

Charles Parker Archive

Annual Report & Accounts 2011-2012

**Celebrating more than Fifty Years of the Radio Ballads
with "The Body Blow" (27th March 1962)**



"I remember giving my name, and then this awful suffocation feeling. I couldn't breath. Next time I woke up I heard this machine, sort of shhh...shhh..I heard the word Polio but I didn't exactly connect it with myself. I think that it's just a word you read in the papers."
Norma Smith in the opening moments of The Body Blow.

*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

Tim Blackmore MBE: Trust Chairman, producer

Ian Parr: Hon. Secretary

Robert Whitworth: Hon. Treasurer

Gillian Reynolds MBE, journalist and broadcaster

Pam Bishop, musician

Philip Cox, QC

Andy Cartwright, university lecturer and programme maker

Helen Lloyd, oral history consultant

Matthew Parker, maker of musical instruments

Sara Parker, radio producer

Alan Hall, radio producer/feature-maker

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 and Heritage 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 people from any background. Individuals interested in topics such as radio, political theatre, trade union and racial politics and folk culture will find the Archive of particular interest.

Chairman's Report

Tim Blackmore MBE

This year's Charles Parker Day was held for the first time in London. The University of Westminster welcomed us to their Regent Street site only yards from the BBC's Broadcasting House, where delegates enjoyed another first class programme of stimulating and informative sessions. Andy Cartwright is due the wholehearted thanks of the Trust for his outstanding, imaginative and energetic organisation. More about the CP Day can found on pages 7, 8 and for the first time reflections on the Day (pages 17 - 21).

The Trustees met twice during the year in person and between meetings regularly exchanged email messages and took part in conference calls to ensure that the Trust's interests were frequently updated. This year has seen new appointments to the Trust including award winning radio feature maker Alan Hall – whilst a couple of other trustees have decided it is time to move on after many years invaluable service.

Of most significance is the decision of founder Trustee Gillian Reynolds to step down at the next AGM. Gillian's championship of Charles Parker's legacy has been without equal, and I refer not only to her work within the Trust itself but across the wider world where Gillian has promoted it in print and through her broadcasts.

Perhaps most significantly, it was through Gillian's leadership that the Trust was able to initiate and to complete the digitisation of all the audio held within the archive. Gillian's overall contribution to British cultural life has been outstanding and her role as Chairman and Trustee of this Archive Trust has been a significant part of that continuing achievement. Thank you Gillian, you are an exceptional human being and I am personally honoured to be able to count you as a friend as well as a colleague.

I am also sad to report that Robert Whitworth has indicated a wish to hand over his role as our Treasurer. Robert has served us so well over so many years and I know that all his fellow Trustees join me in expressing grateful thanks for that contribution and look forward to his continuing input as a Trustee. At the request of the Trustees, Matthew Parker has generously agreed to take over responsibility for our financial affairs from Robert.

During the year we invited Peter Cox and Mary Kalemkarian to be trustees. Peter will be well known to all friends of the Trust as the author of 'Set Into Song' his essential story of the Radio Ballads whilst Mary was the founding force behind what we now know as BBC Radio Four Extra. She has now decided to leave the BBC and in order that her passion for radio and Charles' work should not be lost to us, we asked her to become a Trustee. I look forward to formally welcoming her and Peter at our AGM meeting on September 21st.

Finally, I want to thank all of the Trust's friends and supporters, especially Sian and Fiona at Birmingham Central Library as well as my fellow Trustees, past and present. And a special word of thanks must go to our Secretary Ian Parr, without whom the Chairman's job would be impossible – thank you Ian.

There are still many challenges ahead and I am grateful for everyone's support in helping us to move forward.

Tim Blackmore



Secretary's Report for the 2011/12 Annual Report

Since publication of the last Annual Report the Trustees' committee has met twice, the first being the 2011 AGM in September. The other was in January 2012.

At our January meeting we welcomed Alan Hall for his first meeting as a Trustee. At the AGM in September the previous year it had been agreed to invite Peter Cox also to become a Trustee. Peter has since accepted and we hope to greet him at his first meeting which will be the 2012 AGM in September.

