
Alive and kicking: the living tradition of English 'gallery' music

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In presenting this paper to the conference Ian Russell set out to introduce delegates to a sample of traditional carol singing drawn mainly from south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire. He considers the function and development of the tradition and makes observations regarding the style and manner of performance and its status among the musical elite in contradistinction to its local popularity as an enduring form of vernacular sacred singing. His approach is broadly ethnographic in that it incorporates the methodologies of a number of academic disciplines, including social and oral history, ethnomusicology and social anthropology, cultural geography, performance practice and hymnody. He does not make value judgements based on aesthetic grounds, nor does he indulge in pejorative terms such as 'degenerate' or 'corrupt'. His aim is to describe not prescribe, to be inclusive not exclusive. (At the conference this paper was supplemented with contemporary field recordings of the material, all of which are referred to in footnotes.)

Nicholas Temperley wrote in 1979 that the music of the Georgian country choir or west gallery choir should be regarded as 'a form of folk music, as it surely would have been considered had it survived in use until the present time'. He added, 'Although we can never experience it as a living tradition or hear an authentic performance, we can at least study the music in the written and printed forms that have survived' (Temperley, 1979, p. 162). Happily this music has not just survived but thrived as the cornerstone of countless village carol singing traditions, most notably in south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire (see Panel 1 overleaf), but also in isolated pockets in Nottinghamshire, east Yorkshire, Leicestershire, and parts of the West Country.

Village Carols

The project to record and document, synchronically and diachronically, the localised Christmas carol singing traditions of villages and communities in England, particularly in the South Pennines, has been titled 'Village Carols'. The research for this project, which was begun in 1969, is being assembled into a unique archive (see Russell, 1973, 1977). This comprises almost 1,000

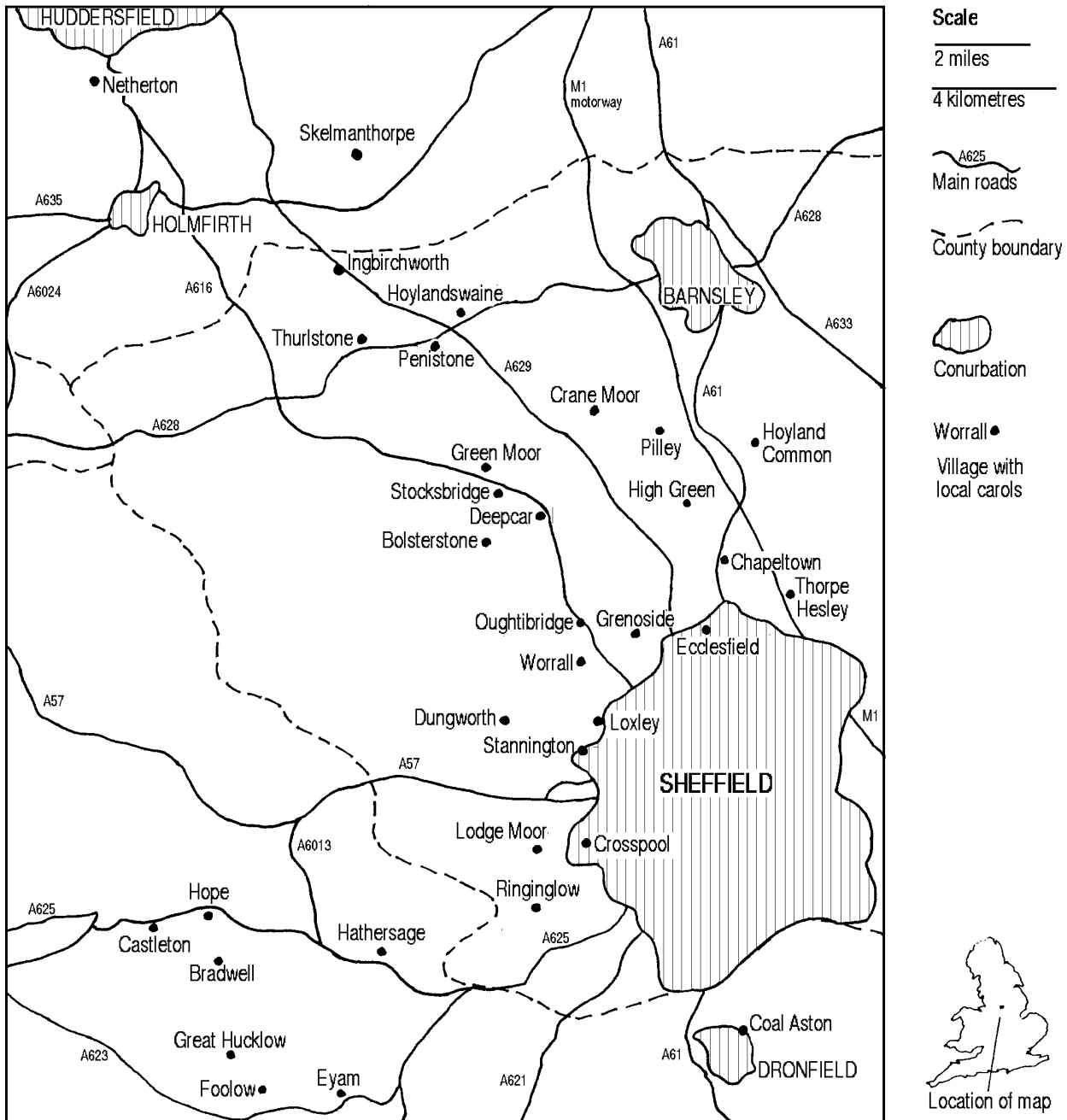
hours of audio-tape and an equivalent number of other items, including field recordings of carol singing, recorded interviews with carollers, carol manuscripts, copies of carol collections locally printed or of local provenance, broadsides, chapbooks and carol worksheets, video recordings, photographs, and fieldnotes. There is also a growing body of correspondence from many parts of the United Kingdom and abroad detailing experiences and memories of local carolling traditions. Village Carols currently has two archivists working part-time on the collection, one on the sound recordings, the other on the manuscript collection. Copies of the sound recordings are being deposited with the National Sound Archive of the British Library and the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language at the University of Sheffield. Funding is currently being sought to make the archive accessible to the public.

