

Charles Parker Archive

Annual Report & Accounts 2013-2014

Celebrating more than Fifty Years of the Radio Ballads



First broadcast 17th April 1964

*Thanks to The Library of Birmingham
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.

Tim Blackmore MBE: Trust Chairman,
Ian Parr: Hon. Secretary
Matthew Parker, Hon. Treasure, maker of musical instruments
Pam Bishop, musician
Peter Cox, author
Andy Cartwright, university lecturer and programme maker
Mary Kalemkerian, radio broadcasting consultant
Helen Lloyd, oral history consultant
Sara Parker, radio producer/feature maker
Alan Hall, radio producer/feature-maker
Jimmy Ewing, radio producer /Charles Parker prize winner

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.**

The Charles Parker Archive is held in the Archives and Heritage
Department of the Library of Birmingham

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.

A Message from the Chairman

Tim Blackmore MBE

It's hard to believe that my first link with the Charles Parker Archive was back in 2004 when my predecessor Gillian, asked me for money to help with the digitisation of the Archive. A couple of cheques later, Gillian and the Board invited me to become a Trustee and since 2006 it has been my pleasure to have served in that capacity. For the last five years I have also served as the Trust's Chairman and now after a decade of close association with the Trust I have decided that it's time for someone with fresh ideas and different contacts to take over the Chair.

I am thrilled that Mary Kalemkarian has accepted the Trustees' invitation to assume the Chairman's role with effect from our AGM in October. I know that Mary's previous experience as the brains behind the creation of BBC Radio's 4 Extra Network, has demonstrated the rightness of this appointment.

With the completion of the Archive's digitisation, the Trust's priority has been to develop greater promotion of its value to researchers, feature makers and oral historians. One of our principal achievements has been to assume stewardship of the annual Charles Parker Day which under Andy Cartwright's direction does much to increase awareness and understanding of the worlds of 'Folk Music' and Oral history including Audio feature making. We are constantly improving our online presence and through Pam Bishop's dedicated commitment the results are there for all to see and to use.

As you can read elsewhere in this report, the Charles Parker Day 2014 was held at Birmingham Central Library, the home of the Archive itself and the first time the Day has been mounted without the association with a local university. For that we are indebted to the support of Paul Hemmings and his Library staff as well as to my fellow Trustees.

This year we also promoted an evening concert featuring Peggy Seeger, Jez Lowe and Charles' own granddaughter Charlotte Andrew. The two events generated a terrific sense of achievement for the Trust and in particular I want to mention the contributions of Andy, Helen, Peter and Pam in making it all happen.

Finally I would like to mention Sian Roberts, who alongside Fiona Tait has provided the interface between the Archive and the Trust. In the reorganisation of the library Sian has moved to other responsibilities but we thank her most sincerely for her support over these many years.

Although I am stepping down from any official role, I assure you that I will continue to offer whatever practical help may be of use to the Trust in the months and years ahead.



Secretary's Report for the 2013/14 Annual Report

Since publication of the last Annual Report the Trustees' committee has met twice, the first being the 2013 AGM in October. The other was in March 2014. Both meetings were held later in the year than has been recent practice, being the result of a review by Trustees of timing relative to the changes in emphasis of the Trust's activities, predominantly our increased involvement in Charles Parker Day.

At our AGM in October we met for the first time in the new Library. This was to be the last meeting attended by Sian Roberts. At the March meeting her overseeing role for the Library became the responsibility of Paul Hemmings. We are grateful for Fiona Tait's continuing attendance and advice on matters relating directly to the Archive.

Along with Fiona, Pam Bishop and Gillian Reynolds, Sian was one of the first people I met associated with the Trust when I was "interviewed" over ten years ago. I've always been impressed and at times inspired by the professionalism and commitment of the people I've known associated with the Library and this is especially so of Sian's contributions. As a committee we will miss her guidance.

The Friends AGM in October was a very busy affair with presentations from Sarah Baylis, describing her search for Charles' contact with James Phelan, Barry Parsons of Cube Cinema and Rod Stradling who described his project of bringing together all the recordings made by Cecilia Costello. The draft minutes can be found on the Trust website.