The Library staff have had a difficult year and the location and timing of the AGM have at time of writing still not been finalised. Details, will however, be enclosed with copies of this Report.

We have been fortunate that efforts by Sian Roberts, Fiona Tait and their colleagues have ensured recent and continual upheavals have not impacted directly upon the Trust's activities. However, the Library management have been made aware of Trustees' concerns regarding access to the Archive resulting from reduced opening hours, reductions in staff numbers and the effects of the move to the new building. We hope to have better news next year.

In the last year the Trust has lost some true and faithful Friends; Friends of the Archive in the formal sense as well as friends of the Trustees and many of you out there. There's further reference to some of them in other parts of this Report. But we can't always acknowledge every loss. Each one, though, we hear of, we try to respond in an appropriate way. That may be through the Secretary, or more often through someone, often a Trustee, who has known the individual or their family and friends personally.

The Travelling Exhibition which shows off the work of Charles Parker using inter-active techniques remains with "The Public", the community and arts centre at West Bromwich see <http://www.thepublic.com/public>. It is hoped that it will be upgraded soon. In recent meetings we have been examining how we might take a different tack in projecting the Archive and Charles Parker's work. Look out for further information on the Trust website and elsewhere in the next year.

During the year I have handled just two responses to enquiries from the Trust website. There is nothing substantial of note to report. When additional pages have been added to the website which are thought to be of interest to those on the Trust register of Friends and contacts a special email is sent out with an appropriate link. Anyone who expects and does not receive emails please let me know. Details are at the Trust website.

Data Protection Act: In accordance with a report submitted to the 2009 Annual General Meeting, and again in 2010 and 2011, the Trust's compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and related government guidance for organisations such as ours has been reviewed. Addresses, both postal and email, of Friends of the Trust, supporters and contacts are revised where necessary. There are no other changes, special recommendations or observations beyond those noted in the aforesaid Reports.

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.

Ian M Parr

Treasurer's Report - year ending 28 April 2012 Robert Whitworth

The main event of the year was Charles Parker Day. We no longer award cash prizes, but the Trust has taken responsibility for expenses incurred. We are grateful to the BBC for financial support for the Day, and with this support our finances for the year show a small surplus. We currently hold about £5,000 mainly arising from the generosity of Friends over the years. This balance is available for new initiatives when opportunity arises.

I will be retiring as Treasurer at the AGM and I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to work with the Trust and so to meet people and learn about matters completely

RECEIPTS	£
Friends' subscriptions and donations	258
Tax refunds on gift-aid contributions	63
Grant from BBC for Charles Parker Day	500
Bank interest	2
Total	<hr/> 823
PAYMENTS	
Printing, postage etc.	234
Website	23
Charles Parker Day	530
Total	<hr/> 787
Excess receipts over payments	36
Balance statement at 28.04.12	
Opening balance in Barclays Bank at 29.04.11	5,021
PLUS excess receipts over payments	36
Closing balance in Barclays Bank at 28.04.12	<hr/> 5,057 <hr/>

Charles Parker Day 30th March 2012

Andy Cartwright

Organiser – Charles Parker Day 2011

Senior Lecturer – University of Sunderland

Executive Producer – Soundscape Productions



This year's Charles Parker Day, held at the University of Westminster in central London, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first transmission of *The Body Blow* with a session examining of how attitudes to the portrayal of disability on radio has changed since this fifth *Radio Ballad* was transmitted. *The Body Blow* was unique in 1962 as it allowed the people with polio to tell their own story rather than be mediated through a presenter or reporter – giving the listener a greater insight in their lives.

The discussion was led by Geoff Adams-Spinks the former BBC disability correspondent and we heard the thoughts of Trish Caverley, Bridget Flint and Aidan Linton-Smith all of whom contracted Polio as children. Having listened to *The Body Blow* in preparation for the session they gave a mixed response – some considered it still condescending but all were moved by the personal testimonies within the programme which brought back some bad memories of how they were treated after diagnosis. Aidan and Bridget, who are member of the British Polio Fellowship, also expressed concern that the general public regard polio as having been eradicated and this means it is difficult to draw the media's attention to Post Polio Syndrome – a series of medical conditions that are now beginning to affect those who contracted the disease during the epidemics of the 1950s.

