

THE HUNT'S UP? RURAL COMMUNITY, SONG, AND POLITICS

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Abstract: Recently in Britain a proposal to ban hunting with dogs has caused a political furore. A fever pitch has been reached with the impending prospect of legislation under the new Labour Government. (Twice previously legislation has been brought before Parliament, but has failed to become law.) Among communities, the polarisation of popular opinion into pro- and anti-hunting pressure groups, led, in June 1998, to the formation of the Countryside Alliance, arguably the largest protest body with a 'status quo' agenda that Britain has ever known. Out of these tensions and perceived threats to rural lifestyles there has grown a renewed sense of community, in which such cherished institutions as the hunt supper together with the singing of traditional hunting songs have come to the fore. The assertion of identity 'in song' of those who value these cultural traditions has, during the last six years, crossed the boundary from the closed gatherings of hunting groups and rural communities into the public arena of political controversy. Based on fieldwork in the west Yorkshire Pennine hills, this paper will consider the changing perceptions of the function and meaning of such songs and the political implications of their performance.

Keywords: song, hunting, politics, community, identity, performance, countryside, polarisation, gender, singing

On the 10 July 1997, 120,000 people gathered in Hyde Park in London in support of the Countryside Movement's campaign to oppose the parliamentary bill to ban hunting with dogs introduced by Michael Foster MP. After the rallying calls by politicians and celebrities, the afternoon concluded with a highly-charged rendition of 'John Peel', led by Andrew Rogers of Kirkburton near Huddersfield. This is one of many instances when hunting songs have been enlisted to bolster the political cause of the Countryside Movement in England. The threat of a ban on hunting has engendered a strong revival of the tradition of singing such songs, which form the focus of many social occasions. This paper will consider the political implications of the performance of such songs, in the context of a resurgence of rural community identity expressed in song.

The history of the hunting song in England is almost as long as the documented history of hunting. Certainly by 1537, the practice of singing such songs was so well established in English society as to have become proverbial and to be the vehicle of political (and later religious) parody (SIMPSON 1966: 323–327; WARD 1980: 1–13). Thus, 'Hunt's Up', the title of a favourite song of King Henry VIII (CHAPPELL 1855–1859: I, 50), was in general usage as a term to describe any song or tune designed to rouse the sleeper and serve as a reveille or aubade (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The date above was marked by the initiation of legal proceedings against John Hogon,

Example 1
'The Hunt's Up' parodies

The hunt ys up, the hunt ys up,
Loe! it is allmost daye;
For Christ our Kyng is cum a huntyng,
And browght his deare to staye.

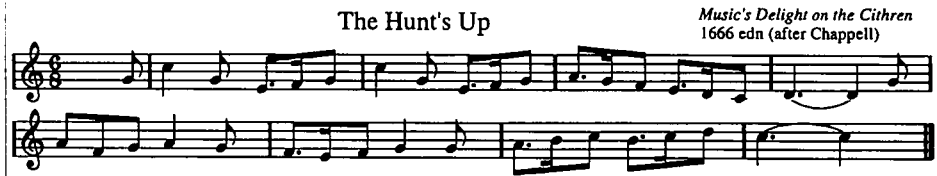
[By John Thorne, from *The Moral Play of Wit and Science*, BM MS Add. 15233, fol. 33.]

With huntis vp, with huntis vp,
It is now perfite day,
Jesus, our King, is gaine in hunting,
Quha lykis to speid thay may.

[*A Compendious Book of Godly and Spiritual Songs*, 1567, ed. A. F. Mitchell, 1897, pp. 174–75]

The Hunt is up, the Hunt is up,
And now it is almost day,
And he that's abed with another man's wife,
It's time to get him away.

[*Merry Drollery*, 1661, I, 20.]



who had transgressed by performing in public a political parody of the song, 'The Hunt's Up' (CHAPPELL 1855–1859: I, 50).