During the year I have handled five responses to enquiries from the Trust website, including the one which led to Sarah Baylis' attendance.

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 for all subsequent Reports, the Trust's compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and related government guidance for organisations such as ours has been reviewed. In the last year I have reviewed and shall continue to substantially revise addresses, both postal and email, of Friends of the Trust, supporters and contacts. There are no significant changes, special recommendations or observations beyond those noted in previous Reports.

I had the pleasure of handing over to Sam Coley of Birmingham City University, School of Media the tape recorders and associated equipment reviewed in our last Annual Report. We are grateful to Sam, who teaches radio and specialises in documentaries, especially since the equipment will find an impressive home in an environment which is appropriate to its history. We look forward to continuing to work with Sam and his department.

As always my thanks to the Library staff and to fellow Trustees and Friends of the Trust for their support.

Ian M Parr



Treasurer's Report - year ending 28 April 2014**Matthew Parker**

The main event of the year was Charles Parker Day and Concert. We are grateful to the BBC for financial support for the Day.

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.

Please note the BBC grant and the expenses have only recently been received and claimed, and so, strictly speaking, are not within this financial year I have listed them (in brackets) for the sake of continuity.

As you can see overall we have remained static this year, a small profit on the concert and other income has covered the loss on the CPA day.

Forms for the renewal of subscriptions are being sent out with the Annual Report.

Financial Statement for the year 29.04.13 to 28.04.14

RECEIPTS	£
Friends' subscriptions and donations	257.00
Tax refunds on gift-aid contributions	192.00
Grant from BBC for Charles Parker Day 2013 (2014 £500)	500.00
Bank interest	1.00
Concert Ticket sales (net)	1746.00
Total (£3196)	2696.00
PAYMENTS	
Printing, postage etc.	182.00
Website	65.00
Charles Parker Day 2013 (2014 £1078)	289.00
Concert expenses (£1582)	
Total (£3196)	536.00
Excess receipts over payments (0)	2160.00
Balance statement at 28.04.14	
Opening balance in Barclays Bank at 29.04.13	5196.00
PLUS excess receipts over payments (0)	2160.00
Closing balance in Barclays Bank at 28.04.13	7356.00
(August 2014 £5196.00)	

Report of the Charles Parker Day 2014 by Andy Cartwright



The 2014 Charles Parker Day which celebrates the radio feature – past, present and future – took place in the impressive studio theatre at the newly opened Library of Birmingham where the extensive Charles Parker Archive is stored.

It is 50 years since *The Travelling People* was broadcast - the last of the eight innovative radio features made by Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. So this year's Charles Parker Day celebrated this ballad about Travellers and examined the legacy of the whole series of Radio Ballads.

To open the conference, one of the original creative team **Peggy Seeger** joined **Peter Cox** (author of the definitive book on the Radio Ballads *Set into Song*) in an illustrated conversation reflecting on the making of the ballads and in particular *The Travelling People*.

But have attitudes towards Travellers changed during the intervening 50 years? Heritage writer and consultant **Sarah Baylis** spoke about the two days she spent listening to the original unedited recordings with Gypsies and Travellers. She played extracts to illustrate the diversity and invaluable nature of the Archive, as well as reporting on their relevance today. (*See pages 16 & 17*)

Rural Media's **Nic Millington** and **Damian Le Bas** (Traveller, playwright and editor of the *Travelling Times*) talked about how they have 'moved on' from the radio ballad format to an online interactive magazine. (*See pages 14 & 15*)

When making the Radio Ballads, Ewan, Peggy and Charles recorded hours of material – real stories from real people. **Helen Lloyd** is a former BBC radio reporter/producer who re-trained to work in oral history – she demonstrated how oral history recording differs from radio interviewing and examined the pitfalls and opportunities of working in oral history. (*read an edited version of her talk on pages 11,12 & 13*)

In the afternoon we explored the important legacy of the Radio Ballads – in music, radio production and drama. Folk historians and archivists **Ken Hall** and **Doc Rowe** examined how songs from the Radio Ballads have become so embedded into the folk tradition that they are often thought to have a traditional roots.

