

Project News: Successful Conclusion



Hallaton 'Hare-Pie' and 'Bottle Kicking' Festival, 1905 [Stone Collection]

The *Connecting Histories* project will come to a successful conclusion in July 2007. The project has been running since February 2005 and has involved Birmingham Libraries and Archives, the *School of Education* at the *University of Birmingham*, the *Sociology Department* at *University of Warwick*, and lots of individuals and community groups across the city. The project has produced catalogues of archives, learning materials on the histories of various communities in the city and a number of other resources which are all available on the *Connecting Histories* website.

The project team would like to thank all of the hundreds of people who have been involved or have supported the project in different ways.



One of the twelve *Connecting Histories* postcards that are now available

Although some of the team will be leaving, Siân, Jim, Izzy and Brigitte will move to work in the Archives and Digitisation & Outreach teams at *Central Library*, where Andy will also be working on *Birmingham Stories* (see below). Good luck to Helen, Anna, Aishling, Adisa, Arike and Sarah with all their future plans.

New Project: *Birmingham Stories*



Dr Andy Green, *Birmingham Stories*. Photo: Izzy Mohammed, 2006

This is a new partnership project led by the *School of Education* at *Birmingham University* working with Birmingham Libraries and Archives and funded by the *Arts and Humanities Research Council*. It will start in August 2007 and run for two years. Dr Andy Green, the Research & Learning Officer with *Connecting Histories*, will be working with another colleague (to be appointed in August) and Professor Ian Grosvenor from the University to arrange a series of talks and workshops in community libraries. The sessions will be aimed at those who would like to know more about the history of Birmingham and its many communities. The workshops will also make available a number of useful resource guides that will provide information as well as practical advice. These will also appear online on the *Connecting Histories* website. Look out for more information in the autumn.

Birmingham Stories workshops and resource guides will cover the themes of Travelling Communities, Urban Childhoods, Visualising Birmingham, Radical Religions, Researching Race History, Refugee Movements, Migration Stories, Slavery and Abolition, Women's Rights, and The Civic Gospel.

CONNECTING HISTORIES

Website in Focus

Web News: New Learning Packages



Banner Theatre's 'Strangers in Paradise Circus'. From 'An Interview with Dave Rogers' in *Performing Resistance*. Photo: Andy Green, 2007

Two new learning resources *Performing Resistance* and *How to Create a Learning Package* have gone online in the last couple of weeks.

Performing Resistance

These pages feature some of Birmingham's many artists, documentary makers, theatre performers, and others who have used the arts to campaign for political freedoms and social equality, and to promote a wider understanding of different cultures.

People's Performers: Theatre, Drama and Politics

Dr Andy Green explores the work and legacy of the radio pioneer Charles Parker placing his famous *Radio Ballads* in the social and political context of the 1950s-60s and looks at his role as a teacher and cultural activist. Andy then goes on to look at the emergence of *Banner Theatre*, from its early work in the 1970s to their current show *Strangers in Paradise Circus* which focuses on migration and asylum.

Black Performance in Birmingham

Sarah Dar explores the history of black performers in the city from the earliest documented black musician in Birmingham through the tradition of minstrelsy to other 19th century singers and actors who visited the city such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Ira Aldridge and Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield. Sarah then goes on to look at the 20th century including visits by Les Ballets Negres, Katherine Dunham and Paul Robeson. It also features Birmingham based artists and initiatives such as Andy Hamilton, the *Asian Music Circle*, the *Black Dance Development Trust* and *The Cave*.



Helen Caddick in Saigon, c.1910, from 'Questions of Travel' in 'How to Create a Learning Package' [City Archives: MS 908/9]

How to Create a Learning Package

This offers basic guidance on using archives to create learning materials and on planning and managing your personal research through an illustrative case study based on the activities of two Birmingham people who travelled the British Empire. Explore the life and photographs of the Victorian collector and Member of Parliament Sir Benjamin Stone and the travels of the educator Helen Caddick 1889-1914. This will also be of interest to people interested in using visual sources for research or in looking at issues of Empire, race, representation and archives.

Web News: discussion and exhibition

Our website now has a *discussion* forum for postings on the histories of Birmingham and its communities or any issues around local history and identity. This is a new feature so please have a look and use it to share information, ask questions or just make a comment.

A new *photographic exhibition* shows a selection of photographs by the South African photographer George Hallett from his archive held in Birmingham Central Library. The exhibition includes images of the work of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa, which was first exhibited as *Bearing Witness*, at the Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry, in 2004. To find out more about George's archive go to the *collections* page.



'Bearing Witness'. Photo by George Hallett, 1997 [City Archives: MS 2449]

CONNECTING HISTORIES

Featured Collection

Charles Parker



Charles Parker on stage during a rehearsal, 1962. Photo: John Hopkins

Charles Parker was born in Bournemouth in 1919 and came to Birmingham in 1954 as a Senior Features Producer for the BBC where he worked until 1972. Parker believed passionately in the value of the testimony of working people and the creative importance of 'the oral tradition' and its relationship to folk music. Parker was a specialist in documentary radio and theatre and he made many remarkable radio programmes including the groundbreaking *Radio Ballads* between 1958 and 1964, winning the *Italia Prize* for radio documentary in 1960. He was also a founder, writer, singer and actor of *Banner Theatre* from 1974 to his death in 1980 and a political activist who campaigned for justice for marginalised communities.