It might be argued that, by this time, two enduring characteristics of hunting songs were well established: the first being their form as songs of praise – panegyrics or paeans; the second being the appeal of their tunes, which readily attracted and retained public affection. Although the original text of 'The Hunt's Up' in the form that was registered with the Stationers' Company in 1565–66 has not survived, Example 1 shows contemporary religious parodies and a secular parody in the form of a catch, which establish the metrical pattern and echo the content of the opening stanza. Thus the text has the sun, bright Phoebus or Apollo, doing his handiwork, while the tune is etched in the public psyche, being used not only for parodies, but also for a country dance and for the town waits' alarm call (SIMPSON 1966: 326), (MERRYWEATHER 1988: 29–30). There are clear resonances of text (Sister Moon or Phoebe) and tune in Henry Fielding's archetypal 'The Dusky Night Rides Down the Sky' with its galloping chorus 'A-Hunting We Will Go', which was written for the ballad opera, *Don Quixote in England* in 1734 (CHAPPELL 1855–1859: II, 650–652) (see Example 2).

Modern examples of this type continue to feature in the current traditional repertoire. Such a song is 'A Bright Rosy Morn',¹ which is a great favourite of the three

¹ For printed texts, see HUNTERS' SONGS 1948: no.10 and HUNTERS' SONGS 1990: no.1. For a recording, see *Hunters' Songs: Traditional Songs Sung by the Holme Valley Beagles Hunt*, audio-cassette, Holme Valley Beagles Hunt, 1991, recorded by Richard Merrick.

Example 2
'The Dusky Night Rides Down the Sky'

From the ballad opera, *Don Quixote in England*, by Henry Fielding (1734)

After W. Chappell, *The Ballad Literature and Popular Music of the Olden Time*, 2 vols (1855–59), (Dover edn, 1965), II, 650–52.

The Dusky Night Rides Down the Sky

From *Don Quixote in England* (1734) by Henry Fielding

The dus - ky night rides down the sky, And ush - ers in the morn; The
 5 hounds all join in glo - ri - ous cry, The hounds all join in glo - ri - ous cry, The
 9 hunts - man winds his horn, the hunts - man winds his horn. Then a
 13 hunt - ing we will go, a - hunt - ing we will go, a -
 17 hunt - ing we will go, a - hunt - ing we will go.

The dusky night rides down the sky, and ushers in the morn;
 The hounds all join in glorious cry, the huntsman winds his horn.
 Then a hunting we will go.

The wife around her husband throws her arms and begs his stay;
 My dear, it rains, it hails and snows, you will not hunt to-day.
 But a hunting we will go.

A brushing fox in yonder wood, secure to find we seek;
 For why, I carried, sound and good, a cartload there last week.
 And a hunting we will go.

Away he goes, he flies the rout, their steeds all spur and switch;
 Some are thrown in, and some thrown out, and some thrown in the ditch.
 But a hunting we will go.

At length his strength to faintness worn, poor reynard ceases flight;
 Then hungry, homeward we return, to feast away the night.
 Then a drinking we do go.

foot packs that hunt in the vicinity of Holmfirth in West Yorkshire – the Holme Valley Beagles, the Colne Valley Beagles, and the Pennine Fox Hounds (see map). Here Phoebus sets the scene in the time-honoured manner, and an association of hunting with love-making is explicitly stated:



Fig. 1. Location of the Holmfirth District within Great Britain

‘Let love crown the night as sweet sports crown the day!’
(see Example 3)

The other common allusion, to drinking and toasting, concludes many of the songs in the current repertoire. Compare the last verse of ‘The Scent Was Good’ with the equivalent verse in ‘The Echoing Horn’, which combines both allusions:

Now if our host permits a toast, we’ll ask each sportsman here
His glass to fill with a right good will and follow with a cheer;
For each man ought to drink to sport in glasses three times three
That long may last the huntsman’s blast in England’s land so free.
(HUNTERS’ SONGS 1948: no. 28)

With a bottle and friend this evening we’ll spend
And crown the brave sports of the day;
Our wives will at night give us such a delight
And smother all sorrows away, away,
And smother all sorrows away.
(HUNTERS’ SONGS 1948: no. 9)

In *English Folk Poetry*, Roger Renwick refers to the consensual feeling that pervades many of the hunting songs – ‘a unity of good fellowship and singular

Example 3

'Bright Rosy Morning'

As sung by members of the Pennine Concert Party, 1999.