Award-winning radio feature makers **Alan Hall**, **Sara Parker** and **Sally Goldsmith** investigated the legacy of the Radio Ballads in radio production. After he 'left' the BBC, Charles Parker founded Banner Theatre and it's still going today – we were joined by Banner's director **Dave Rogers** who described their Video Ballads, and by playwright **Rony Robinson** who explored the work of Peter Cheeseman at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent in creating plays that adopted some of the Radio Ballad techniques.

At the end of the day the 10th Charles Parker Prize winners were announced – Gold, Silver and Bronze for Best Student Radio Feature 2014.



Peggy Seeger is joined by Charles' granddaughter Charlotte performing across the generations.

Congratulations to the winners of the 2014 Charles Parker Prize



The winners of the Charles Parker Prize for the Best Student Radio Feature were announced at this year's Charles Parker day . Many thanks to the judges Jane Anderson, Radio Editor of the Radio Times, Felicity Finch, freelance feature producer and presenter and Chair, Simon Elmes, Creative Director, BBC Features and Documentaries. Also a big thank you for the generous donation of a Roberts DAB Radio for each of the winners and to Prism Sound for donating the Gold winner prize of a SADiE Editing system as well as to the BBC, Smooth Operations and Falling Tree Productions for providing work placements for the Gold, Silver and Bronze winners respectively.

The Gold award went to **Adam Allinson** from the University of Westminster for what the judges described as 'the absolute stand-out entry which could have been crafted by a radio producer with years of experience behind them'. '**Beachy Head – Life on the Edge**' was commended for its 'beautiful unputdownable opening' and remarkable stories with 'beautifully handled sound and music' in a 'compelling, intelligent and important piece of radio that shone as brightly as the Beachy Head lighthouse'.

The Silver award went to **Diane Gray** from the University of Sunderland for her feature '**Where are they Now?**' Focusing on a former mining community, the judges praised its very strong opening as 'unbeatable' with a mix of music, birdsong and words that were quite heart-stopping". They said it was 'a brilliant piece' which as a ballad-style work was 'spot on for the Charles Parker prize' with its 'superb use of music – a beautifully developed idea'

Another University of Sunderland student, **Chloe Gosling** won the Bronze award with her feature about the Merchant Navy – '**All at Sea**'. The judges praised the excellent interviews including 'a satisfying number of women', which one judge said 'allowed people to tell their own story and opened up a new world to me. Gentle and engaging"; "it was a little gem".

<p>The Charles Parker Prizewhat's NEXT? Last year's Gold winner Hana Walker-Brown</p>
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Since winning the Charles Parker Prize in 2013 I have been presented with some incredible opportunities and have grabbed hold of them firmly with both hands!

I was awarded the prize whilst studying on the MA in Radio course at Goldsmiths where I graduated with a distinction. I was fortunate enough to be invited back to Goldsmiths as a guest lecturer prior to finishing and after 6 months freelancing alongside my studies, I joined the brilliant team at Falling Tree Productions as a producer.

I have since gone on to produce short and long form features and documentaries for BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio 4 including *Sky Boy*, *Forever Young*, *Shadowplay*, *The Design Dimension*, *A Sound Portrait of Stouerhead* and excerpts for Radio Academy Nominated *Short Cuts*. Alongside my work in radio I have been continuing to establish myself as a freelance sound designer working with theatre companies associated with The Roundhouse, Edinburgh and Brighton Fringe, The Arcola Theatre and Hull Truck. Earlier this year I was invited to curate the sound installation "Behind the Broadcast" as part of BBC Radio 3's Southbank residency and more recently I composed an original score for Bad House Film's first feature *The Compass is a Centrifuge*. This autumn I will collaborate with Dr Campbell Edinborough (Lecturer in Drama at Hull University) on a Walter Benjamin audio walk for the School of Advanced Study's *Being Human Festival*.

I am currently content producer for *Notes on Blindness*; originally a short film that received critical acclaim at Sundance in 2012 that has now kicked off a nationwide incentive with the RNIB-documenting transitions into blindness by means of podcasts which will culminate in a feature film and international online campaign in 2017.