Running parallel with the archival work is a publications programme. Thus far recordings of the carol repertoires of seven communities together with detailed research have been issued as a cassette-book series and more are planned. These include Ecclesfield, Worrall, Ingbirchworth, and Oughtibridge from south Yorkshire, and Castleton, Hathersage and Foolow from the Derbyshire Peak District.¹ These recordings (some of which have received regional arts council funding) have helped to generate local interest and raised the awareness of the participants and others to the significance of the traditions. They have also helped to achieve national and international recognition for local carolling through features on BBC Radio 4, Granada Television, National Public Radio of America, *The New York Times*, *Natural History*, German State Radio (WDR), as well as reviews in the *Guardian* and on BBC's *Kaleidoscope*.² The latest publications, which include a CD, cassette, and a carol collection, result from the highly successful Festival of Village Carols held at Grenoside, 3 December 1994, which attracted

¹ Details of these can be found in the list of recordings at the end of the references.

² See, for example, *Natural History*, 12 (American Museum of Natural History, 1990), pp. 58–65, and *The New York Times*, 19 December 1993, p. 25.

Panel 1 'Carol country' around Sheffield



a capacity crowd of 430 singers and instrumentalists (see Russell, 1994; and the recording *A Festival of Village Carols*). This was featured on BBC Radio 3's *Music Matters*, the BBC North arts programme, and BBC Radio 2's *Folk on 2*. Village Carols is a non-profit-making organisation and any income generated supports further archival and recording work, as well as a number of local charities nominated by the participants.

Repertoire

Most of the carols that have been recorded are distinct from the largely Victorian repertoire of popular carols which are generally sung in church, broadcast on the media, or available on commercial recordings. The 'local' carols are usually distinguished by a core that dates back to the 18th century, some of which originated in the locality, and their tunes are sometimes described as 'curly' or 'repeating'. These carols are characterised by melismata, a fuguing section and the playing of