There's a bright rosy morning peeps over yond hill,
Sweet blushes adorning the meadows and fields;
Whilst the merry, merry, merry huntsman cries, come, come away,
Awake from your slumber and choose the new day! [Last two lines repeated]

See the hare runs before us and away seems to fly
She pants to her cover, the hounds in full cry;
Crying, Follow, follow, follow, follow to the musical chase,
With triumph and vigour our sport to embrace.

Now the day's well spent over with joy and delight
And brings to each lover fresh charms for the night,
Crying, Let us, let us, let us, let us be merry whilst we may,
Let love crown the night as sweet sports crown the day!

enjoyment' – which he recognises as a core value of its bracketed world. This fellowship is fully inclusive, hounds and huntsmen are praised, followers cheer on the pursuit, even the quarry is given plaudits, and gladly and enthusiastically participates in its own downfall. In fact, 'all are mutual participants in common allegiance to the ethos of the hunt' (RENEWICK 1980: 119–121).

The tendency to assign dialogue to the animals, hounds and quarry, is noted by Renwick (RENEWICK 1980: 120). Such anthropomorphising can be seen in 'Old Snowball' (see Example 4), where the two antagonists, leading hound and fox, both familiarly named with suitable epithet, converse to progress the action. Bold Reynard sportingly proposes to take flight:

'Methinks I hear yon jovial hounds pursuing of me still,
Before that me they shall come near, I'll cross yond mighty hill.'

Old Snowball advises his pack:

'We'd better leave these woods and groves and try yond mighty rocks'.

Bold Reynard sportingly invites the hounds to chase him:

'If you will follow me, my boys, fresh grounds to you I'll show.'

Finally the exhausted fox pleads:

'If you will spare my life this time, I'll promise and fulfil
I'll touch no ducks or feathered fowl nor lambs on yond high hill.'

But the fox's word is not to be trusted; no mercy is shown and none is expected, as the hounds chorus:

'So bid adieu to cocks and ducks, likewise yond lambs also,
We've caught bold Reynard by his back and we will not let him go.'

This equanimity further serves to emphasise the consensus to which all the participant voices in the song subscribe.

Example 4

'Old Snowball and Bold Reynard (A Duet)'

From *Hunters' Songs*, [3rd edn], Holme Valley Beagles Hunt, 1948, no. 27.

You gentlemen of high renown, come listen unto me,
That takes delight in fox hunting, 'tis of a high degree.
A story true I'll tell you concerning of a fox
We hunted him o'er mountains high through valleys, fields, and rocks.

Bold Reynard lying in his den and hearing of these hounds,
They waked him out of his sleep and on his legs did stand.
'Methinks I hear yon jovial hounds pursuing of me still,
Before that me they shall come near I'll cross yond mighty hill.'

Old Snowball he threw up his nose, he knew it was a fox,
'We'd better leave theses woods and groves and try yond mighty rocks.'
Bold Reynard lying not far off and hearing him say so
'If you will follow me my boys fresh grounds to you I'll show.'

Old Snowball he threw up his nose he caught the gallant scent,
Old Snowball he threw up his heels and through the woods he went.
Then away, away, through Piketon Park, through parishes eighteen,
We hunted him nine hours or more till we came to Masefield Green.

Bold Reynard lying himself down thinking to take some rest,
Old Snowball he came up to him and sounded him his last.
'If you will spare my life this time I'll promise and fulfil,
I'll touch no ducks or feathered fowl, nor lambs on yond high hill.'