More recently I have been begun presenting a weekly specialist music show on *Hoxton Radio* which acts as a platform for underground artists - stepping in front of the mic rather than behind is equal parts terrifying and exhilarating but definitely a hobby I am keen to pursue....!

It's really has been a fantastic year and I feel incredibly privileged that I can call this my job and grateful to the steps on the way such as the Charles Parker Prize!

**Telling Lives – a shortened version of a talk on oral history
given by Helen Lloyd at the Charles Parker Day 2014**

On the Library of Birmingham's *Connecting Histories* website Charles Parker is described as "a pioneer of radio broadcasting and oral history". It's certainly true that oral history owes him a debt – for recording people whose lives would otherwise go unrecorded and for doing so in their own environment - but his interviewing techniques were very different from those now recommended by the Oral History Society! In his unedited interview with Alderman Harry Watton - which can be heard in the Charles Parker Archive - he makes clear his disagreement with the Alderman's hostility to Irish tinkers and interrupts him to clarify a point or rephrase it so that it will make sense without the question.

The concerns of some radio producers do overlap with those of oral historians, but their purposes are distinct. *The Travelling People* uses the Alderman's voice to stunning effect – warning us of what happens when we regard anyone as less human than ourselves. But oral history reminds us of people's humanity in a different way – by allowing even disagreeable people to tell their story at length from their own point of view, with minimal intervention.

In 1998, the BBC embarked on the biggest audio oral history project ever undertaken in this country – *The Century Speaks* – a grand public service gesture to celebrate the Millennium. They appointed 40 producers to cover the whole of the UK and I was appointed to cover the West Midlands and Warwickshire. We each recorded the life-stories of up to 150 local people and made 16 half-hour programmes which were broadcast on local radio stations, with highlights repeated on Radio 4. We were trained by Rob Perks of the National Sound Archive to follow the interviewee's agenda rather than our own: if they thought something was important, that very fact was of historical significance! We should listen to their life-stories without interrupting – only offering a prompt if they paused. We were given a theme for each of our 16 programmes – such as food, work, leisure, health, immigration – but we didn't need to steer people to talk about these things, because if you record someone's whole life-story, they cover many subjects naturally.

When you listen to someone at length with total concentration, this is such an unusual experience for them that they often recall things for the first time, as they speak, and that gives what they say a special intensity, even when they're talking about something quite mundane, like a woman from Wales who

enthused about the home-grown vegetables and free range eggs she ate as a child during the First World War. (It's interesting that she talked about 'free range' eggs because all eggs were free range 100 years ago, but even very elderly people are *contemporary* people, who are influenced by modern media and interpret their past in the light of the present.)

When I began the *Century Speaks* project, I was interviewed about my search for interviewees by Nick Owen on the TV programme, *Midlands Today*, and I received 300 phone calls, many recommending people described as "great characters". These "characters" often told anecdotes that they'd clearly repeated many times, but the advantage of a long oral history recording is that you get much more than anecdotes and even people who seem unreflective at first begin to reflect.

Our interviews were recorded on 2-hour MiniDiscs and lasted from 1½ to 2 hours. When the project ended, the Director General, Greg Dyke, gave around 6000 unedited life-story recordings and 640 half-hour programmes to the National Sound Archive – now called the British Library Sound Archive.

After I finished *The Century Speaks*, I set up my own Oral History Consultancy and collected 150 life-stories for Birmingham City Council's quaintly-titled *Millennibrum* project, which are now available in the Birmingham Archives. Over a third of the interviewees were from ethnic minorities and many others liked living in a multi-cultural society, but I felt I must include some people who *didn't* like it, because if at a later time there were riots, or a rise in the popularity of a racist party, an oral history collection should offer some understanding of these developments.

My BBC training told me to look interviewees in the eye and nod and smile encouragingly, but I couldn't do that if I was interviewing someone who expressed racist views. Even with people you like, smiling is fine for 10 minutes, but gets tiring over 1½ hours, for both interviewer and interviewee. So I usually sit *beside* the interviewee – often on a sofa with cushions or pillows between us on which I can rest my arm holding the microphone. You can show you're interested by the quality of your attention, but the historical record is less affected by the interviewee looking for approval.

