the National Museum of Science Industry) has an extensive radio technology collection.

We have a radio studio in the Museum- the BBC's Bradford studio which hosts programmes and contributions into BBC Radio Leeds and other BBC networks. Local commercial and community radio stations including The Pulse and BCB (Bradford Community Broadcasting) broadcast from the Museum regularly.

We are increasingly offering ourselves as a venue for radio shows and events involving audiences making use of our two main auditoria –300 seat and 100 seat cinema spaces. For example, the Radio One at the Movies event was held at the Museum last year.

So we are embracing radio alongside the other media subjects the Museum covers. The Museum opened in Bradford back in 1983 as the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television. We have three and a half million items in our collection – international quality holdings of objects and images relating to these media (with the addition now of radio and new media) including the world's earliest surviving photographic negative and John Logie Baird's original mechanical Televisor from 1925.

We changed our name to “National Media Museum” in 2006 to acknowledge the realities of the digital age and to enable us to broaden our remit. Among projects we are working on in the short term are a gallery about the history of the web and a showcase gallery for our exhibitions in London.

Our “big idea” for radio is to build a museum gallery telling the story of British radio and we have started preliminary discussions with the radio industry and others to help shape this project. It is a longer term ambition for us but we believe this great medium deserves proper treatment and acknowledgement in a national museum.

In the meantime, however, we are delighted to host events like the Charles Parker Day at the Museum. Capturing the story of radio is not just about objects and archives. It's about celebrating the culture of radio and the skills involved in making radio. So, as someone who worked in broadcasting for a quarter of a century, I am looking forward to April 3rd next year and the chance to discuss what I still secretly refer to as the “senior medium” where, as we all know, the pictures are better than television!

Radio Goes to The Pictures

When we were discussing next year's Charles Parker Day, to be held at the National Media Museum in Bradford, we started wondering whether it would be possible to run alongside it a short season of accompanying films in which radio features or even stars. The combined massive brain power of your Chairman and several distinguished helpers, (including Philip French, film critic of *The Observer*, and Prof. Sean Street) has come up with this list.

At this point we don't yet know if this season is going to be possible, but we're hopeful. And we'd like our list to be as ambitious as possible. So, if you can add to it, we'd love to hear from you.

Radio Parade of 1935		(Will Hay)
Band Waggon	1939	(Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch)
The Sun Never Sets	1939	(Douglas Fairbanks Jr.)
Freedom Radio	1940	(dir: Anthony Asquith)
Who Done it?	1942	(Abbott and Costello)
It's That Man Again	1943	(Tommy Handley)
The Unsuspected	1946	("Major Warner Bros noir thriller," P. French)
The Night America Trembled	1957	(drama-doc on Orson Welles's War Of The Worlds)
The Great Man	1956	(Jose Ferrer stars and directs, "My favourite," G Reynolds)
Pure Radio	1958/9	(doc by Philip Donnellan)
WUSA	1970	(Paul Newman)
The King Of Marvin Gardens	1972	(Jack Nicholson)
Play Misty For Me	1971	(Clint Eastwood)
The Ploughman's Lunch	1983	(Jonathan Price: dir Richard Eyre)
Radio Days	1987	(Woody Allen)
Good Morning Vietnam	1987	(Robin Williams)
Talk Radio	1988	(Eric Bogosian: dir Oliver Stone)
Pump Up The Volume	1990	(Christian Slater)
Tune In Tomorrow	1990	(aka <i>Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter: see below</i>)
Aunt Julia And The Scriptwriter	1990	(Keanu Reeves: dir Jon Amiel)
Straight Talk	1992	(Dolly Parton)
The Radioland Murders	1994	(Mel Smith)
A Prairie Home Companion	2006	(Robert Altman's final movie, based on Garrison Keillor's classic - and still running - radio show)

Themes and Variations

by

Ian M Parr

Last May there was to be a meeting at the Central Library to discuss promotion of the Archive. Having an hour to spare I looked in at the little record store in Symphony Hall. I found and bought a recording of Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Fantasia on Christmas Carols" (inappropriate maybe in late spring) and "Hodie", one his last compositions first performed at Worcester Cathedral and made at a time when he started editing "The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs" with A L (Bert) Lloyd.

From my reading of the Archive, Charles Parker had a taste for the music of Vaughan Williams, although he actually made a programme in 1957 to celebrate the centenary of Elgar's birth. Called "The Fifteenth Variation". It was presented by a Roman Catholic priest and musicologist, Alec Robinson. Shortly afterwards Charles started on "The Ballad of John Axon".

But our link with Christmas is not yet finished. On Christmas Day 1957 Charles also produced, from the Broad Street Studios in Birmingham, "Sing Christmas and the Turn of the Year". It was presented by Alan Lomax and included Ewan MacColl.

So to Ewan MacColl; Charles had written to Ewan in 1960 following 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." He'd just listened to a recording of Vaughan Williams' opera "The Pilgrim's Progress". Out of this comment came The Critics Group? I don't know. But it certainly had an effect on the selection of singers for future Radio Ballads. (Peter Cox's book, "Set into Song" refers to this comment on bel canto).