The other hounds came up so bold and hearing him say so,
'We've caught bold Reynard by his back and we will not let him go.
So bid adieu to cocks and ducks, likewise yond lambs also,
We've caught bold Reynard by his back and we will not let him go.'

Before discussing the performance context, it is worth pursuing one further characteristic of such songs found in the repertoire of Pennine singers. This feature, common in locally composed songs, consists of cataloguing places, characters, or events. 'The White House' written by Malcolm Hawkswell of Colne Valley Beagles in 1956 illustrates this in the account of the social evening that follows the hunt.²

Dorothy Blakeney was our hostess and did us rather proud,
With damn good ale and sandwiches for that assembled crowd,
And tap'oil³ being well nigh full, best room were crowded out,

² For a recording, as sung by John Cocking, see Holme Valley Tradition, *Bright Rosy Morning*, 12-inch L.P., Hill and Dale, HD851, 1984.

³ Dialect term for 'tap room', a bar in a pub for working men.

Some supped their ale on flags outside, teetotollers did without.
Laddie fol light fol larolay, light fol light folarolay
Laddie fol light fol larolay, light fol light fol larolay

Roger Broadbent sung a silent song and did us 'Waggon Wheels',
Archie Cameron in tap'oil were dancing Scottish reels;
Brian Pearson played piano, he banged down hard on keys,
It sounded as if he was playing with his elbows and his knees.
Laddie fol light fol larolay, etc.

Inevitably the connotive meaning of such lists is largely impenetrable to the outsider, who is unfamiliar with the characters mentioned or their foibles. Although there can be a certain element of good-natured censure or teasing, the notoriety of being included in such a song provides not just a palliative to render the personal remark inoffensive, but the incentive to make a suitable riposte. In this way the equilibrium is sustained in an invigorated form. Herbert Halpert observed astutely that the existence of local song composition in a tradition was a measure of its vitality (HALPERT 1951: 35–40).

Of the three footpacks mentioned above, the Pennine Fox Hounds are currently the most active, in terms of singing, owing to the shared enthusiasm of the Joint Masters, Andrew Rogers and Mark Davies. They have up to twenty singers on whom they can call, and during the last four or five years they have performed as many as 20 times a year. Over half of these occasions have been outside their own hunt social circle, when they have been referred to as the Pennine Concert Party. Several of these external outings have been to support events organised to raise awareness and funding for the Countryside Movement (reconstituted as the Countryside Alliance in 1998), which is the national organisation set up to oppose any ban on hunting. Most of these events take place in community halls, marquees or club/pub concert rooms, and are attached to the meetings of other hunts and agricultural or livestock shows, such as dog trials. Some of these engagements have been at some distance from Holmfirth, for example in the West Country (south-west England) or the Borders (counties bordering the English-Scottish border), and the host group has provided the members of the concert party with accommodation.

The general format for these occasions is that the singers supply the evening's entertainment and one of the group, usually Nigel Hinchcliffe, will act as the Master of Ceremonies. As a salesman, auctioneer, and actor, he is well suited to the role, and his banter helps to create a convivial and relaxed atmosphere. Not only does he introduce singers very effectively, but he intersperses this role with jokes and anecdotes, carefully chosen to appeal to his 'country' audience. Although the singing is seen to support the cause of the countryside, fundraising is achieved via different means. Usually there is an entrance charge or ticket price, but more overtly there is always a raffle, for which the prizes are donated. The other common fundraising activity is an auction of donated 'lots', typical examples of these would include hand-made shepherds' crooks or sticks, hand-made brass or silver hunting horns, or large

cuts/joints of meat. Nigel, together with one of the singers, Clive Mitchell, are past-masters of the auction scenario.