Panel 2 The twenty most popular carols in rank order

	Carol	No. of pubs recorded in	No. of recordings
1	Good News	20	42
2	Hail Smiling Morn	13	24
3	Jacob's Well	13	21
4	Liverpool	13	19
5	O Come All Ye Faithful	13	17
6	Back Lane	11	16
7	Diadem	11	15
8	Silent Night	10	15
9/10	How Beautiful upon the Mountains	10	13
9/10	Crimond (While Shepherds Watched)	10	13
11	Tyre Mill	10	12
13	Sweet Chiming Bells	9	15
14/15	A Song for the Time	9	12
14/15	Abroad for Pleasure	9	12
16	Malin Bridge	9	11
17	Lloyd (While Shepherds Watched)	8	9
18/19	Hark, Hark	7	9
18/19	The Mistletoe Bough	7	9
20	Spout Cottage	7	7

Source: Russell, 1973, table 4

symphonies between the verses. They are usually sung in two parts (treble and bass), which are referred to locally as 'firsts' and 'seconds', emphasising their contrapuntal nature. The treble singers normally include both men and women; occasionally a tenor part is sung, but rarely an alto or contralto part. These are the carols that, for the purposes of this conference, are referred to as belonging to the 'gallery tradition'.

In a survey of carol repertoires in South Yorkshire conducted in 1970 (see Panel 2), five out of the seven most popular carols were in the fuguing style and the first example was 'Number One'.¹ This particular recording was made at the Black Bull, in Ecclesfield. It is variously known as 'Hark Hark', 'Good News' or 'Swaine Hark' after the south Yorkshire village of Hoylandswaine near Penistone. The music has been attributed to John Hall, a blacksmith of Sheffield Park, who died in the poorhouse in 1794 (Mackerness, 1974).

¹ Example 1 was played, from the recording *A Song for the Time*.

Time and place of carol singing

In the south Pennines the most common location for the performance of these carols is the pub. The singers congregate on a particular lunchtime or evening on a weekly basis; for example, the Ecclesfield session is held on Thursday evenings from Armistice Day up until Christmas with a special session on Christmas Day at lunchtime. In other villages the season varies. At Hathersage they sing on several evenings from the week before Christmas, on Boxing Day lunchtime and finish on New Year's Day, whereas at Castleton they only sing on the Sunday evening before Christmas.

There are a number of groups of carollers whose tradition is based around their nonconformist chapel, as is the case at Netherton, south of Huddersfield. This group perambulates the village on the Sunday evening before Christmas, singing outside people's houses. A group from Coal Aston in Derbyshire make their perambulation on Christmas Eve, whereas the Foolow Singers only tour on Christmas Day itself. Up until the early 1980s both the Foolow and Netherton

groups had sung 'through the night', starting at midnight on Christmas Eve with 'Christians Awake' ('Stockport'), breaking for refreshments and finishing in the early morning at some auspicious landmark. In the case of Foolow, the carollers performed two verses of James Ellor's 'Diadem', said a prayer, and sang a setting of the Doxology (usually 'Old Hundredth') in front of the village cross.

Although all three groups mentioned above are chapel-based, in reality the carol singing is regarded as a community occasion such that the participants include several non-chapel members in their number. Here is a recording of the 'Singers' from Foolow singing their carol, 'Mortals Awake' to the accompaniment of a solo violin.¹ The words are by Samuel Medley (1782) and the setting is attributed to Jeremiah Ingalls of Andover in Massachusetts and was published as 'New Jerusalem' in the *Christian Harmony: or, Songster's Companion* (1805). Of neither of these attributions are the Foolow Singers aware. To them the carol is a part of their tradition and has been for as long as anyone can remember. It has been passed down, largely by oral means, and is usually performed from memory without music, although several manuscripts and transcriptions of the carol have been encountered among members of the community.

Organisation

In most cases the carols are sung informally, that is without music scores, without a conductor, without rehearsals, and without a programme. Membership of the group is defined solely by support, by enthusiasm, and by knowledge of the repertoire. There is nonetheless a loose hierarchical structure, such that there is a leader or leading group, usually defined by seniority or kinship, whose role is to keep the proceedings going according to the traditional pattern and to prevent anarchy. The leader of an unaccompanied group is sometimes known as the 'Striker' (a term that originates from striking a tuning fork) as it is he (or she) who is trusted to find the best pitch for the carol and for the singers in the party.