In terms of the representation of disability issues on the radio it was felt that more needed to be done to get issues affecting the disabled community on programmes and features across the output. There are still important programmes to be made with the skills of future programme makers to innovate like Charles Parker's to bring these issues to a wider audience in a radical and thought provoking way.

Future programme makers were also present at the day as the Charles Parker Prizes for 2012 were presented by Simon Elmes, BBC Radio's Features Creative Director and two of this year's winners, Gold and Bronze, also had a medical theme. Michael Umney's (Goldsmith's College) controversial feature 'Keeping an Open Mind' was about self-trepanning – the idea that drilling a hole into your skull could bring on a permanent 'high' won the Bronze Prize. Rhianne Boland (Westminster) won Silver for her highly creative feature based around John Agard's poem 'Hello, I'm Half-Caste'. This year's Gold Prize went to James Ewing (Bournemouth) for his feature 'Ward 13' a remarkable and highly polished programme about the mortuary at Leeds General Infirmary which one judge described as "amazing voices, nicely woven, great characters with some very original observations which only radio could give with a nicely timed twist of sentiments at the end to evoke the spirit of Parker."



Congratulations to all three winners – who won placements within the BBC, Falling Tree Productions and Whistledown Productions – with James and Rhianne also receiving a SADiE editing system.

This year's judges were Simon Elmes, the radio critic Susan Jefferies and producer David Prest from Whistledown Productions.

Good Night and Good Luck! Gillian Reynolds *steps down as a Trustee, but will always be a friend. Here she remembers her 30 years invaluable commitment to the CP Archive.we'll miss you Gillian.*

I've just spent a week with my Charles Parker Archive files, all thirty years of them. I was dreading it, remembering struggles, setbacks, deaths. Now I'm amazed at so much energy, friendship, good luck.



The paper in these files is sometimes a carbon copy. Remember carbon copies? Sometimes pages are blank. When time brought in the fax it didn't guarantee faxes would not fade. After about ten years come the computer years, the bliss of the disc, cut and paste, e-mail. This, I suddenly realised, is a mirror image of how the whole concept of sound archiving, the why and the how of it, has changed across those three decades. Back then no one wanted to know. These days every voice from the past has value.

When Charles Parker died in 1980 I talked about his work on Radio 4's *Kaleidoscope*, then its nightly arts magazine. Shortly afterwards I got a three page, hand written letter from Mary Baker. She had been, she wrote, "very closely associated with him in his work from 1956 until I retired in 1960, the heyday of the *Radio Ballads*." Then Sara Parker telephoned. The family wanted to set up a Trust to keep Parker's work together. Would I be a Trustee? Of course I would.

With Sara and Matthew Parker, Philip Donnellan and Richard Groves I duly signed the Deed in 1982 formally establishing the Trust, with Phyl Parker, Charles's widow, as Grantor and the five of us as Trustees. Our first meeting was on 3rd March 1982. The agenda was short. The prime consideration was where the collection of tapes, papers, files, books, would be housed. Issues arising were of ownership, cataloguing, conservation, copyright and cost.

After thirty years of steady work at the Charles Parker Archive, though every change of BBC Directors-General, of governments and technologies, those are still the issues that arise but these days they don't just perplex Parker Archive Trustees.

But all that lay ahead. In 1982 the big question was where the Parker collection should be. Birmingham, certainly, but where? Volunteers brought the collection from the Parker family home in Shropshire and deposited it, temporarily, at Fircroft College. Philip Donnellan, now Secretary, and Richard Groves (Chairman) began negotiations with both Aston and Birmingham Universities to give the CPA a proper home. Each was willing, neither had the means.

In 1985 Birmingham Public Libraries offered the CPA a secure home, professional care and public access. Meanwhile Philip had spotted the possibility of obtaining funds to catalogue and copy. The Wolfson Trust had made a major grant to the British Library for that purpose. Philip's persistence was rewarded with a hefty slice of it. The Annual Report for 1986 records the public opening of the CPA at the Central Reference Library, with a day long event of performances, speeches, songs and dancing in Chamberlain Square, organised by Philip with much help from Cathy Mackerras, Pam Bishop and Mary Baker of the CPA's Executive Committee. All three were to become Trustees. Julie Henigan of the University of North Carolina became, through a process known only to Philip, the CPA's first Research Fellow.