The singing itself is not devoted exclusively to the performance of hunting songs, nor ever has this been the case. Popular rural choruses, such as 'The Farmers' Boy', feature alongside Irish pub ballads, such as 'The Black Velvet Band'; while sentimental pieces, for example 'Madge', alternate with comic songs in blatant local dialect, the classic being 'Gossip John' (RUSSELL 1987: 90–92)⁴.

Ya bran' new cow 'as corved right unda t'parla winda
Ya bran' new cow 'as corved right unda t'parla winda;
And its corf it will not suck, suck, suck, suck, suck,
Tha'll 'ave to give it finga, Gossip John.

In spite of the remit, to support the Countryside Alliance, very few of the items performed have an explicit political or topical theme that relates to the present situation. The one exception is 'The Music of the Hounds', which originates in the 1970s, several years before the current controversy (see Example 5). It was written by Jeffrey Dent, a member of the Airedale Beagles, a hunt from Yorkshire, some fifty kilometres further north in the Pennines. Unusual among the hunt repertoire, it

Example 5
'The Music of the Hounds'
Words by Jeffrey Dent, Airedale Beagles Hunt.
Tune traditional
As sung by Jane Livingstone, 18 February 1998,
Fleece Inn, Holme, West Yorkshire

Original pitch and range $\text{♩} = 112$

The Music of the Hounds As sung by Jane Livingstone

Some peop - le love the op - er - a where pri - ma don - nas sing. While

o - thers like an orch - es - tra to make the raf - ters ring; With

in - stru - ments and voi - ces the lof - ty hall re - sounds, But

frank - ly, sir, I much pre - fer the mu - sic of the hounds. But

frank - ly, sir, I much pre - fer the mu - sic of the hounds.

Chorus

⁴ For a recording, as sung by members of the Holme Valley Beagles Hunt, see, *A Fine Hunting Day*, 12-inch L.P., Leader Sound, LEE4056, 1975, recorded by Dave Bland and Bill Leader.

Some people love the opera where prima donnas sing,
 While others like an orchestra to make the rafters ring;
 With instruments and voices, the lofty hall resounds,
 But frankly, sir, I much prefer the music of the hounds.
[Last line repeated as refrain]

If you should visit Wharfedale or the valley of the Aire,
 You'll find that we have bred a pack of hounds beyond compare,
 And when the hunt is over, good fellowship resounds
 As we supply a chorus to the music of the hounds.

Joe Paisley is our Master, he bears an honoured name,
 George Dyson is the Whipper-In, that knows the hunting game,
 Anne Lloyd would view the hare away with a hollo that astounds,
 And we supply a chorus to the music of the hounds.

Although the wind is biting as across the beck we splash,
 And snow falls like an avalanche from Huntsman's white moustache;
 We soon forget discomfort as from the hill rebounds
 That glorious burst of music, the music of the hounds.

Now some down there in Parliament are plotting in advance
 To take away our birthright, if we give them half a chance;
 I pray that when we're short of breath, our pockets short of pounds,
 We still will have the right to hear, the music of the hounds.

So all you honest hunting folk that love our ancient sport,
 Be ready to defend it from abuse and false report,
 And even though they dig our bones from consecrated grounds,
 Make sure they never stop the music of a single hound.

So when we go to heaven, as all good hunters do,
 There'll be a pack of beagles and a pack of foxhounds too;
 St Peter will be good enough to pause when on his rounds
 And listen for a moment to the music of the hounds.

is a song that is favoured by women. Two singers from the Pennine Concert Party, who perform it regularly, are Jane Livingstone and Wendy Pinkney. Jane is the Kennelmaid for the neighbouring hare hunt, the Holme Valley Beagles, and Wendy's husband, Will, is the Huntsman of the Pennine Fox Hounds; this is relevant as both women depend on hunting for their source of income. A third singer who has popularised the song in the Lake District, is Diane Barker, a shepherd from Ullswater, and youngest daughter of the legendary Lake District hunter, the late Anthony Barker.