I've recorded many memories of poverty between the wars, when parents struggled to feed their children – and these recordings now help a younger generation to understand why there was so much support for the creation of a welfare state.

Oral history's also good at challenging over-simplifications of the past by providing exceptions to generalisations. It's well-known that immigrants faced a lot of racism, but I interviewed a man who came from Pakistan in 1960 who found that while people were abusive when he worked as a bus conductor, the very same people were much more friendly when he worked as a postman.

Another over-simplification of the 1960s is represented by the phrase "the permissive society". It may have been permissive in some areas, but it certainly wasn't in others. I recorded a Birmingham woman who was an unmarried mother in 1963 and described the local opposition to her having her baby christened. When the vicar ignored this opposition, two families cancelled christenings that were due to take place at the same time.

Oral history is good at registering slight shifts in social attitudes. It's also good at exploring the aftermath of public events. 40 years ago, in 1974, the IRA planted bombs in two Birmingham pubs. I was living here at the time, but it wasn't until I began recording oral histories that I realised the huge effect the bombings had on the Irish in Birmingham. I've interviewed people who were bullied at school or at work or had bricks thrown through their windows, because they were Irish. When I play these recordings in schools, Muslim pupils recognise the similarities with their families' experiences after 9/11 or the London bombings.

In 2000, I recorded the life-story of a 14-year-old boy, because I thought society was changing so rapidly that even a 14-year-old might be conscious of how different things were in the past. Since he had a Caribbean background, it was suggested that I ask him about racism, but what he most wanted to talk about was his computer and his pay-as-you-go mobile phone. That's the joy of oral history: you go where the interviewee leads. He talked of how mobile phones had transformed his social life – avoiding the need to talk to parents! – and how personal computers had kept all his friends indoors. Like an old man, he lamented that "Winson Green isn't such a community as it used to be."

Helen Lloyd is a Trustee of the Charles Parker Archive and a former BBC radio reporter and producer. She now runs her own independent consultancy, www.oralhistoryconsultancy.co.uk, based in Birmingham, and is a Regional Network Representative for the Oral History Society.

Nic Millington is founder and CEO of The Rural Media Company - the Herefordshire based organisation that for the last 16 years has published the national magazine, *Travellers' Times*. Here he writes about the impact of the *Travelling People* on the 50th anniversary of its broadcast.



The *Travelling People* was one of the first ever programmes to let Gypsies and Travellers speak out about their own lives in the media. Its songs written by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger like the *Move Along Song* and *Freeborn Man of the Travelling People*, are now well known, and include powerful expression of views, pro and contra, about Gypsies and Travellers in British society.

Although I had started working with young people from Herefordshire Traveller families on a variety of youth projects in the late 1970s, it was not until ten years later when making a film on rural poverty that I met through the Shropshire Traveller Support Group TV film director and producer, Philip Donnellan, a friend and BBC colleague of Charles Parker. Thanks to him I first listened to *The Travelling People*. The film, *Borderland*, featured several families of the teenagers with whom I had been working, and I was immediately struck about how closely these Herefordshire families' lives mirrored those of Sylvester Gordon Boswell, Minty Smith, Belle Stewart and Cornelius Lee.

The *Travelling People* was recorded before the 1968 Caravans Site Act which obliged local authorities to provide accommodation 'for Gypsies residing in or resorting to their area' and we hear Minty Smith saying, "I was expecting one of my children, you know, one of my babies, and my husband he's sent for the midwife and in the time that he's gone after the midwife the policeman come along. 'Come on', he says, 'Get a move on. Shift on', he says, 'Don't want you on here, on my beat.'"

Twenty years later Harry Warner in *Borderland* reflects similar prejudice and hostility against Travellers. "Now, the likes of me, I've been bred and born in Herefordshire, all of me breed have, grandparents, uncles, the lot, and therefore I'm a local Traveller for the county. And that's why I've always had it ringing in my head, 'Why is they as much against the Travellers as they is?'"

Philip Donnellan started his documentary career in radio but in 1958 moved into television and drew extensively on Charles Parker's technique of using only the words and songs of ordinary people, dispensing with the customary use of a 'professional' voice over. I adopted this style for *Borderland*, and was grateful to Peggy Seeger who gave me permission to use the *Move Along Song* for the film's Traveller section.