But Chairman Richard Groves' health was failing. In his absence I stood in. Richard died in May 1988. The Wolfson money had almost gone. The collection was only partly catalogued and copied onto cassette tapes. Things looked bad. Yet we achieved a major breakthrough that year. At the Birmingham Readers and Writers Festival, supported by funding from the BBC and the CPA Friends, we put on a major exhibition, *The Living Word*, and mounted a historic platform session with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger talking about their work with Charles.

Ewan died the next year. By then Sara had left the Board, replaced by Philip Cox, QC, a Cambridge contemporary of Charles and friend of the Parker family. Dave Rogers of Banner Theatre had also become a Trustee. The whole board, however, was still struggling with the BBC about copyright, still trying to complete the catalogue and copying, still attempting to promote the Archive more widely.

1993 was a turning point. An application to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts was successful and we were awarded £30,000 to design a new kind of travelling exhibition, based on inter-active digital technology. Guided by the National Sound Archive, Nick Kingsley, Archivist at the Library and our designer Graham Peet, we abandoned the cassette and entered the computer age. The Trustees work hard, held monthly editorial and progress meetings. The staff at the Library supported us all the way. The new exhibition was launched with a civic reception.

Beneath the surface, as I remember it, we were in a bit of a mess. But not for long. A largely absent Treasurer was replaced in 1994 by Paul Shilston, another Cambridge contemporary of Charles, who quietly and efficiently got the books back in order. When that same year Philip moved to Ireland and resigned as Secretary, Paul took on his duties as well. The travelling exhibition, meanwhile, was bringing the *Radio Ballads* to a new generation. On BBC Radio 4 Laurie Taylor did a *Radio Lives* about Charles. On Radio 2 I did a feature on the work of the Archive. There was even a rumour that the new Heritage Lottery Fund might fund archive projects.

We began working on our application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1996. In 1997 the government reviewed the HLF and the rules changed. They kept changing. It wasn't until 2001 that we were able to submit our application. By then the BBC was looking for £20 million to start digitisation and the National Sound Archive was applying to the HLF.

Our bid succeeded. Elation turned to alarm as we realised our sums were wrong. Noone, not even the HLF, had spotted that programme hours are only half as long as those required for digitisation. Back to the drawing board, nipping, tucking, needing more funds. We did it! The Parker collection was not completely catalogued and digitally conserved but the success of this project, *A Future For Ordinary Folk*, led to Sian Roberts, now Archivist at Birmingham Central Library, conceiving a bigger and bolder scheme, *Connecting Histories*. It would bring into the digital family all the local history collections, including the rest of the Parker Archive. She did it! This really was a landmark project, a huge step for the Library and for us. Just think. If the CPA had been lodged at a university none of it might have happened.

Phyl Parker, Paul Shilston, Mary Baker and Philip Donnellan did not live to see it. Phyl died in 1995, Philip in 1999, Mary in 2003, Paul in 2004. Across all that time awareness of Charles' work was growing. In 1998 Topic Records re-released all the *Radio Ballads* on CD. On Charles' birthday, 5th April, 2004, Sean Street, Professor of Radio at Bournemouth University, mounted the first Charles Parker Day. There has been one every year since. In 2005, in conjunction with BBC and the CPA Trust, it awarded the first Charles Parker Prize for a student radio programme, bringing both prize money and work experience. One past winner, Katie Burningham, is now a Sony Gold Award-winning producer. Sean Street has retired from academic life (but is still writing and broadcasting.) Andy Cartwright now runs the Day and has augmented the annual prizes to three. Andy became a Trustee in 2011. Sara came back onto the Board.