The first four verses of 'The Music of the Hounds' follow a very similar pattern to that expressed in many hunting songs and include a list of notable characters, significant topological references, and praise for the hounds. The figure of speech, 'the music of the hounds', is alluded to in other songs and is commonly used in hunting circles.⁵ A highly evocative term, it refers to the clamour of yaps and yelps as members of the pack communicate with each other, whilst following the scent of

⁵ See, for example, 'The Brown Hare of Whitebrook Head', in HUNTERS' SONGS 1948: no. 35.

their quarry. Admittedly there is a hint in the opening verse of the highly-charged language that follows in the latter part of the song, in that a distinction is drawn between aficionados of opera/classical music and the supporters of hunting. This can be taken as a town/country divide, later to be translated to a metropolitan/provincial context.

The last three verses encapsulate several of the themes that hunting people espouse: firstly the interpretation of parliamentary deliberation on cruelty to wildlife as intrigue; secondly the belief that the freedom to hunt is a basic human right; thirdly the recognition of the need to rally support from among their own ranks; and fourthly the perception that the hunting community is the victim of injustice, slander, and propaganda. It is worth noting that the phrase 'they dig our bones from consecrated grounds' is a reference to the desecration of John Peel's grave in Threlkeld by hunt saboteurs, which was understandably a highly provocative and emotive act. Presumably the association of hunting folk with heaven is chauvinistic bravura that consigns the opposition to be damned in hell.

Whereas there are other examples in which the participants' obsession with the sport of hunting is spelt out at great length, for example 'A Fine Hunting Day' (MELBREAK HUNT 1971: 68), such songs promote inclusivity and the consensus view of balance and harmony with nature. 'The Music of the Hounds' is exceptional in its explicitness; it points up the controversy and refers with passion to those who are for and against the sport, 'them and us'. By presenting a polarisation of views that does not concur with the accepted world view, as expressed elsewhere in the repertoire, the song requires an interpreter – a voice that has credibility but is distinguishable from the mainstream hunting tradition. It is perhaps for this reason that the song has been taken up by female voices and that they should be so effective in this role.

Jane Livingstone sang the song in support of the Countryside Alliance at the Hyde Park Rally in 1997 before 120,000 people, and again at the Labour Party conferences in Blackpool in 1998 and at Bournemouth in 1999, where there was a march involving 80,000 people. Understandably she calls it her 'rallying song', noting that 'it stirs the blood'.⁶ She explains how she was not keen on the song when she first learnt it over ten years ago, but subsequently it has grown on her and the meaning has become more poignant. The emotional intensity of the song has increased, in the current climate, to the point where, in summer 2000, she broke down in tears whilst performing it at a singing competition in Lowther in the Lake District.

One of the other rallying songs at Hyde Park, alongside 'Jerusalem' and 'Men of Harlech', was, of course, Andrew Rogers' rendition of 'John Peel', mentioned above (Example 6). Andrew recalls that he sang to a brass band accompaniment and that the words of the song were included in the official programme.

⁶ Interview, 25 August 2000.

Example 6

'John Peel (1777–1854)'

From Songs of the Fell Packs, Melbreak Hunt, 1971, p. 2.

D'ye ken John Peel with his coat so gray,
 D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day.
 D'ye ken John Peel when he's far, far away,
 With his hounds and his horn in the morning.

Chorus

'Twas the sound of his horn brought me from my bed,
 And the cry of his hounds that he oft times led,
 For Peel's 'View halloa' would awaken the dead,
 Or the fox from his lair in the morning.

D'ye ken that bitch whose tongue is death,
 D'ye ken her sons of peerless faith,
 D'ye ken that a fox with his last breath,
 Cursed them all as he died in the morning.

Yes, I ken John Peel and auld Ruby too,
 Ranter and Royal and Bellman as true,
 From the drag to the chase, from the chase to the view,
 From the view to the death in the morning.