Borderland made a significant impact because it showed conditions in which many families lived and led directly to Rural Media taking on Cardiff Law School's Traveller Law Research Unit's newsletter and making it more accessible to Travellers' themselves as the 'Travellers' Times' magazine.

From radio through television and magazine production, Gypsies and Travellers' are moving with the times and now using the internet to powerfully communicate with each other, as well as directly with service providers, politicians and the wider public. The new 'Travellers' Times' website <http://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/> will launch in November 2014 and offer a unique platform for digital media produced by Travellers themselves. The means of production is now very much in Gypsies' and Travellers' own hands and in this respect very much has changed in 50 years.

www.ruralmedia.co.uk
www.travellerstimes.org.uk

@ruralmedia
 @travellerstimes



Photograph by A. Chapman

Assigned to Listen ... the sound recordings for “The Travelling People”

Dr. Sarah Baylis



Almost a year ago, I enjoyed a rare – and an unexpectedly moving experience. For 2 days, sitting alone on floor 6 of the Birmingham Central Library, disconnected from all external reality, I listened through headphones to the sound recordings which formed the source material for ‘The Travelling People’. Gathered in 1963/64 by Charles Parker with Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl - this was the rich source material for what would become the Radio Ballad, ‘The Travelling People’, now 50 years old.

My intention (to spend some time getting to know the sound archive in advance of speaking at the Charles Parker Day conference) was vague enough, and yet driven by intense curiosity built up over years. I’ve long been an admirer of the ‘Radio Ballads’ and Charles Parker and I’m an avid absorber of all things relating to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture. Professionally – working with community engagement through heritage – I’ve been concerned for some time with widening access to archives and collections containing Gypsy/Romany/ Traveller material.

I suspected I might be the first Library user to attempt to listen to the whole set of recordings since they were transferred to CD. (Parker’s team apparently gathered 300 hours of original material). There are 97 in total – mostly around 17 minutes long.

Snatches of those recordings still come vividly into my mind now and then, and bring with them a powerful sense of place – of particular weather and atmosphere. The wind blowing as the young Scottish girls, laughing and chatting to Peggy Seeger, pick raspberries and tell her about their children , and their deep attachment to the travelling life. The snuffling suckling baby held in the arms – close to the microphone; a barking dog; the shrieks of children as they run in and out bored by the conversation, the spitting campfire; the occasional clank from a chained horse grazing nearby. The incidental soundscape of a way of life – close and inward – ancient and under threat.

And then there are all the voices – which include settled people as well as Travellers – ranging across counties and class and attitudes to life. Humane, hesitant words from a softly spoken Hampshire Vicar; a Birmingham alderman who is none of these things. A cross-section of minds both closed and open. A record of Society's attitudes to the travelling people, but equally and unavoidably of their attitudes to that Society. A mirror that includes us all.

I only scratched the surface in those 2 days of rapt listening. Another great highlight was the chance to hear 'Stallion Eternity': a 1956 BBC programme produced by Charles Parker with writer, Juanita Berlin (later Casey). Described as 'a tribute to the horse' – it is densely woven with references to the gypsies with whom Juanita and her husband (artist Sven Berlin) spent much time while living in the New Forest. 'Stallion Eternity', it now seems to me, was both a prelude to - and a touchstone for - the 'Travelling People'.

Perhaps the most significant legacy of 'The Travelling People', created a half century ago, is the huge, rich resource of human material contained within the sound recordings. These voices and their stories still have enormous, world-wide relevance today.

Although cultural initiatives such as 'Roma Routes' are starting to assess the extent of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller collections in European museums and galleries – sound recordings are often overlooked. In the past – when they lay hidden in archives and libraries, and difficult to access or navigate this was not so surprising. But today we have no such excuses.

But the challenge remains: how can these voices be more widely heard, both by the source communities in the UK, and the families and descendants of those who contributed to the enduring success of the Radio Ballad, as well as researchers, film-makers, broadcasters, teachers, healthcare workers and many other professionals who work with travelling communities today.

Truly the question is still: 'where do we go from here?'