Radio 2 commissioned six new *Radio Ballads* in 2005. One won Sony Gold, another Bronze. A special *Ballad* was commissioned to mark the 25th anniversary of the miners' strike. Six more were commissioned for this Olympic year. Even Radio 1 has broadcast a “mashup” version of the original *Radio Ballads*, their young producer professing bemusement at the BBC's stern attitude to copyright. *Plus ça change... The Folk Britannia* festival packed London's Barbican. Radio 2's annual *Folk Awards* are a major event. Programmes on Parker, MacColl and Seeger, on oral history and archives, feature regularly on BBC radio. Peter Cox's *Set Into Song*, *Ewan MacColl*, *Charles Parker and the Radio Ballads*, won plaudits from the sternest critics. “The radio feature has never been so hip,” wrote independent producer Alan Hall in the 2009/10 Annual Report. Peter, Alan and oral historian Helen Lloyd are all Trustees.

After twenty years as chairman I stepped down in 2008, knowing Tim Blackmore was exactly the right man to take the CPA into the future. I depart now after thirty years as a Trustee, confident that Ian Parr is a fine Secretary, Robert Whitworth an exemplary Treasurer and the whole Board is stronger than it has ever been, rich in talent, experience, courage, contacts and solid good sense. I shall be a Friend for life.

Gillian Reynolds

Flyboats* and other creatures

In this Diamond Jubilee Year, Ian Parr reflects on other Parker collaborations

Jubilees are a sort of feature of heritage and we all know it's big business nowadays! But “jubilee” has Biblical origins when once every fifty years, slaves would be released, land restored to its original owners. All at the sounding of a ram's horn.



“Cry from the Cut” was first broadcast on 10th February 1962. That's a jubilee! The “slaves” were allowed to speak and the issues of ownership revealed. I wrote about the programme in a piece on the “Birmingham Ballads” for our 2007/8 Report. You can read more on the Trust website where Brian Vaughton describes his work with Charles Parker and Ian Campbell.

This heritage business, in the context of canals for a start, and also the subversion of jubilee, can be obsessive. How did we get from a source of employment to a largely voluntary-run, leisure business that is still worth more in real money than the original industry? Well some of the answers came out in a folk music event I attended recently.

Maybe you've seen, experienced, perhaps enjoyed, “Where the working boats went”, see <http://www.lifeandtimes.me.uk/Shows.htm>. To me it was an anachronism, comprising scripted conversation (and, once instruments are gathered and tuned), songs (antiquarian) and musical bits, even a little step-dance; all performed with occasional photographs projected onto a screen. I'm tempted to say, “And these were the good bits.”

What didn't figure in the framework of this "Lavengro of the waterways" is the sort of thing we've become used to and was characteristic of Charles Parker's work outside the BBC, like "Collier Laddie". It should be clear *when* the slaves speak and *when* their masters speak for them. Clear, too, who owns what and who owns not. And who knows not he knows not.

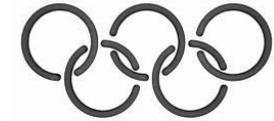
Have canal people fared badly from this heritage business? The BBC re-worked, and largely destroyed, the true substance of Brian Vaughton's field recordings. A 1969 vinyl LP called "Narrow Boats" had bad singing and instrumentation. Though it didn't use pseudo-actors. I guess it was BBC Enterprises' attempt to create an income stream from their Archive.

Brian Vaughton made recordings on to CD to accompany a book edited by Hugh Potter. "Last of the Number Ones" describing the lives of people who worked, owned and ran their own boats. It was much better, see <http://www.waterwaysworld.com/bookshop.html>.

Does it matter this re-working of history and songs telling of events? Is it alien to people who enjoy boating on the canals? What then of TV films describing modern re-building of a narrow boat, realising someone's dream; life with central heating and plumbing. It doesn't blow for me that ram's horn!

I think we know what counts. It's how the material is used – the actuality, sounds, voices, movement – unifying this heritage of rail, canals, roads, coal mining, herring fishing, iron lungs - all this hardware, with people. Unifying people with people. Freeing the slaves, all of them for ever! We all have a voice, need no jubilee, not even a ram's horn. Unless, that is, the horn is radio, TV, film, social media..... And who owns it?

So our flyboat; a song from "Cry from the Cut" ".....and if you want to join a fly boat and show them a clean pair of heels...then you're alright to work all night upon the greasy wheel."