Accompaniment

As we have heard at Foolow, some of the groups sing to an accompaniment; the most common form is the electric organ, electronic keyboard or piano, though brass instruments and strings have also been encountered. The tradition of playing a

short musical interlude between the verses of the carols, known as the symphony, is kept up at some of the villages, most notably Worrall. This recording from the Blue Ball in the village features Lol Loy leading and accompanying their version of the carol 'The Star of Bethlehem'.² The words to this carol are by Henry Kirke White of Nottingham and were first published in 1812. The music is attributed to Thomas Dungworth, who is believed to have lived in the Sheffield district.

The Big Set, Worrall

The Worrall style of singing and repertoire owes much to the former itinerant band of carollers known as the Big Set, who were based in the village.³ This group was active from the latter half of the 19th century through to the Second World War. Lol's father, Len, had been a member and Lol had learnt to play the carols at the hand of one of the former leaders, Duncan Colley, from whom he had copied his own manuscripts. The all-male Big Set, which numbered about eight singers and five instrumentalists, originally sang in two parts, treble and bass, but by the 1900s had developed an alto part performed by boys and a tenor, in line with modern four-part harmony conventions. It is significant that neither of these two inner parts are considered essential to contemporary performance in the pub. A remarkable photograph from about 1906 shows a rather formal bowler-hatted group, proudly posed outside the Cock Inn at Oughtibridge, with three fiddles, a cello and a small double bass.

Understandably there are no recordings of the Big Set. However, we do know that their tempo was strict, fairly slow and deliberate, with the use of pauses and stresses for dramatic effect. Here is an excerpt of a recording from 1960 of John Dawson of Worrall playing the piano accompaniment to the carol 'New Celestial'.⁴ John's father led the Big Set before Duncan Colley and he himself sang with the group as a boy alto. It can be heard that John is doubling the bass in imitation of the strings (cello and double bass) with his left hand, covering the treble and alto voice parts with his right hand, filling in with chords, runs, arpeggios

¹ Example 2 was played, from the recording *On This Delightful Morn*.

² Example 3 was played, from the recording *Arise, Rejoice and Sing!*

³ For further information see the book to *Arise, Rejoice and Sing!*, pp. 37–40, and *A Festival of Village Carols: Sixteen Carols*, pp. 2–6.

⁴ Example 4 was played, from a recording in the archives of Village Carols. A recording of the carol 'New Celestial' can be heard on *To Celebrate Christmas*.

and passing notes, and bringing out the rhythm of the text with pauses and even syncopation. He plays entirely from memory or by ear and can transpose instantly to suit the singers.

Green Moor string players

Recent research into the carolling tradition at Green Moor near Stocksbridge in south Yorkshire has brought to light a group of string players led by Douglas Walton, who until recently accompanied their village carols on a tour of their locality. This recording of one of their carols, 'New Hark', is another setting of 'Hark Hark What News' and is also attributed to John Hall of Sheffield Park. I particularly want to draw your attention to the way the violins embellish and develop the tune, providing a polyphonic texture that is not simply reinforcing or accompanying the voice parts, but rather, in the manner of an obbligato, transcending the tune and giving it both energy and movement. Before we listen to this extraordinary recording, it is helpful to establish the melody line; to do this I would like to play an extract from a version of the same carol from Castleton sung by three women, Jessie Hall and Nellie Lampe (sisters), and Betty Bramwell, recorded at the Peak Hotel.¹

Here is the Green Moor recording that I made last year.² The group includes three first violins, two seconds, a viola and a cello. The group kept meticulous records of their outings in the past.³ One account book that dates from 1906 details the name of every singer and instrumentalist that took part, how long they had been a part of the group, every house visited, every carol sung, every penny collected and from whom, the weather conditions, any refreshments consumed, and who left early and with whom.⁴

Carol words

Already it is apparent that certain sets of words such as the anonymous 'Hark Hark What News' captured the popular imagination. In this cat-

egory are included Charles Wesley's 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing', James Montgomery's 'Angels from the Realms of Glory' and Nahum Tate's ubiquitous 'While Shepherds Watched'. Such words owe their widespread distribution to broadsides and chap-books devoted to carols such as *A Good Christmas Box*, published by G. Walters of Dudley in 1847, as well as to cheap hymn-books (words only) such as Hugh Bourne's *Small Hymn Book for the Use of the Primitive Methodists* of 1825 or Denham's *Selection; or, The Saints Melody* of 1837.