Parker in a Banner Theatre outdoors performance, 1970s [MS 1611]

The Charles Parker Archive is a huge collection that gives a unique view of the wide-ranging work of a passionate cultural activist in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.



Parker recording interview for the Radio Ballad 'Singing the Fishing' c.1960. Courtesy of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger

The collection includes over 5,000 hours of sound recordings and oral history interviews with a wide range of people, notes, production books, scripts, correspondence and newspaper cuttings relating to his programmes and interests, and over 1000 books on international folk music and culture, politics, history and religion.



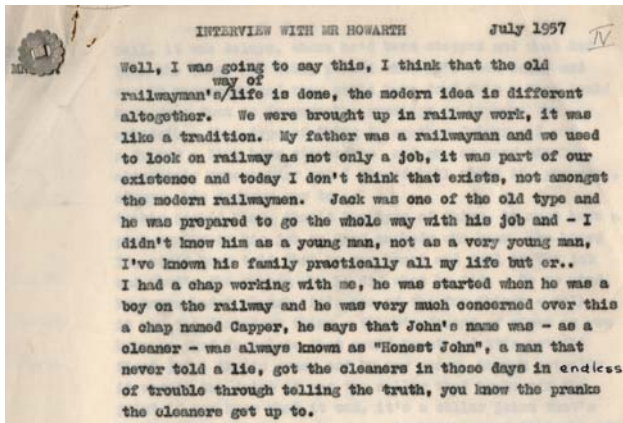
Parker recording material at Saltley Gas Works for 'Maker and the Tool', 1960s

Parker's best known works are the *Radio Ballads*, made in collaboration with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, which document the lives and experience of working people in their own words and music. The ballads are considered classics of radio production and were re-issued by *Topic Records* in 1999. Eight *Radio Ballads* were made:

- *The Ballad of John Axon*: death of a heroic train driver
- *Song of a Road*: building the M1, the first motorway
- *Singing the fishing*: North Sea herring fishermen
- *The Body Blow*: the battle against polio
- *The Fight Game*: why boxers fight
- *On the Edge*: the experience of growing up in the 1950s and 60s
- *The Big Hewer*: Britain's coal industry
- *The Travelling People*: Britain's travelling communities

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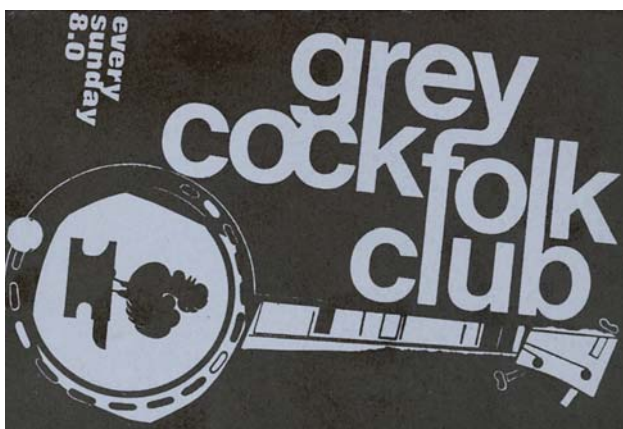
Featured Collection



"Transcripts-field recordings" for 'The Ballad of John Axon', 1957

In addition to the ballads Parker made around 200 other radio programmes such as *The Blind Set* (living with visual impairment), *Vox Pop* (history of pop music 1930s-60s), *I Chose where to Stand* (Elsa Rosenfeld's Berlin childhood and life as a Jewish woman in Nazi Germany), *Landmarks* (the six ages of man through music) and programmes on the working lives of jewellers in Birmingham and potters in Stoke among others. He also collaborated with the film maker Philip Donnellan on projects such as *The Colony* (1964) which explored the experiences of West Indian migrants in Handsworth.

Parker recorded many hours of 'actuality' for each programme and only a fraction of this vast sound archive was used in the finished broadcast. The original reel-to-reel tapes have now been digitally converted and can now be listened to for the first time.



Flyer for the Grey Cock Folk Club



Parker at a rehearsal, 1970s

The Charles Parker Archive is a nationally significant resource for the social, cultural and political history of Birmingham, the West Midlands and Britain in the second half of the 20th century. The possibilities for research and educational use are endless, and subject areas covered in the archive include:

- the experiences of Black, Asian, Irish, Chinese and other communities
- Britain's travelling communities
- living with disability
- folk and pop music, drama and the oral tradition
- political protest
- history of broadcasting
- Christianity and political theatre

Material from the archive is also available online on www.connectinghistories.org.uk in *Performing Resistance* and other pages in the *learning* section.



Parker with Bob Staunton, dance director, 1962. Photo: John Hopkins

The collection [MS 4000] is available at Birmingham City Archives on Floor 7 of Central Library [0121 303 4217] and a catalogue of the archive will be available at the end of July 2007 on www.connectinghistories.org.uk