The Brian Vaughton Award for Excellence in Radio Production

As Degree Leader for radio studies at Birmingham City University, I was delighted to hear the Charles Parker Day for 2014 was to be held in the city that gave birth to the iconic 'Ballads'. We play excerpts from 'The Ballad of John Axon' and 'Singing the Fishing' in our radio documentary classes and discuss the seismic impact that Parker's work had on radio documentary production. And so, on the 4th of April, eight of our most promising radio documentary students attended the event in the shiny new Library of Birmingham, alongside a team of our radio department staff. The students especially enjoyed hearing the work of the finalists for the Charles Parker Prize and the judges' comments, which spurred them on to hopefully becoming finalists themselves in the future.

During the break for lunch I was speaking with Helen Lloyd when she kindly introduced me to Ian Parr. We spoke about the University's radio courses and the subject of Brian Vaughton's recording /editing equipment came up (Ian has written extensively about this collection in an excellent article in a previous edition). Brian, of course, worked alongside Parker and had gifted his personal radio kit (in near pristine condition) to the Charles Parker Archive Trust. Although the original intention was to have Brian's equipment stored alongside the rest of the Charles Parker Archive, the move to new premises meant the



Brian Vaughton with the EMI midget tape recorder he donated

Birmingham Public Library was pushed for space (controversially shedding thousands of books in the process) and was unable to take on any new artifacts. It was then that Helen and Ian suggested the possibility of having Brian's collection displayed at the new Parkside Campus of Birmingham City University, which opened a year ago next to Millennium Point.

Fast-forward several months later, and Brian's EMI L2 midget tape recorder, L2 (STC) 4032 microphone and Brenell tape deck can now be seen in a glass cabinet in the lobby area of our suite of state-of-the-art, digital radio studios. I think it fitting that Brian's wonderful collection has found a home in the city of his birth, forming a link between Birmingham's proud radio heritage and young documentary makers of the future.

I was fortunate to visit Brian at his home in Devon with Vanessa Jackson, the University's Degree Leader in Television, in early August to film an interview about his career and to have him demonstrate how his equipment operated. As a documentary producer myself, it was a rare privilege to ask about those pivotal days when modern radio documentary production was forged. We spent several hours together and the footage is currently being edited into a series of videos which will be made available online before the end of the year. Brian's recollections of working alongside Charles Parker and Philip Donnellan will be incorporated into the teaching syllabus for our Radio Documentary module – and will no doubt be of great value to aspiring documentary producers.

To honour Brian and his work on what have become known as his Birmingham Ballads ('The Jewellery' and 'Cry from the Cut') Birmingham City University has established 'The Brian Vaughton Award for Excellence in Radio Production'. It is appropriate that the inaugural winner of the prize, Sophie Sparham, received a special commendation from this year's judges of the Charles Parker Prize for her 'Addicted Philosophy' documentary, which was also featured in the Radio 4 Extra programme documenting the Charles Parker Day.



On behalf of Birmingham City University, I would like to take to the opportunity to thank Helen and Ian – and especially Brian – for their generous assistance and for allowing us to share a tangible connection to radio documentary's 'golden age' with our students. As young radio documentary producers of the future head to their classes they will pass by the Brian Vaughton collection and hopefully be inspired to follow in his path.

Sam Coley
Degree Leader Radio
Birmingham City University



The Awkward Squad

Ian M Parr

You'll read elsewhere about Charles Parker Day this year. It was excellent. But such excellence was also an attribute and part of the achievement of the Radio Ballads of which *The Travelling People* was the culmination.

Felicity Finch chaired a session on the Radio Ballads' legacy for today's programme-makers, inviting some of them to apply their own labels; they did and included with legacy, integrity and humanity which they amplified and qualified. It certainly gave us a glimpse into their thinking, encapsulated in Alan Hall's phrase, "legacy includes being part of the awkward squad". And I felt it applied to those other qualities too. Is it universal? If we exclude concepts of cultural relativity, how do we see Charles' work today?