Returning to 'Hark Hark What News', closer examination of early sources reveals that there are at least two sets of words opening with the same couplet.⁵ This version from Beeston near Nottingham is part of the repertoire of a chapel party, known as the Beeston Methodist Carol Choir. They call it 'Drop Hark' and it was recorded outside Sainsbury's supermarket at Christmas 1994. They later sang it inside McDonald's.⁶ It is a version of William East's 'An Hymn for Christmas Day', published in his *Voice of Melody*, Book 1 (1750).⁷ Needless to say, the Beeston singers had no knowledge of its age or its origin. Versions of this same carol have been recorded in several other villages in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

Diffusion of carol tunes

Just as versions of the same text are encountered in different parts of the country, this is also true for versions of the same tune. Different versions of the same tune for 'Hark Hark What News' were published by Davies Gilbert in 1823 and by William Sandys in 1833 (McGrady, 1993, pp. 50–3). In 1994 at Green Moor, I recorded the carollers performing their own version of this same tune which they call 'Old Hark'.⁸ Other equally remarkable examples of carol diffusion can be cited. For example, the versions of 'The Star of Bethlehem'

¹ Example 5 was played, from the recording *The Bells of Paradise*.

² Example 6 was played, from a recording in the archives of Village Carols.

³ In 1979 the Green Moor singers appeared on television in a BBC *Look North* Christmas special, a proud moment tempered by the fact that they were obliged to wear Dickensian costume and that none of their local repertoire was chosen for the actual broadcast, but instead 'O Come All Ye Faithful'.

⁴ Copies of these account books are in the archives of Village Carols.

⁵ See 'Birth of Christ' and 'Saviour's Birth' in *A Good Christmas Box* (Dudley: G. Walters, 1847), reprinted edition, edited by M. Raven and J. Raven (Wolverhampton: Wolverhampton Folk Song Club, 1967), pp. 4 and 6.

⁶ Example 7 was played, from a recording in the archives of Village Carols.

⁷ A modern transcription of this hymn is available in Adobe Acrobat pdf format from the Gallery Music website: <http://www.sgpublishing.co.uk/gm/music/East.html>

⁸ This is the name given to the tune by Erik Routley in *The University Carol Book* (1961) at no. 39(ii). He also provides an alternative tune from Leicestershire (no. 31(I)) to the same text. [CT]

which are sung by the carollers of Padstow in Cornwall (see Worden, 1965, p. 8) and by the Coal Aston carollers from Derbyshire are of the same carol, yet neither group has any printed copy or original nor an explanation of how this might be. The version of 'Angels from the Realms of Glory' sung at the Blue Ball in Worrall (included in *Arise, Rejoice and Sing!*) and formerly sung by the Big Set is somewhat fuller than the version of the same carol which is included in the *New Oxford Book of Carols* (no. 96(iv)), which comes from Redruth in Cornwall and was published in an 1889 collection. Moreover, different versions of this same carol occur in other parts of the West Country, in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, as well as in south Yorkshire. In fact, the carol was composed by William Matthews of Nottingham (shortly after 1816) and subtitled 'A Christmas Anthem'.¹

The fact that this carol setting originated in the east Midlands helps to dispel the myth that in the early 19th century migratory Cornish tin miners in their search for work brought their carols to the North. Such a simplistic hypothesis takes no account of the fact that villages in counties as diverse as Lancashire, Sussex and Warwickshire also had similar carolling traditions. A far more probable explanation for this diffusion is that 'Angels from the Realms of Glory' along with other music, song and oral tradition was carried from village to village by itinerant nonconformist preachers and singing teachers, by disbanded soldiers in search of employment in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, and by village labourers turned off the land as a result of the enclosure movement. Whereas the oral tradition was supported by the popular cheap broadside press as far as the words of the carols were concerned, the music was largely circulated by memory or through handwritten manuscripts, as the printed music scores were very expensive and well beyond the means of most artisan musicians; for example, John Foster's *Sacred Music*, published in York about 1820, cost a guinea (£1.05) for the two volumes.

Musical scores and manuscripts

The attitude of contemporary carol singers to printed carol texts and musical scores is similarly ambivalent. They like to own them but not necessarily to use them to sing or play from. In some villages, such as Hathersage and Thorpe Hesley, the singers go to the trouble of printing out copies of the words of their carols, but these are primarily intended to support the singers who are new to the session and unfamiliar with the reper-

toire. In Oughtibridge the singers have reproduced their words on a flipchart to make it easy for anyone to join in.