An' I've followed John Peel both often and far,
 O'er the rasper fence, the gate and the bar,
 From Low Denton-holme up to Scratchmere Scar,
 Where we vied for the brush in the morning.

Then here's to John Peel with my heart and soul,
 Come fill, fill to him another strong bowl,
 For we'll follow John Peel thro' fair or thro' foul,
 While we're waked by his horn in the morning.

Our best of nags went stride for stride,
 With ears shot forth and nostrils wide,
 Nor fagged before 'we're dead' was cried,
 As we grappled for the brush in the morning.

O, yes, I have seen and have done far more,
 Many, many times and as oft tell o'er,
 How we ran into foxes in galore,
 Ere the hoar left the hills in the morning.

Yes I ken'd John Peel with his coat so gray,
 He lived up at Troutbeck (Caldbeck) once on a (in his) day,
 But now he's (he is) gone and he's far, far away,
 We shall ne'er (and we never) hear his horn in the morning.

'Verses 6, 7, 8 not usually used.
 Woodcock Graves, Circa 1825.'

Note: Andrew Rogers sings verses 1, 3, 5, 8, and chorus.

‘When I sing “John Peel”, I’m lucky to sing it, to be asked to sing it. [It’s] the only song that really rallies the crowd. They all know it. It’s a crowd rouser. That’s the one... There wasn’t a soul on that field [Hyde Park] who wasn’t singing it.’⁷

He identifies deeply with the song, which he describes as the ‘national anthem of field sports’, and yet he feels no affinity with John Peel himself, whom he pictures as ‘just a squire’.

Joan Davies, who is the chairperson of the Barlow Hunt Supporters Club, sees ‘John Peel’ as archetypal, harking back to a different way of life and yet connecting with the present. She argues that such songs are so successful not because they are cerebral, but rather because:

‘they tie into people’s emotions... like a crass pop song reminds you of your youth... some songs just take you there – whoosh!’⁸

Such expression resonates closely with John Blacking’s position statement that heads his essay on the significance of the music of the Black Christian churches in South Africa.

‘Music is non-referential and sensuous, and no claim can be made that it is directly political. But some music can become and be used as a symbol of group identity, regardless of its structure; and the structure of music can be such that the conditions required for its performance generate feelings and relationships between people that enable positive thinking and action in fields that are not musical’. (BLACKING 1995: 198).

Andrew Rogers is clearly aware of the emotional power of his song and for the Countryside Alliance ‘March March’ held in London on 1 March 1998 (which attracted in excess of 250,000), he tacked on the following few lines, which he adapted shamelessly from Ralph McTell’s ‘The Streets of London’:⁹

‘So how can you tell me it’s over
And say for me the sun won’t shine;
Let me take you by the hand and we’ll walk through
the Streets of London
We will show you something to make you change your mind.’

Michael Foster’s private members’ parliamentary bill to outlaw hunting ‘ran out of time’, on Friday 6 March 1998 at the Report Stage. The Labour government subsequently instigated ‘The Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs’, chaired by Lord Burns, which published its report on 12 June 2000.¹⁰ Previously the

⁷ Interview, 29 June 2000.

⁸ Interview, 30 June 2000.

⁹ Ralph McTell, *Streets*, 12-inch L.P., Warner Brothers, WB56105, 1975.

¹⁰ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales*, HMSO CM4763, June 2000.

Countryside Alliance had made its submission to the Inquiry (COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE 2000: 1–133). In answer to Question 9 of the terms of reference – ‘In what ways, and to what extent, does the existence of hunting with dogs contribute to or impair the social and cultural life of the countryside?’ – the following points were made (COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE 2000: 62–76):

- Hunting provides the social glue in many communities, because it provides a valid purpose for socialising.
- Hunts organise a constant round of social activities, which are a dependable feature of country life, around which many people’s lives are entirely structured. [27 examples are listed]
- The importance of the social network and sense of identity provided by hunting with dogs is ... paramount to remote communities ...