Stories from the Making of the Ballads of the Games - Reporter Vince Hunt *follows in the Parker tradition gathering material for the BBC Radio 2 series.*

I have kept the piece of scrap paper on which John Leonard and I jotted the first draft of our Olympic Radio Ballads series. The outline was rough but we agreed: we needed the actual people to unlock the drama.

Getting the words on which these Ballads are built took me two years and to Germany, Israel, America, across the UK. It's been an unforgettable and often surreal experience.

I've met winners, losers and legends. Olga Korbut's memories of Munich were fresh as daisies: Black Power athlete John Carlos took six months to get behind a microphone.

History is made at the Games. I stood on the balcony where a Palestinian terrorist brandished his AK47; drank tea with an East German athlete who was fed so much testosterone that she became a man; walked up a path in Queens, New York, to meet 97 year old Gretel Bergmann who should have had a medal at the Berlin Games but for being Jewish.

The stories I gathered were sifted by speech editor Annie Grundy and pushed out to songwriters by producer Kellie While. The complex and unpredictable jigsaw that emerged was shaped and polished by editor John Leonard.

I don't hear the Ballads until they're almost done and a first listen is like my recent past flashing before my eyes. Gretel's stories of her husband's family dying in the concentration camps as Julie Matthews sings 'Nie Wieder'; Tali Slavin and I close to tears in Tel Aviv as she talked about her brother Mark who died at Munich, and that conversation becoming 'Did Not Compete'; the calculated unfolding of Chris Wood's brilliant 'Masterpiece' and wonderful pace of Jez Lowe's 'Jesse Owen's Shoes' and 'Berlin'. The beautiful melodies, music, harmonies – all this from those words?

I wanted us to roll back history and take a different look at moments when the world's gaze fell on the Olympics. There have been enormous efforts from musicians, historians, authors and my colleague Sara Parker whose interviews swelled our collective effort. But centre stage are the athletes who gave their time, insight and amazingly honest stories of courage, success, euphoria and failure on a scale most humans could not imagine, let alone experience. These Ballads are a gasp of rarefied air, set in a tapestry of musical jewels.

One moment I'll never forget. Israel's Olympic boss put me in touch with his Palestinian counterpart Djibril Rajoub, but when I got to Ramallah he was needed urgently elsewhere. "I can give you fifteen minutes," he said.

We talked in a room with low leather sofas and a picture of Chairman Arafat on the wall. My first question to Mr Rajoub – West Bank security chief as well as Olympic chairman, I later discovered - was rather more direct than I'd intended. There wasn't time.

"Forty years after the Munich attack, do you want to apologise?" I said, feeling sweat trickle down my back. We were certainly taking these Radio Ballads to pastures new.

'The Ballads of the Games' is a Smooth Operations production for BBC Radio 2, broadcast in six parts from July 2 to August 6 2012.

Making history

Trustee and oral history consultant Helen Lloyd gives her thoughts on this year's Charles Parker Day.

I was asked to write about the day from the viewpoint of someone working in oral history and for me Michael Rosen's talk was a wonderful example of the way personal memories can complement the evidence of documents and photos. His brilliant summary of the creative, theoretical and political influences that Ewan McColl passed on to Charles Parker was interwoven with his own memories – of attending Joan Littlewood's Theatre Royal as a child; of his father, Harold, encouraging him to listen to the Radio Ballads in his early teens; of Harold inviting Parker to talk to his students; and of Michael spending a week with Parker in the 1970s arguing and listening to interviews with those who took part in the 'Saltley Gate' mass picket during the miners' strike of 1972, with the aim of making another Radio Ballad.

The Ballad was never made, partly because Parker no longer worked for the BBC and partly because McColl was no longer involved. However Banner Theatre produced a play about Saltley Gate in 1976, using interviews with participants, and some material from this show is in the Charles Parker Archive ([MS 1611/B/9/2](#)).*

Rosen also talked about his new blog: <http://secmod.blogspot.co.uk>, where people can share memories of failing the 11+ and attending secondary moderns. This written record will usefully counteract the present government's nostalgia for segregated education, but it would be good to have audio recordings too – for the sake of the rhythm and poetry that Rosen identified in people's descriptions of their work in the Radio Ballads, as well as all the additional information that audio provides, through accent, emphasis, hesitation and even – as Sean Street said later – through silence.