There are many family music manuscripts of the carols in villages such as Worrall and Thorpe Hesley, and these are very highly valued but rarely used to perform from, except by practising carol instrumentalists. Lol Loy plays from his second manuscript which he transposed down to suit the voices of the pub singers. When he wanted to make a copy of Duncan Colley's manuscript, it took a great deal of effort on Lol's part to persuade Duncan to allow him to borrow it, even though the two families were close friends and neighbours.² At Green Moor, Douglas Walton's father Sidney possessed a fine manuscript copy of their local carols, but Douglas still had to make his own. One autumn, when Douglas was in his teens, his father would wake him up at 6 o'clock every morning and Douglas would be obliged to copy out a carol before he started work at 9.00 a.m. in the offices of the local steelworks.³

Origins of carols

There is a popular misconception concerning the origins of the local carols among most carolling communities. This concerns the extent to which a village repertoire may be considered unique, in that the bulk of it had originated locally. The Thorpe Hesley carols provide a fairly typical example (see Panel 3). In the first instance, the repertoire has a lot in common with the repertoires of other nearby south Yorkshire villages, such that half of the Thorpe carols are also sung at Ecclesfield. It has been established that a number of the carol tunes had their origins in the wider region of Sheffield, north Derbyshire and south Yorkshire, but an even greater number had their origins in parts of England remote to the village. All that is left is a group of three or four carols about which little is known and these may or may not have local origins. Of course, what gives any set of village carols uniqueness is the local provenance of the carols, the context of their performance, the way the carols have evolved locally in tradition, and the manner of their performance. It is right and proper that a community should feel a sense of ownership for their carols and understandable that local pride would lead them to believe that ownership should imply origination.

¹ I am grateful to Sally Drage for this reference.

² Copies of the Loy and Colley manuscript books are in the archives of Village Carols.

³ A copy of this manuscript is in the archives of Village Carols.

Panel 3 The Christmas carol repertoire of Thorpe Healey

FIRST LINE	TITLE	Masons - Words	Red Lion - Words	Sportsman - Words	Hope Chpl - Words	Thorpe St - Words	Church (Walsh?) MS	Almond MS	Burglin MS	Chesman MS	Cooper MS	Law MS	Renshaw Collection	Waller MS	Hope Chpl Treble MS	Hope Chpl Alto MS	Hope Chpl Tenor MS	Hope Chpl Bass MS	In Oral Tradition	Source of Words	Source of Music
1 A Charge to Keep I Have	Southport	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Charles Wesley (1762)	J. Davies (1869)	
2 All Hail the Power	Crown Him	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Edward Perronet (1779)	Laban Solomon (1842-1903)	
3 All Hail the Power	Shaw Lane	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Edward Perronet (1779)	Richard Thomas (?)	
4 Angels from the Realms	Olivet	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	James Montgomery (1816)	G. Hirst	
5 Angels from the Realms	Prospect	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	James Montgomery (1816)		
6 Angels from the Realms	World's Jubilee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	James Montgomery (1816)		
7 A Song for a Time		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Alfred Scott Gatty (?)	A. S. Gatty (?) (1847-1918)	
8 At Jacob's Well	Jacob's Well	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Hugh Bourne(?)	James Leach (1762-1797)	
9 Awake My Harp	Old Israel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Richard Furness (1791-1857)		
10 Bright and Joyful	Malin Bridge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	James Montgomery (1819)		
11 Christians Awake Salute		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	John Byrom (before 1750)	John Wainwright (1750)	
12 Come Singers Make Bold	Merry Christmas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Reginald Spofforth (1810)	
13 Hail Smiling Morn		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		John Hall (d.1794)	
14 Hark Hark What News	Good News	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
15 Hark the Herald Angels	Mansions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Charles Wesley (1739)		
16 Hark the Herald Angels	Martin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Charles Wesley (1739)		
17 Hark the Herald Angels	Ring the Bells	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Charles Wesley (1739)		
18 Hark to the Ringing	Christmas Bells	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
19 Hark What Means	Wondrous Story	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		J. Cawood (1819)	
20 How Beautiful upon the Mts		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Isaiah, 11i, 7	
21 I Will Arise	Prodigal Son	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Luke xv, 18-19	
22 Joy to the World	Mount of Olives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		R.A. Smith (c.1827)	
23 Lo The Eastern Magi	Star of Bethlehem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		(arr. George James)	
24 Messiah was Born	Christmas Morn	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
25 Mortals Awake	Pentonville	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		William Marsh (c.1800)	
26 Ring Out Ye Bells	Ring On	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
27 While Shepherds Watched	(Buckley)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Nahum Tate (1700)	
28 While Shepherds Watched	Foster	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Nahum Tate (1700)	
29 While Shepherds Watched	Liverpool	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Nahum Tate (1700)	
30 While Shepherds Watched	Lyngham	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Nahum Tate (1700)	
31 While Shepherds Watched	Northrop	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Nahum Tate (1700)	
32 While Shepherds Watched	October	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Nahum Tate (1700)	