After "Singing the Fishing" there came The Birmingham Ballads I reported on last year. One feature I find interesting is that the script of "The Jewellery" has detailed references to songs or music taken from "The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs", and first published in 1959. So "The Jewellery" may well have been one of the first radio programmes to use material taken from this collection. Incidentally my 1961 edition cost three shillings and sixpence.

Much later, in 1971, Charles Parker as producer for "the voices of the people" was involved in "The Long March of Everyman – Themes and Variations on the History of the People in Britain". It was an ambitious and, in twenty six episodes of fifty minutes, far-reaching programme. Some of the contributors' voices from the Radio Ballads can be heard again, this time speaking parts from the period covered by the particular episode or singing songs associated with that period. And the theme music..... Vaughan Williams' "Saraband of the Sons of God" from the ballet "Job" based around William Blake's "Illustrations to the Book of Job". Cormac Rigby introduced the programmes in those smooth Radio 3 tones of his. On leaving the BBC in 1985 he returned to his earlier training and became a Roman Catholic priest.

And now those Christmas carols; one of the contributors to the Penguin Book was Ella M Leather and the "Fantasia on Christmas Carols" also has music gathered by Ella Leather in Herefordshire. It was she who wrote the definitive appreciation of a song she had collected in Herefordshire, "The Bitter Withy". A version of this song is on John Tams CD "The Reckoning" and with John Tams and the Radio Ballads we arrive in the year 2006. But it was in 1920, that Vaughan Williams, with whom we started, compiled the first collection of folk songs from Hereford with Ella M Leather

In last year's report we announced the Trust's new website, which 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. New pages added this year include:

- **A chance to listen to the presentations at the 2008 Charles Parker Day**
A link to the Institute for Media and Communication Research at Bournemouth University, where you can listen to all the presentations including the short feature which won the 2008 Charles Parker Prize. *A long commute* tells the story of immigrant land-workers from Eastern Europe and their lives in the UK, and was made by Matthew Rogers of University College Falmouth.
- **The first in a series of articles on the "Birmingham Ballads"**
Part 1 was contributed by Brian Vaughton, writer and compiler of *The Jewellery* and *Cry from the Cut*, who described his life and the background to his involvement in documentary features to Ian Parr.
- **An account of the Radio 4 Archive Hour celebrating the first Radio Ballad**
Like Blackpool Went Through Rock was commissioned for the BBC Radio 4 Archive Hour to coincide with 50th anniversary of the first broadcast of *The Ballad of John Axon*. Charles Parker's daughter Sara writes of her first hand experience of using the Charles Parker Archive as she begins researching the programme.

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.

During the past year the catalogue of the sound recordings digitised and catalogued as part of the *Future for Ordinary Folk* project were made available on the national online archives portal A2A and this part of the Parker archive catalogue can now be searched via the A2A website (www.a2a.org.uk). All the catalogues undertaken as part of this project and the *Connecting Histories* project, which completed the digitisation and cataloguing work on the sound recordings in July 2007, are now available in printed format (occupying thousands of pages in 20 large ring binders) in the new research room facility on floor 6 of the Central Library. The new, larger, research room accommodation which opened in February of this year has improved the research facilities for users of the archive and should also make the archive more visible to users. As part of these changes to floor 6 the *Man with a Microphone* interactive exhibition is now permanently installed in an obvious location on the floor and is proving popular with users of the service. Work is also progressing on the task of making all the catalogue available online with the other collections of Birmingham Archives and Heritage over the City Council's website, and this large and complicated task will, we hope, be achieved during the coming year when DS Ltd. have completed the work on developing a new public interface to the electronic collections management system used by Birmingham Archives.

We continue to receive many enquiries about the archive and new users are discovering the collection due to the A2A website and the Connecting Histories website. Two recent examples of new users who would not previously have been able to access the archive until it was digitised and catalogued include Jeanette Normanton Erry, who used the recently digitised recordings and the paper files relating to *The Blind Set* as part of her PhD research into the history of schools for the blind in the 20th century, and Dr Kevin Myers who is undertaking a research project into the interest in black history by educators, young people and community activists in the 1960-80s, and who again used sound recordings that were not available at all until last year and the related paper files.

The completion of the digitisation work has also meant that material from the archive is now being used regularly in educational projects with community and school groups. One example from the past year was the *Urban Voices* oral history project undertaken by our learning and outreach officers Nikki Thorpe and Izzy Mohammed with Holy Trinity School in the Small Heath district of Birmingham. They worked intensively over several weeks with groups of young people from across the school using oral history to track changes in the local community and in experiences of schooling since the 1950s. They took Charles Parker's interviews with Charlie Burke as a starting point for getting the young people to think about the subjects they wanted to cover in their own recordings, and used the archive to explore how to formulate questions and conduct an interview. They then listened to *On The Edge* and *The Fight Game* as potential models for their finished product. Their final showcase event in June included a presentation of their project through a mixture of music, spoken word, sound effects and images.

The archive will continue to be promoted by Birmingham Archives and Heritage and we hope the coming year will see a continued and increasing use by a wide range of users. For further information about using the archive contact 0121 303 4217, e-mail archives.heritage@birmingham.gov.uk or see www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage and www.connectinghistories.org.uk