The Alliance stressed the contemporary importance of hunting to the culture of England and Wales by listing various items advertised in the *Hounds Magazine*. Five of the ten examples included refer to songs, typically *Songs of the Fell Packs* and *Hunting Songs from Country Voices*.

The campaign itself has helped to generate a number of publications directly associated with songs. George Bowyer, with thirty others, walked from Coldstream in Scotland to London as part of the 1997 rally. They were regularly joined, on a casual basis, by up to 200 supporters to give them encouragement. While driving north in his van, George was inspired to write a song for the walk, ‘The Guardians of the Land’, which was performed *en route* and later issued on CD.¹¹ It reached number 21 in the charts in October 1998, a not insignificant achievement for such a specialist item.

One day in May 1999 on the Lancaster Canal, Andrew Rogers and John Haigh joined James and Mary Holt, who were walking from Land’s End to John o’ Groats in support of the Countryside Alliance’s campaign: John notes: ‘As we walked we were inspired and developed the idea of recording a CD of country songs to raise money for their fund’.¹² The result, *A Lift on the Way*, includes songs performed by John Cocking, Martin Fitton, Jane Livingstone, William Noble, Wendy Pinkney, and Andrew Rogers – all members of the Pennine Concert Party. Mark Davies, who leads the party, comments: ‘The Pennine Fox Hounds haven’t a lot of money to give, but songs and singing is support in kind, a positive contribution. It’s a tradition. There’s one or two can speak well, like Ann Mallalieu, who can raise people, but you can sing a song and that can work just as well.’¹³

¹¹ George Bowyer and William McClintock Bunbury, *The Guardians of the Land*, CD produced by BOYS for the Countryside Alliance [no matrix number], 1998.

¹² *A Lift on the Way: A Collection of Country Songs to Celebrate James and Mary Holt’s Countryside Walk, Land’s End to John o’ Groats, in Aid of the Countryside Alliance*, CD privately produced by Andrew Rogers and John Haigh [no matrix number], 1999.

¹³ Interview, 30 June 2000.

Although the Burns Report accepted the social/cultural argument made by the Alliance with reference to comparatively remote areas, such as the Lake District, not surprisingly there was no mention of the significant part songs and singing have played in such communities.

Responding to the recommendations of the Burns Inquiry, in December 2000 the British Government introduced to Parliament legislation that proposed a choice of three outcomes – a total ban, a system of regulation, or self-regulation. The Hunting Bill¹⁴ was given a third reading in the House of Commons on 18 January 2001, when MPs voted, by a majority of 387 to 174, for an outright ban in England and Wales. However, the House of Lords did not agree with the Commons and voted by 317 to 68 for self regulation. This impasse was unresolved and the bill ran out of time when Parliament was dissolved as a result of the General Election having been called for 7 June 2001. The re-elected Labour Government has pledged in its second term of office to re-introduce yet another bill to ban hunting. It should be added that tensions in the countryside have further increased as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic that is plaguing livestock in certain areas, and this may significantly delay the introduction of legislation.

Unquestionably, the hunting crisis has brought rural communities together in England. Mounted packs from the South and Midlands of England have wholeheartedly embraced the singing traditions of the Pennine, and the singers have relished their new-found audiences and risen to the occasion. The voice they have been given has been maximised to great effect, whether it be to remind their audience of the rich heritage of hunting songs or to challenge their consensual worldview with the more contentious issues that have been brought into focus by the current situation. John Blacking wrote: 'performance is political in the sense that it may involve people in a powerful shared experience within the framework of their cultural experience and thereby make them more aware of themselves and of their responsibilities towards each other...' (BLACKING 1987: 98) In Mark Davies's mind there is no doubt that singing is stronger because of the Countryside Alliance's campaign, and that the Countryside Alliance's cause is stronger because singing has been incorporated into its campaign.

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¹⁴ 'The Hunting Bill', as brought from the House of Commons, 28 February 2001, HL Bill 32.

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