It is not surprising therefore that local attributions for carols often turn out to be incorrect. There are, for example, several accounts from the 1850s of George Dawson (1840–1899), a currier from Eyam, pricking out the notes in a fit of inspiration for a setting of ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing’ on the leather hide he was working on (Daniel, 1958, pp. 26–7). However, his authorship cannot be endorsed as this setting has been found in a manuscript from Poole in Dorset, where it is called ‘Newtons or St Pauls’, which predates Dawson’s birth by four years.¹ In Foolow we have already been introduced to one carol, the tune of which has exotic and remote origins in America. Nonetheless there is little doubt about another carol in their repertoire, ‘Marshall’. This setting of Kirke White’s words is by George Maltby, a leadminer, who lived in the village in the 1820s and 1830s and whose manuscript is still in existence, treasured by one of his descendants.² Permission to photocopy the manuscript was only granted on condition that the owner’s daughter came with me as a guarantee of its safe return.

Eclectic repertoires

The local repertoires are by nature eclectic. Alongside the core of fuguing carols, there are a number of popular sacred and secular songs of various types, including glees, such as ‘Hail Smiling Morn’, anthems such as ‘The Prodigal Son’, parlour ballads such as the ‘The Mistletoe Bough’, and favourite common-metre hymn tunes such as ‘Crimond’, ‘Lloyd’, ‘Belmont’ and ‘Edgeware’, which are invariably sung to ‘While Shepherds Watched’. There are also carols that have originated with other seasonal house visiting or mumming customs, such as ‘Six Jolly Miners’ from Ecclesfield³ or ‘Another Year Has Passed Away’ from Dungworth.⁴ Some of the popular carols readily find acceptance, especially ‘O Come All Ye Faithful’ and ‘Silent Night’. The singers are not immune to mass-media influences and several groups have absorbed, for example, Harry Belafonte’s ‘Mary’s Boy Child’ or ‘Amazing Grace’ (sung to ‘While Shepherds Watched’, of course) into their repertoire.⁵

¹ Martin MS from Poole, Dorset, 1836. This reference was kindly supplied by A. D. Townsend.

² Example 8 was played, from the recording *On this Delightful Morn*; the manuscript is reproduced in facsimile in the book, pp. 18–19.

³ See *A Song for the Time*, ‘Ritual’.

⁴ A recording of this carol made on 1 January 1995 is in the archives of Village Carols.

⁵ An example is included in the recording *While Shepherds Watched*.

Perhaps what is most remarkable is that many villages include as ‘carols’ items that either have no reference to Christmas or no sacred reference at all.⁶ A prime example of the first category is ‘Jacob’s Well’, and ‘Hail Smiling Morn’ fits the second. It would seem that, because other seasonal occasions for singing, sacred and secular, have largely disappeared, the Christmas repertoire has inherited a number of favourite items that the community does not wish to abandon. They have become ‘carols’ by usage and by association over many years and are central elements of the traditions in which they are sung. If time allows I should like to play for you an example of the anthem, ‘Prodigal Son’, from the Fountain at Ingbirchworth.⁷

Performance style

One aspect that contributes towards the distinctiveness of each village’s tradition is performance style. Doris Coates, the grand-daughter of George Dawson of Eyam, told me that when she was a little girl before the First World War, she would stay awake on Christmas Eve to hear the village carollers start their rounds at midnight with ‘Christians Awake’. She describes their singing as quite unlike anything she had heard in church or chapel. It was robust, dramatic, flamboyant and exuberant, nearer to opera than hymn singing. The singers sang their parts as if they were singing solo rather than harmony. Certainly the style of singing encountered in the pubs matches this description, as we have heard at Worrall, Ecclesfield and Ingbirchworth. Such features of musical expression as light and shade, diminuendo and pianissimo, are rarely encountered.

