

Pipe dreaming? Musical expressions of “Northumbrian-ness”

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Tunes Travel



<http://comptondale.org.uk/humanities/TunesWeb.pdf>

Boundaries and Diversity



Public Perceptions



A Recipe for Northumbrian-ness

- n Noble Savages :
 - n The Border reivers
 - n Bob Cranky
- n Ethereal Cheviot landscapes
- n Celtic saints
- n Winding gear and shipyard cranes

Cross-fertilization

- n Rural and urban traditions intermingle
- n Jack Armstrong's Barnstormers play
Geordie Ridley

<http://www.asallive.com/archive/detail.asp?id=A1000007>

Musical particularity

- The “rant” step
- Rapper dance
- The only English bagpipe to have continuity of tradition



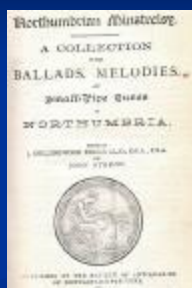
A Question of Patronage?

- Who called us Northumbrian?
 - Ritson stuck to counties
 - John Bell - Northern Bards
 - Jamey Allan – “our Northumbrian minstrel”
 - Ned Corvan provides the first clear vernacular reference?
 - The “Lit and Phil”/Society of Antiquaries as “new Northumbrians”



The Northumbrian Minstrelsy

- Catalyst: Algernon, 4th Duke of Northumberland
- Ancient Melodies Committee
- Eventually compiled by Bruce and Stokoe and published in 1882



A regional particularity: Print and oral sources intermingle.

- Border Ballads
- Tunes from earlier collections (eg Peacock’s *Favourite Tunes*)
- Songs from earlier collections
- Songs from chapbooks and broadsides
- Recent material

Improving culture

- Bowdlerized words
- “Beautified” tunes
- Bruce: “*Young men so trained will ... be able to resist the vicious excitements which ... lead them to ruin.*”

Piping Contests

- Newcastle Town Hall, 1877
- Won by Thomas Clough (one of several generations of piping Cloughs):

- Thomas Clough c1760-18??
- Henry Clough 1789-1842
- Thomas Clough 1823-1885
- Henry Clough 1855-1936
- Thomas Clough 1881-1964
- Thomas Clough 1918-1987



Composite photograph, 1920s, this print from C Ornston and J Say, *The Clough Family of Newcastle* (Northumbrian Pipers' Society, Morpeth, 2000)

Continuous tradition – a broad church

- Joe Wilson; Geordie Ridley; Alexander Barrass; Tommy Armstrong
- Early recording stars:-
 - Catcheside Warrington
 - Harry Nelson
 - J C Scatter



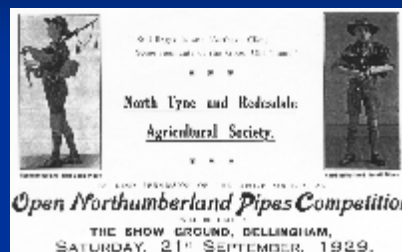
Revivals and Continuities

- North of England Musical Tournament begins 1919
- Adjudicators include Vaughan Williams & Gustav Holst
- Sword and Morris Dances adjudicated by Cecil Sharp
- Northumbrian pipes contests 1920 onwards, judged by:
 - 1920-1924 Richard Mowat
 - 1925 onwards Tom Clough
- Amateuism

The Northumbrian Pipers' Society

- Inaugural meeting 5th October 1928
- Key figures drawn from Society of Antiquaries
 - GVB Charlton
 - William Cocks
 - Gilbert Askew
- 'Northumberland' or 'Northumbrian'?
- Pedagogy and Participation

The 'Half-Long' Pipes



A system of informal tutelage

Mr Billy Pigg, himself one of the great pipers, recalls how, when he was about eighteen years old, he would cycle on Sunday evenings from Blagdon to Tom [Clough]'s home at Newsham where he would find about twenty other pipers assembled. The sessions used to start about six o'clock and go on until half past ten. First of all the visitors would take turns at playing and Tom would listen, then when every one else had finished Tom, either alone or with his father, would put on the pipes and play for two hours or more while his listeners remained spell-bound.

Foster Charlton, *Pipers of Pipes*, (draft c1964, TWA 924/182-195b)

The Kennedy North Controversy

- *North Mail*, 1928
- Is revival necessary when the tradition is still living?
- Gillies Whittaker: 'the most musical race in the world' ?



Venerating the Landscape

n Jack Armstrong –
'Buttered Peas' becomes
'Border Fray'

n Chris Ormston –
'plagued by images of
shepherds, plaids and
dressed sticks'.



Networks and Assimilation

n Joe Hutton
n Will Atkinson
n Will Taylor



Jack Elliott

Three versions of musical 'Northumbrian-ness'

1. The romantic vision of a cultural elite
2. The product of pragmatic patronage
3. The soundtrack of a living (as well as imagined) community.