The speakers throughout the day described their work with much the same intensity as Parker's interviewees and they provided new contributions to oral history – not just in the well-researched subjects of their talks but in their own personal recollections of Parker, McColl, Peggy Seeger or Michael Mason and of pre-digital technology.

It was well judged that the last speakers should talk about presenting audio through the latest technology – to link the innovators of the past with those of the present and future. Anyone who was daunted by the words “multi-platform” in the session's title must have been relieved to discover that it meant simply using all possible means to encourage people to listen to audio and to use their imagination. The quality of the audio and the skills of the storyteller are still the key to success. Old-fashioned radios may be replaced by tablets or smartphones, but the old skills of setting an interviewee at their ease or of editing the most telling phrases are as important now as they were to Charles Parker.

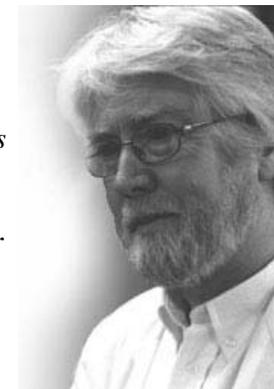
Helen Lloyd, www.oralhistoryconsultancy.co.uk

*Banner Theatre has created a new show, *The Battle of Saltley Gate*, to mark the 40th anniversary this year. A student dissertation *Re-examining the Battle of Saltley Gate* by Rob Kellaway can be found online: www.bristol.ac.uk/history/ug/ugdissertations/2010kellaway. He used my interviews with a factory worker who supported the strike, Henry Cockerill (British Library Sound Archive C900/18611) and with coke depot engineer, Bill Shreeve (Birmingham Central Library MS2255/2/108), who corrects the title ‘Saltley Gate’, explaining that in fact the confrontation took place at the gate of Nechells gas works. I also interviewed a man who policed the demonstration (British Library Sound Archive C900/18595).



The Poetry of Radio

Professor Seán Street's latest book, *The Poetry of Radio – The Colour of Sound* ‘draws on many of the principles that inspired Charles Parker. The work contains chapters on *The Radio Ballads* and the poetry of the vernacular in radio, as well as the idea of pure sound as poetry. Here Seán, founder of Charles Parker Day, reflects on some of those themes.



'Poetry' was a word heard often during this year's Charles Parker Day at the University of Westminster; *The Long March of Everyman* and Lance Sieveking's *Kaleidoscope* might be said to be epic poems of radio, while current work such as *The Hackney Podcast* touch the ear as a lyric poem might. And it is true that poetry in the traditional sense and radio have always been natural kin. Radio is itself – at its heart – a poetic medium. Poetry was spoken before it was written, and both poetry and radio both ask and require the active engagement of the imagination in the reader/listener; the mutual key is a partnership fused in listening. John Clare, for example, wrote poems as full of sound as any radio feature:

*“The crow goes flopping on from wood to wood,
The wild duck wherries to the distant flood,
The starnels hurry o'er in merry crowds,
And overhead whew by like hasty clouds...”*

Poetry and radio also understand the power and importance of silence. The words 'listen' and 'silent' are anagrams of one another; here's Thomas Hardy, from his poem, 'Silences':

*“There is a silence of a copse or croft
When the wind sinks dumb,
And of a belfry-loft
When the tenor after tolling stops its hum.”*

The tolling bell, and the metaphor it provides in its journey from attack through decay to the mystery of where it eventually resumes its silence, is at the heart of what I've tried to write in this work, because it perfectly describes the relationship between sound and the imagination that is at the heart of poetic making. Sound's very invisibility renders it strange, uncanny, suggestive; Wordsworth caught it in his poem, 'On the Power of Sound':

*“Thy functions are ethereal,
As if within thee dwelt a glancing mind,
Organ of vision! And a spirit aërial
Informs the cell of hearing, dark and blind...”*

Little wonder radio has always been so good at ghost stories!