Scholarly prejudice?

When I first began researching local village carolling traditions, it became clear that the absence of documentation was not accidental but largely due to a conscious ‘hands-off’ approach adopted by scholars of classical music, church music and folk music. It is tempting to suggest that this amounted to a conspiracy of silence. The reasons for the contempt in which most classical and

⁶ The inclusion of such material by carol singers was noted by the Rev. John Egerton, 24 December 1858, at Burwash, Sussex (Wells, 1992, p. 46). They included: ‘Hail Smiling Morn’, ‘The Red Cross Knight’, ‘Foresters Round the Cheerful Horn’, ‘Life’s a Bumper’, ‘A Country Son’ and just one carol – ‘While Shepherds Watched’. [CT]

⁷ Example 9 was not played, from *While Shepherds Watched*.

church musicians held this carol music have been recited at length elsewhere (Gammon, 1981, pp. 62–88). This attitude was made clear to me from my first encounter with a Sheffield composer, Leonard Horton from Stannington, in February 1970. He had a very low opinion of the carol music with which he had been brought up, describing the melodies as 'poor and homespun' and the harmonies as 'crude'. By contrast he was more charitable in his opinion of the words, in which he found 'great beauty'. Of course, classical musicians were judging the music of the carols, as Nicholas Temperley has pointed out (1979, p. 202), according to a set of rules and conventions with which the composers of the carol music were unfamiliar – their criticism was based on a form of 'presentism'.

The reasons for the folk-music scholar's contempt for local carols, especially in the First Revival, is best understood through Cecil Sharp's attitude. He deliberately excluded the carols from his definition of folk-song because they were 'composed' (Sharp, [1907] 1972, p. 125). (Folk-song to be genuine had to have been created by some form of 'immaculate conception' or at least as a result of mass group therapy.) Sharp could not reconcile his definition of folk-song to a tradition of part singing, despite the fact that the first folk-singers (James and Tom Copper from Rottingdean in Sussex), whose songs were featured in the first journal of the newly formed Folk Song Society in 1899, sang in parts (Lee, 1899, pp. 1–26). Sharp saw the existence of manuscripts at odds with his idealistic beliefs about the purity of oral tradition, ignoring the positive role that the broadside press had played in the diffusion of the song tradition which he so highly prized. Furthermore, it was a mistaken belief that the carols were strictly localised and not widely distributed that caused him to discount them. The fact that the carol traditions demonstrate in abundance his three tenets of folk music – continuity, variation and selection – seem

to have been overlooked (Sharp, [1907] 1972, pp. 21–41). Thus the same carol can occur in markedly different versions across the area. Some exhibit variations in the melody; some have the same words to different tunes; others have the same tune to different words; variations in the words or the verses are also evident. All the repertoires demonstrate the effects of the existence of a longstanding oral tradition.

Conclusion

In this whistle-stop synopsis that I have attempted, I have tried to deal only in facts based on my own researches and experiences. Within the contexts that the carolling traditions are found, they are extraordinarily popular. It is 'standing room only' at many of the pub sessions and participants frequently have to queue to get a place. Moreover, there is no shortage of new recruits. My estimation of the numbers who actually participate in the traditions around Sheffield runs into several thousands (more than watch county cricket at Abbeydale, for example). This popularity should not be dismissed, for it tells us that vernacular sacred music of 18th-century origins can stand the test of time; it gives us clear examples of the repertoire which have endured; it demonstrates the ways in which the music has changed, to make it more comfortable for the users; it tells us about the performance style that has been passed down with the music, like nothing else can, because we can hear it with our ears; it tells us that such traditions are eclectic not purist, and that the most successful are those that are not hung up with issues to do with religion, sectarianism, temperance, fundraising or even historical re-enactment. The singers keep up their carolling traditions because they love their carols; they want to celebrate them, and they value the feeling of fellowship and community that such occasions engender.