Yes, a thoughtful session. It's pretty clear that the attributes of the Radio Ballads arise neither by coincidence nor inspiration but by dint of craftsmanship, insight, opportunism, even genius, and a refusal to compromise. Someone in a magazine article years ago described Ewan MacColl as a "Marxist-humanist". I wasn't clear what was meant by this at the time. Could it be infectious, who can testify to that? Quite a few as it turns out. These values, other than genius we might say, are patently universal and transferable.

From my own experience, large corporations often thrive from having one or two awkward squads. The challenge keeps the jobs-worths in their places whilst igniting the embers, inducing creativity, in others. Dynamic minds and even conflict are good and good, creative managers, such as some of those involved with Charles - and in the 1930s Ewan - look to manage creative division. As we know, the outcome can be something special.

If there were those attending Charles Parker Day who were disappointed in the lack of social challenge in present-day BBC programmes, they should consider how Charles' output for the BBC as a producer reached its zenith. In the view of most people this year, it was with *The Travelling People*. I think, though, that his later programmes require much more consideration and understanding. Something, then for the Trust to address in the future?

I'm sure there was no decline in the values of Charles' later programmes. Nevertheless, it seems that excellence of the sort we find in the MacColl/Seeger/Parker partnership was unattainable during his remaining years in the BBC.

There would be no more achievements comparable with the Radio Ballads. Like all paternalistic corporations, the BBC could buckle under external loads and post 1970, dynamic creativity, whether Marxist-humanist or not, wouldn't be enough for people such as Charles Parker. To me, an outsider, he and some others appeared corporate men without shadows, our existential heroes needing release. I wonder if in these later programmes there is more light to be shed upon how productive minds respond to such alienation.

Perhaps Charles' experience of Centre 42 some years before was a prototype for Banner Theatre, maybe not. But the evidence suggests Charles had learnt something from it all. The awkward squad was to be re-born.



Ten years ago the Charles Parker Archive secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to digitise original sound recordings rescuing them from the old reel to reel tape which was degrading. The aim of the project called a Future for Ordinary Folk was to preserve the recordings forever and make them accessible to users. Selected from Charles Parker's substantial archive, the recordings concerned the oral tradition, vernacular speech, folk song and music, the folk revival and popular culture. Since then other recordings in the Archive have been digitised as part of Birmingham Libraries Connecting Histories programme. Most of these recordings are now on CD but what is their life-span on a format that once used to be viewed as fairly indestructible?

Trustee Pam Bishop who runs the Trust website drew my attention to this article...Ed.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/08/18/340716269/how-long-do-cds-last-it-depends-but-definitely-not-forever>



Library of Birmingham and the Charles Parker Archive

The new Library of Birmingham opened on 3rd September 2013 and has been an enormous success with visitor footfall of over 2.5 million in the first 11 months of opening. Given the level of use, this has been an extremely busy year for the staff of the Library including staff involved in managing and providing access to the archives. The move of the collections from the old library to the new building was a massive undertaking, but was achieved in time for the opening. After opening staff continued entering new locations on to the catalogue and established new service arrangements. These are now complete and after this hectic opening period the library is entering a period of consolidation.

The Charles Parker Archive has been heavily drawn upon for exhibitions and activities for visitors to the library. Notably the collection was a key element of the Library of Cultures exhibition (Jan – Apr 2014) which featured many items from our “star” collections including the Charles Parker Archive. Extracts from “The Travelling People” were used in the exhibition, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of its first broadcast. New information on the Archive has been specially written for the library website.

The profile of the new library has helped attract an increased number of researchers to use the Archive. Since Sept 2013 there have been 28 individuals looking at and listening to a real variety of topics in the Archive including - travellers, Cecilia Costello for the issue of the CD of Cecilia Costello’s singing by Musical Traditions, Charles Parker’s lectures to students in London, the Folk Revival, the Critics Group, Banner Theatre, housing in Tower Hamlets, and a number of others.

The Library of Birmingham was also proud to host the 10th Charles Parker Day in April 2014. A blog post on the day appeared in the archives blog site “The Iron Room” and can still be found at <http://theironroom.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/charles-parker-day-2014/>

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For further information about using the Charles Parker
Archive

<http://www.libraryofbirmingham.com>

<http://theironroom.wordpress.com>

<http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk>

The Charles Parker Archive Trust

www.cpatrust.org.uk