Charles Parker's work is linked in my mind with the poetry of David Jones, insofar as both men 'built' their work out of human experience. In Jones's preface to his vast poem, *The Anathemata*, he summed it up by saying: 'One is trying to make a shape out of the very things of which one is oneself made'. In *The Radio Ballads*, MacColl and Parker created a form which is the quintessence of radio poetry, and that act of creation involved taking cultural risks; and some of the most groundbreaking poetry, song and folk art has been controversial, subversive. To quote Jones again:

“Poetry is to be diagnosed as 'dangerous' because it evokes and recalls...something loved. In that sense it is inevitably 'propaganda', in that any real formal expression propagands the reality which caused those forms and their content to be...there is a sense in which Barbara Allen is many times more 'propagandist' than Rule Britannia.”

Parker and MacColl understood above all what Roland Barthes called 'the grain of the voice', the sheer sound of words voiced through language and dialect, the aural patina of age and experience, the modulation – the music of it all in short. Words as pure sound become abstract, and yet remain full of meaning held within the sound. This is what fascinates; if we listen to a language we do not understand, it becomes at once prohibited literal meaning and an aural landscape we may yet find we understand through volume, pitch, intonation – and, of course, tears and laughter.

Poetry is sound. Sound is poetry. Sound practitioners deal in more than words, more than music, speaking not just mind-to-mind, but, at its most profound, to something deeper; the potential of their sonic rainbow is capable of bypassing thought itself, taking us to a point where its imaginative palette transmits directly from – and to – the human condition. The relationship between sound and silence, and the bell's metaphorical journey through sound colour from one to the other, lies at the very heart of meaning, and is itself the essence of the poetry of radio.



'The Poetry of Radio – The Colour of Sound' is published by Routledge. Seán Street is Emeritus Professor of Radio at Bournemouth University.

Birmingham Archives and Heritage

Sian Roberts

The staff of Archives and Heritage are busy preparing for the move into the new Library of Birmingham building which is scheduled to open on the 3rd of September 2013. The new building will include state-of-the-art environmentally controlled storage accommodation for the collections which will mean improved storage conditions for the Charles Parker Archive. The move itself will mean that all of the archive collections will be inaccessible for a period of time in 2013 so anyone intending to visit to use the Parker Archive should check the Archives and Heritage website or contact the staff in advance of their visit.

In the meantime the archive continues to be used by individuals undertaking personal research, and over the past year the research topics have included the miners' strike of 1972-4, family history, local accents and dialect, folk music and migration particularly from Ireland and the West Indies.

The location of this year's Charles Parker Day prompted us to see what was held in the archive relating to Parker's lectures at the Polytechnic of Central London. The first lecture Charles Parker appears to have given to students at PCL was on radio production in December 1967. In January 1968 he was invited to be one of the lecturers on a 'service course in Communication as a Liberal Study', run for one hour a week for still and cine photographers, photo technologists, scientists etc.

A three year Diploma course in Communication Studies was also being developed as a general interest course and students were asked to undertake various practical projects such as a 4 minute radio feature and a 3 minute television programme.

Parker was an Associate Lecturer from March 1973 for one year in the first instance at £250 per annum to teach for 2 hours a week. He gave his last lecture there on 7 December 1980 as he died later that evening in Birmingham.

The archive includes transcripts, notes, correspondence and other papers relating to the lectures (MS 4000/1/3/3) including 'Why can't the educated speak English?' from 1969 (MS 4000/1/3/3/1) and 'The Use of Folk Song in Schools' for the Department of Education and Science (Midland) by Charles Parker and Chris and Dave Rogers, 1980 (MS 4000/1/3/3/11).

The archive also holds papers relating to a book called 'Only Listen' based on the lectures on which Charles Parker worked with Anthony Schooling. Schooling was a friend and fellow tutor at PCL who had heard Parker give a lecture on Actuality in 1969 and was hooked. Draft chapters exist for this although it was never finished and remains unpublished.

For further information about using the Charles Parker Archive contact 0121 303 4217, e-mail archives.heritage@birmingham.gov.uk. For a link to the online catalogue go to www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage