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# **Making Traditions | Practising Folk**

*Contemporary folk performance in the Northwest of England: a practice-led enquiry.*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**February 2014**

[Partially redacted in 2018 for the reasons of data protection]

<b>Contents</b>	
<b>Figures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Abstract:</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction:</b>	<b>12</b>
“The Voyage Out”: Re-thinking folk, re-thinking research	
<b>Chapter 1.</b>	<b>42</b>
An introduction to folk and making	
Case Study 1: The Long Company: making and “invented tradition”	<b>47</b>
Case Study 2: <i>Conversation Hats</i> : “thinking through making” and “revival”	<b>70</b>
: Outcomes	<b>111</b>
<b>Chapter 2.</b>	<b>116</b>
From personal practice to relational practice	
Case Study 3: <i>Bear Dance</i> : thinking through making an invented tradition	<b>122</b>
: Outcomes	<b>136</b>
Case Study 4: <i>Rose Queen</i> : collaborative practices of site-specific revival	<b>138</b>
: Outcomes	<b>179</b>
Case Study 5: <i>Sewing Difference</i> : towards a collaborative practice-led	<b>185</b>
<b>Chapter 3.</b>	<b>208</b>
Research	
: Outcomes	<b>214</b>
An artistic ethnomusicology?	
Case Study 6: <i>Lower Withington Royalties</i> : testing a novel approach	<b>222</b>
: Outcomes	<b>261</b>
<b>Conclusions:</b>	<b>268</b>
“The Voyage Home”	
<b>Postscript</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Appendices:</b>	
Appendix 1: “ <i>Et in Orcadia Ego</i> ”: Field materials towards an ethnography of girls’ carnival morris dancing.	<b>317</b>
Appendix 2: <i>Making Traditions   Practising Folk</i> Exhibition Guide.	<b>326</b>
Appendix 3: DVD footage of exhibition	<b>340</b>

## **Figures**

The images in this thesis serve two distinct but complementary functions. Some are illustrative, intended to support theory and offer clarification of events and processes detailed within the text, and these are numbered, Fig. 1, 2, 3 etc. Other images function differently, as independent evocations of my creative practice. These are not numbered, but rely instead on brief written captions which aim to give the reader a sense of the research process and its outcomes, but without prescribing a specific meaning.

In addition, an exhibition guide detailing the material artworks made available at the PhD examination appears in Appendix 2 of this text.

All photographs were taken by the author, unless otherwise stated.

## Illustrations

### Introduction:

Fig 0.1. A preliminary diagram of “expanded ethnomusicology”

### Case study 1:

- Fig 1.1. The Long Company, (2012)
- Fig 1.2. Detail of The Long Company costumes by Annie Dearman (2011)
- Fig 1.3. Detail of The Long Company headdress – ‘The Devil’ (2011)
- Fig 1.4. Performer's eye-view inside 'The Devil' headdress (2011)
- Fig 1.5. The Long Company in performance at The Bridge Inn, Ripponden (2011)
- Fig 1.6. The Long Company musicians (2011)

### Case study 2:

- Fig 2.1. *Conversation Hats* by Lucy Wright, worn by Lymm Morris at Lymm Rushbearing (2013)
- Fig 2.2. Oughtrington Morris Men (1899) Morris Ring Photographic Archive
- Fig 2.3. ‘Lymm Morris Dancers’ (1904) from a series of ‘6 Coloured Post Cards of Lymm’: photograph by C. E. Ardern, Lymm, Cheshire.
- Fig 2.4. Statham Lads Morris Team (1923) Morris Ring Photographic Archive
- Fig 2.5. Lymm Rushbearing, c.1840 – York Art Gallery collections
- Fig 2.6. Middleton Morris Dancers (1885) Morris Ring Photographic Archive
- Fig 2.7. Detail of Andrew’s Thelwall Morris hat (2011)
- Fig 2.8. Detail of Andrew’s Lymm Morris hat (2011)
- Fig 2.9. Andrew White at home (2011)
- Fig 2.10. Detail of Rob’s Lymm Morris hat (2011)
- Fig 2.11. Assorted morris hats (2011)
- Fig 2.12. Rob Pracy at home (2011)
- Fig 2.13. Detail of Steve’s Lymm Morris hat (2011)
- Fig 2.14. Detail of Steve’s Thelwall Morris hat (2011)

- Fig 2.15. Steve Guest at home (2011)
- Fig 2.16. Detail of Henry's Lymm Morris hat (2011)
- Fig 2.17. Henry Addison at home (2011)
- Fig 2.18. Lymm Morris at The Star in Lymm (2013)
- Fig 2.19. *Conversation Hats* in progress, by Lucy Wright (2011)
- Fig 2.20. Article in the Warrington Guardian (2013)

Case study 3:

- Fig 3.1. Making with Annie (2012)

Case study 4:

- Fig 4.1. Manley Park Rose Queen Festival Programme 1966
- Fig 4.2. Janet Robertson, nee Smith as Manley Park Rose Queen (1966)
- Fig 4.3. Janet Robertson today (2013)
- Fig 4.4. Girl Guides at the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival (date unknown)
- Fig 4.5. Girl Guides at the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival (date unknown)
- Fig 4.6. Crowning at Manley Park Rose Queen Festival (date unknown)
- Fig 4.7. Morris Dancers at the Manley Park Rose Festival (date unknown)
- Fig 4.8. Guides designing dresses (2013)
- Fig 4.9. Guides designing dresses 2 (2013)
- Fig 4.10. Pipe-cleaner crown
- Fig 4.11. Dress design: Megan (2013)
- Fig 4.12. Dress design: Eva (2013)
- Fig 4.13. Dress design: Zara (2013)
- Fig 4.14. Design development: Lucy Wright (2013)
- Fig 4.15. Design development 2: Lucy Wright (2013)
- Fig 4.16. Design development 3: Lucy Wright (2013)
- Fig 4.17. Detail "crown" making (2013)
- Fig 4.18. Programme 1: Zara (2013)
- Fig 4.19. Programme 2: Alesha (2013)
- Fig 4.20. Article in the Manchester Evening News (2013)

Case study 5:

Fig 5.1. Model dress given to the garment makers (2012)

Case study 6:

- Fig 6.1. Orcadia Juniors' morris dancing practice (2013)
- Fig 6.2. Lyn and Mike Booth at home in Oldham (2013)
- Fig 6.3. Team photograph of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers, 1955 (2012)
- Fig 6.4. Medals belonging to Samantha Hamer, her mother and aunt (2013)
- Fig 6.5. Orcadia Tinies at ETACCO End of Season Championships (2013)
- Fig 6.6. Orcadia Morris Dancers (2012) Photograph used with permission from Champ News online.
- Fig 6.7. Valencia Seniors at ETACCO End of Season Championships (2013)
- Fig. 6.8. Samantha wearing her old troupe waistcoat (2012)
- Fig. 6.9. Samantha in her studio (2013)
- Fig 6.10. Lower Withington dress in progress (2013)

## Dedication

*Making Traditions | Practising Folk* is dedicated to my uncle, the organologist and folk musician, John Wright, who passed away during the writing of this thesis.

He would have hated it...

(...but might secretly have been quite proud!)

With many thanks also to everybody, too many to name, who have helped me in this work.

## Abstract



Orcadia Morris Dancers at the ETACCO World Championships (2013)

This practice-led research is about contemporary folk performance in the Northwest of England. It draws on my academic background in ethnomusicology and personal practices as a folk performer and maker, expanded and developed in and through this project. In addition to this written thesis, it contains a body of arts-based outcomes including; garments and apparel, collaborative performances, photography that documents folk as a practice of making (Appendix 2, and interspersed throughout the text) and a DVD showcasing highlights of my final exhibition at the People's History Museum in Manchester, in April 2014 (Appendix 3). My pluralistic approach aims towards complementarity, no single outcome taking precedence within the research, but rather emphasising or improving the qualities of the others.

The research takes as its starting point Dave Harker's call for a new way to handle folk materials (Harker, 1985) and the notion of an *artistic turn* for ethnomusicology

research (Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009). Cognisant that the parallel and historically symbiotic relationship between folk performance and ethnomusicology has led some scholars, such as Philip Bohlman, to suggest that the latter actually resists newness (Bohlman 2008), I draw on theories of cultural improvisation by Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (2007) to consider ways in which folk performance might be reoriented forwards - instead of backwards - as something generative and not simply repetitive.

My key questions concern the intersection of folk performance, material practice and place-making, and the most apposite ways of exploring them as a researcher and maker. This has developed my practice from “thinking-through-making,” to making together, and aims towards a way of working that “does not turn away” from research participants during or after the fieldwork phase (Ingold, 2007: 28). Viewing performance as a site in between two main streams of practice-led scholarship, artistic research and arts-based enquiry, my approach builds on the extant practice-led elements of music research (e.g. Small’s “musicking”: 1998 and Baily’s “performance-as-a-research-technique”: 2001) to explore what ethnomusicology, distinct within the social sciences, might have to offer to debates around art as knowledge.

The broadest goal of my project is to demonstrate the potential of artistic research as a rigorous, generative model for augmenting ethnomusicology and not merely a convenient means to illustrate theory. While I began this work with a practice as a folk performer, my project brings out for me the artistic practice inherent in folk via making, simultaneously revealing gaps in current approaches and suggesting one possible way in which to proceed.

The main contributions to knowledge are my use of an *artistic research* approach in an ethnomusicological study, and resulting materials towards original ethnographies of selected folk performances, including girls' carnival morris dancing (Appendix 1). The inclusion of carnival performance into the canon of British folk scholarship is potentially transformational, making an overdue case that current approaches to the identification of *tradition* are more strongly aesthetically led – influenced by how a performance looks – than has previously been acknowledged.

### **“Making traditions”**

1. processes of creating, developing and maintaining a tradition
2. the transmission of specific generative material practices

### **“Practising folk”**

1. verb: a method for researching folk performance via making
2. noun: those engaged in creative practice (especially those who might not primarily consider themselves artists or performers)

## Introduction: “The Voyage Out<sup>1</sup>”

### Re-thinking folk, re-thinking research

#### Prologue

Books are but so many telephones preserving the lore of the Folk, or more often burying it and embalming it. For, after all, we are the Folk as well as the rustic, though their lore may be other than ours, as ours will be different from that of those that follow us.

(Jacobs, 1893: 237)

What we think of as “folklore”... is only a small part of the folklore of modern society.

(Trubshaw, 2002: 167)

Joseph Jacobs famously said it in 1893 and Bob Trubshaw said it again - more quietly - in 2002: that loaded and evocative notion, *folk*, is more complex and more contemporaneous than it is usually given credit for.

However, despite a “painful” redefinition of academic folklore studies since the 1960s (Bennett, 1993: 77), and the current fashion for capitalised and revitalised *-Folk* as a commercial prefix, the term remains slippery, elusive and frequently misunderstood. It is easily recognisable, we presume, but it proves difficult to pin down.

We can glimpse its contradiction in the narrow seam of popular depictions of *the*

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<sup>1</sup> The subtitle, “voyage out,” borrows directly from Peter Elbow’s “loop writing process” (1981), and in spirit from Kathleen Coessens, Darla Crispin and Anne Douglas’ “setting sail” metaphor (2009): both of which make the case for proceeding into creative practice without a predetermined destination.

*English folk arts* in contemporary culture<sup>2</sup>; from those glib and grinning portrayals of “quaint”, “ancient” customs on the local news, to inter-changeably idyllic, Lawrentian scenes of maypoles and morris dancers rolled out by media executives to illustrate some nostalgic or jingoistic point. Likewise, in folk clubs and folk festivals across the country, performances of what are invariably presumed to be “old songs and tunes” underlines the insistence that folk is to be understood as something inherently *of the past*: or at the very least, existing at a remove from everyday, contemporary life.

Because where folk “survives,” it is to be considered a curiosity, tied to some conception of primitivism, peasantry and potential salaciousness made popular by post-Romantic artists and writers. Jo Ellison’s surprisingly apposite feature in UK Vogue (July 2011), published during the writing of this thesis and titled “Merrie England,” spoke to the seductively ambiguous collectivism of “traditional” folk in bucolic tones. Posing fashion models and professional folk performers together in awkwardly styled rustic garments (a liberal mix of “authentic” and designerly interpretation), it asserted that folk is currently *de rigueur*, a possible stand-in for a kind of unchanging, earthy, non-corporate English identity, simultaneously penetrating the dual, perpetually-innovating industries of music and fashion. The by-line asked the questions supposed to be on everybody’s lips:

[W]ho, or what is folk? Is it a school of music? Or membership of an ancient guild? Are its practitioners simply weirdos – with an unnatural fetish for beards?”

But it is not just popular understandings of folk that are rooted in a distinctly Victorian (in)sensibility, but some scholarly ones too. The refreshingly

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<sup>2</sup> (for it is so often visualised)

unsentimental folk historian, Georgina Boyes, muses that despite being roundly discredited, the Survivals theory of ancient, pagan origins for many folk performances “is still flourishing in a number of areas of scholarship,” (Boyes, 1990, 2012: 199). Another thesis might be to consider the psychological imperative for the proliferation of this inclusively appealing fiction, this *metafolklore*, as Mat Levine has named it (Levine, 2011), but that is not my intention here. Instead, I am interested in the fixedness of the representation itself, its apparent lack of propensity to change – or to appear to change – even as the social world in which it is located hurtles ever faster ahead. Sure, individual performers make small concessions to the material conditions of the modern world; you’ll find video tutorials on YouTube and sampled drum tracks on a radio-friendly release, and these are often lauded as proof of the genre’s enduring potential; but folk must never change too much, it seems, and only in pre-prescribed ways.

Scholarship, which can be held largely responsible for enshrining rigid definitions in the first place<sup>3</sup> has remained slow to create new models; so literature still tends to focus most heavily on historical precedence, and if contemporary practice is considered at all, it is the individual professional interpreters of folk performance that receive the most comprehensive representation (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013; Young 2010; Sweers, 2005; Brocken, 2003), and not those smaller communities of interest and enthusiasm who make up the bulk of folk performance activity in the UK today (MacKinnon, 1994). Most crucially of all, even less has been done to re-evaluate and update the kinds of expression that might constitute and characterise folk as it is now. As Trubshaw complains, although a wealth of

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<sup>3</sup> The philosopher, theologian and poet Johann Gottfried Herder coined the term “Volkslied” (“folksong”) in 1778, followed by Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s, “Volksgeist,” (“spirit of the people” or “national character”) in 1801.

materials was collected in the late nineteenth century, “there is a relative dearth of material from a century later” (Trubshaw, 2002: 169). Does this imply that we, as a society, have stopped the active practice of folk?

Poring over the testy histories of folk and the academy (for they were always bound to one another by theory) the binding origins of the paradox emerge. Coetaneous with the invention of the phonograph in the late nineteenth century, folk scholarship was conceived as a discrete and finite period of collection by an educated middle class; the selective recording, sanitisation and re-appropriation of certain popular (but non-commercial) songs and tunes, usually performed by a disempowered working class, otherwise known as “the folk”. It was simultaneously a response to the domino-effect threats of extinction, cultural grey-out and bowdlerization associated with the rapid growth of industrialised society, and a result of Victorian enthusiasm for the empirical possibilities of modern technology.

Believed to reside in untouched and rural places only, folk performance was inextricably bound to a belief in the “inertia of tradition” (Pelegriin, 1993: 312, cf. Ingold, 2013: 36), a Gordian conception of continuity, which seemed to preclude the possibility of reproduction<sup>4</sup>. Songs that were not deemed suitably rustic, such as music hall songs were frequently dismissed as lacking the edifying potential of authentic English tradition. As Phillip Bohlman writes, “tradition...was not ‘new’, nor could it be... It was precisely because it was not new, moreover that tradition acquired its authority” (Bohlman, 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> "In Ireland, 'traditional music' is generally regarded as more 'traditional' (that is, ancient, authentic, valuable) than the separate genre of folk music, which is generally more closely associated with acoustic guitar-led, singer-songwriting." (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 9)

It is this unattainable standard which led to the tenacious narratives of demise that continue to shape our understandings of folk, until they became traditions in their own right. Even in 1900, the Liverpool Daily Post knew that things weren't as good as they used to be...

The neglect of May Day and its great festive traditions struck many observers most forcibly yesterday... Few of our young maidens washed their faces in dew yesterday morning... May Poles, Morris Dancers and greasy poles are only apparently fit for chawbacons hidden in some obscure village in dull portions of the country. (in Haslett, 2012: 1)

...while the same is reliably said of contemporary folk too:

Morris dancing could be "extinct" within 20 years because young people are too embarrassed to take part, a UK Morris association said today... "unless younger blood is recruited during the coming winter months, Morris dancing will soon become extinct". (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/morris-dancing-facing-extinction-1226549.html>. Accessed November 2013.)

Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold suggest that this symptomatic of a "traditional view of tradition" might be understood as a "backwards reading" (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 9, 2). Interrogating the flawed dichotomy between improvisation and innovation, the authors suggest that tradition is frequently wrongly perceived as the opposite of an approach to creativity that sets repetition and novelty as unbreachable poles:

This backwards reading, symptomatic of modernity, finds in creativity a power not so much of adjustment and response to the conditions of a world-in-formation, as of liberation from the constraints of a world that is already made... [I]ts enactment is rather like the derivation of a sequence of numbers from the iteration of a basic formula. (Ibid: 2, 9)

If we can agree that folk should not be perceived as a discrete and completed entity (preserved in aspic and subject to re-enactment only) what might an

equivalent contemporary folk practice look like?

As a performer myself,<sup>5</sup> I am aware of the controversy I may be invoking amongst my contemporaries in suggesting that our practice might be considered formulaic. They will rightly point to artists and records that push genre boundaries, insisting that few performers today would be foolish enough to make explicit claims about the ancient pedigree of their approach. And there is surely creativity in repetition and continuity. These things are undoubtedly true. They might also suggest that in privileging evolution and change I am *de facto* devaluing the existence of older and continuing traditions, and the people who choose to perpetuate them, but this is not true.

The study and enjoyment of historical materials is undoubtedly a worthy endeavour, and I know that I for one will continue to sing the “old songs” my father and uncles taught to me. However, my aim here is to persuade that more things might readily be considered folk performance than are currently understood by that term, that folk can still be relevant—as an evolving entity—in the present day. It is my suspicion that in opening up the definition, by attempting for the first time to read tradition *forwards* and not back, both folk and our ability to make use of it might be simultaneously reinvigorated.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I tour regularly nationwide with the BBC Folk Award nominated band, Pilgrims' Way and I dance with Waters Green Morris from Macclesfield, a ladies Cotswold morris side.

<sup>6</sup> The research is concerned with a new way of handling folk materials, but it is not my aim to draw attention to the ways in which a small group of often-amateur scholars have “got it wrong” – that would be unjustified and uncharitable. My intention instead is to provide evidence that misinterpretations of folk and a “backwards reading” of tradition has implications for broader scholarship – to practitioners in ethnomusicology, geography and art among others – and that attempting to re-orient it forwards may have important ramifications beyond the study of morris dancing and mumming.

So what are the implications of searching for and applying a truly contemporary definition of folk and how might such a hermeneutic shift be enacted? In his purposefully contentious battle-cry for a new way to handle traditional materials, Dave Harker, announced that the task of rehabilitating folk is “far too important to be left to the historians” (Harker, 1985: xii). This project shrugs and asks, “so how about the artists?”

### **Aims and purpose of this thesis**

This written thesis acts as an analytical commentary and companion to work undertaken between 2010 and 2013 as part of my practice-led doctorate, *Making Traditions | Practising Folk*.

It details the development of a novel personal practice as a maker and researcher, to answer questions about folk performance in the Northwest of England. In doing so, it draws on my scholarly background as an ethnomusicologist, and longstanding involvement and participation in the English folk movement, as well as a research interest in practice-led, transdisciplinary approaches.

The original contributions to knowledge lie in my use of arts practice to test new models of *ethnomusicology*, a field sensitized to the study of performance, people and place, and in particular, a suggestive account of a new way to conceptualise traditional folk performance. This culminates in an exhibition and materials towards ethnographies of selected contemporary folk performances, including girls’ carnival morris dancing, as yet unaddressed in scholarship but potentially transformational for understanding contemporary folk. By approaching this visually incongruent but otherwise cognate performance via collaborative art practice, my

research makes the case that visual appearance plays a more significant role in determining identification of folk (or otherwise) than was previously acknowledged.

The project brings together, and holds in tension, two interconnecting aims:

1. To meet Dave Harker's challenge to find a new way to approach folk performance. Harker wrote that "concepts like 'folksong' and 'ballad' are intellectual rubble which needs to be shifted so that building can begin again" (Harker, 1985: xii), but this call to arms has been little addressed in scholarship since.
2. To explore the possibilities of an "artistic turn" for ethnomusicology<sup>7</sup>.

My preliminary questions are:

- What can be understood by "folk performance" in the Northwest of England today?
- How might reflexive and representative ways of studying folk be developed and implemented?
- How might art practice be employed as a rigorous and generative approach to the study of folk?

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<sup>7</sup> I had originally termed this "visual ethnomusicology" to reflect the borrowing of theory from the established field of visual anthropology and specifically, my early intentions to re-work my pre-existing ethnographic practice as a video-maker. However, this later became "expanded ethnomusicology" in recognition of the fact that art practice is not necessarily "visual," and a simultaneous commitment to the stretching of conventional boundaries of ethnomusicological subject matter and address.

The research is thus propelled by two hermeneutical hypotheses that challenge many dominant interpretations. These are that art can be research, and that folk performance can be contemporary.

These hypotheses are circumscribed by the subsidiary problem:

3. What is wrong with pre-existing assumptions about folk performance?

Where do they come from? How might they be replaced?

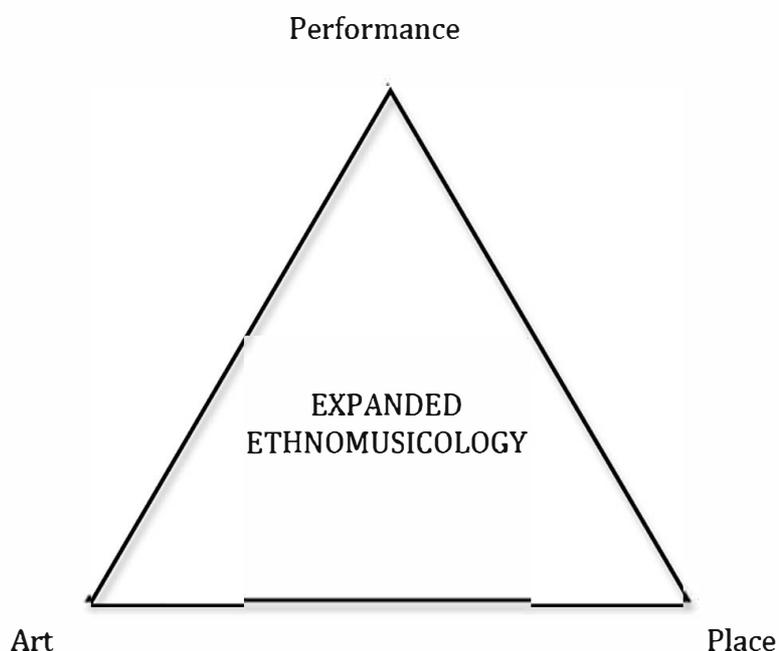
This final question offers “triangulation” to my primary aims and provides contextual anchorage. Triangulation is understood in a specific way here as “a dislodging of categories that can otherwise seem self-evident” (Grimshaw, Owen and Ravetz, 2010: 148, cf. Gates, Kettle and Webb, 2013: 84 – 104), which feels appropriate because as the title of this introduction implies, my research was conceived and conducted as a kind of departure from conventional interpretations, a voyaging outwards in search of new and more representative ones. In presuming to reorient ethnomusicology and folk performance, the question of how my developing approach might differ from existing models is both imperative and catalytic.

Voyaging, with its connotations of travel and territory, reflects a further strand of inquiry bound into this exploration: developments in the social and cultural geographies of place. In addition to prerequisite literature from ethnomusicology, anthropology, folklore and folk performance scholarship, this project also draws upon and embraces writings of contemporary geographers and ecologists, whose parallel theories offer valuable perspective for genre preoccupied with ideas about belonging, identity and topophilic nostalgia. In this way, my work starts from a

position of inherent transdisciplinarity (Nicolescu, 2002), consciously and intentionally resistant to the unhelpful limitations of some bounded subject-area constructions.

The following diagram illustrates an introductory modelling of the relationships that underpin this project:

Figure 0.1.



A preliminary diagram of “expanded ethnomusicology”

### **About the author**

Although this is ostensibly the result of four dedicated years in an art and design research centre, it is in many ways the work of much longer, a first attempt at drawing together some of the disparate strands of interest that have informed my personal and academic life to date, hoping to find resolution.

For as long as I can remember I have been interested in material practice, although of course, I wouldn't have called it that at the time. As a child I spent hours making and crafting, insatiably starting one project after another in pursuit of solutions to a problem I could not name. Finished products did not interest me that much, and I left many of my efforts unfinished. What inspired me, I later realised, was the process of making itself, and the way I felt when I worked. In doing so, it seemed I was offered an alternative glimpse on the world.

At the same time, I have been involved in folk performance all my life. Growing up in a close-knit family of musicians at the fringes of the amateur English folk movement, I was drawn to traditional music and dance from an early age, discovering in its formal and informal performance spaces a sense of continuity and cohesion, and the possibility of reconciliation with my unwieldy English identity. I experienced the satisfaction of participating creatively and collaboratively with others, creating and nurturing a small but fiercely held sense of community through self-entertainment that located itself outside of an institutionalised or overtly commercial environment. Being a folk performer is integral to my understanding of my place in the world, and binds me to many of my closest friends and memories.

As a social science scholar in training, I was drawn to questions about methodology, and my immediately preceding study in an ethnomusicology department suggested to me that there was a need to question and develop current approaches to music-making research. Acutely aware of the substantive and ideological chasm between the work I did in the field and the ways in which I was required to record and document these experiences for dissemination, I felt

dissatisfied with existing models. The imperative to writing alone appeared to overlook the experiential and emotional qualities of performance.

Things were already changing in ethnomusicology by the time I began my studies. A widespread overhaul of fieldwork approaches had made researchers more attuned to the importance of reflexivity (Barz and Cooley, 1997) and the “phenomenology” of experience as it presents itself to the consciousness:

Fieldwork is no longer viewed principally as observing and collecting (although it surely involves that) but as experiencing and understanding music...The new fieldwork leads us to ask what it is like for a person (ourselves included) to make and to know music as lived experience. (Titon, 1997:87)

Correspondingly, methods were embraced that foregrounded the ethnomusicologist’s own learning processes as a performer, such as Christopher Small’s work on “musicking” (1998) and John Baily’s “performance-as-a-research-technique” (2001), eventually coming to be routinely characterised by them.

However some in the field expressed concern that these practices were fallible, or simply incomplete. Timothy Cooley stressed that “performance participation is not a panacea” (Barz and Cooley, 1997: 18), and John Morgan O’Connell’s tongue-in-cheek pronunciation, “eth-*no-music*-ology,” reflected a growing concern that despite the apparent preoccupations of its scholars, ethnomusicologists run the risk of forgetting about the unique qualities of music in the outcomes of their research (Cottrell, 2004: 2). In other cognate fields, new possibilities were being considered, new ways of thinking about research were being tested.

As a frustrated Masters student, I read about the opening of a shared space between contemporary art and anthropology, and was captured by the suggestion

that art practice - something I had always employed *outside* of my academic work - might have value *inside* the research process. As Grimshaw and Ravetz explained:

It is our experience of exploring other fields of enquiry that overlap with academic anthropology as traditionally constituted, does not bring about intellectual collapse – the opening up of a sort of conceptual black hole. Quite the opposite. We have found that working with artists, writers, photographers and film-makers functions not to dull anthropological sensibilities but to sharpen them. (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005: 2)

I pinned this quote up on my noticeboard. Could an artistic turn for ethnomusicology augment the study of music in a similar way?

### **An “artistic turn” for ethnomusicology**

At the same time that social scientists were reconsidering the research value of artistic engagement and address, some artists too, were exploring and articulating what made their knowledge-making practice important.

The “artistic turn” is a term coined by Coessens, Crispin and Douglas in their 2009 manifesto on the uses of art as a site for knowledge. It describes the diverse and burgeoning use of art in and as research by scholars from a range of disciplines, seeking to carve and affirm alternative ways of working and thinking about practice.

One of the most recent in a history of turns in scholarship<sup>8</sup>, Coessens, Crispin and Douglas suggest that the artistic turn is the next coherent step for an academy which has already progressed through subjectivity, writing culture and reflexivity,

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<sup>8</sup> “Turns” in academia are movements which require a reframing of the reference points of research questions themselves.

to constitute, “the latest (the last?) scion in the family of knowledge in Western society” (Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009: 44). However, it is, they admit, “currently in a frank phase of growth through trial and error” (Ibid.) and thus, lacks established models, and frequently, ready acceptance in the wider research community. It is as yet, to my knowledge, unrepresented in ethnomusicology research.

There are loosely two main streams of art-as-research activity:

- the use of art practice by participants not traditionally associated with art – sometimes termed “*arts-based enquiry*”
- the interrogation of art and knowledge production by artists themselves – sometimes called “*artistic research.*”

Arts-based enquiry, taking place outside of the art world, seeks to capitalize on the augmenting possibilities of art as a tool for representation, particularly for aspects of social life felt to be inadequately addressed through text alone. Anthropology, in particular has begun to search for potential spaces of overlap and verisimilitude between its own practices and those of contemporary artists:

We are concerned with questioning assumptions about ‘anthropology’ and ‘art’ – these are labels that can often work to obscure any affinities... In some cases differences between the two have more to do with exhibition sites and strategies – with finished products, rather than intentions or practices. (Schneider and Wright, 2006: 2)

However, inside the art world, artists are also using research as a means to articulate artistic practice itself, making the assertion that art, like the academy, is a territorialized space. Artists have always engaged in research, some artistic

researchers argue, but in a historically empirically-oriented academy, what artists know has sometimes been dismissed, while a contemporary shift towards institutionalization of the arts has put pressure on the field to be both open and clear about what specifically, art practice has to offer. Anne Douglas calls for greater artistic leadership which focuses on the role of the artist's practice in the public sphere. She suggests:

artists are uniquely placed to inform and creatively develop public life... [Artistic research] opens up a new trajectory of thinking about leadership that is not predominantly management based, in which the role of artist operating within social, cultural and environmental contexts is scrutinised for what it can reveal about creativity in general. (Douglas, 2009)<sup>9</sup>

In this thesis I use “artistic research” as an umbrella term to describe the various manifestations of artistic practice-led research in my project. This is not intended to blur the distinctions between the practices of artists and arts-based enquirers, or any other researcher-practitioner but instead reflects the substantive nature of this approach in contrast to established quantitative or qualitative research paradigms. This also feels appropriate because ethnomusicology, in contrast to anthropology, can be seen to occupy an intermediary space, concerned with a form of art: performance, but anchored to the disciplinary perspective of the social sciences.<sup>10</sup> Between spaces, evocatively described by the philosopher, Gillian Rose, as “the broken middle” (1992) are potentially conflicted, implicated and engaged. Her work makes the case that the interstices of the disciplines are places of contact, volatile

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<sup>9</sup> <http://ontheedgeresearch.org/artist-as-leader-2007-09/> (Accessed 1. December 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Helen Sword suggests that “to enter an academic discipline is to *become* disciplined,” (Sword, 2012: 12) observing how some scholarly commentators have come to view the disciplines as “silos”, “barricades”, “ghettos” and “black boxes,” – reflecting a conception of the academic landscape as characterized by exclusionary, impermeable zones of activity. However, an artistic turn for the social sciences purposefully transcends such boundaries, to produce work with one foot in each – standing in the space between.

and prone to eruptions, like tectonic plates shifting, but transformational, forging new areas – aspirational prospects for a consciously trans-disciplinary project of this nature.

Ethnomusicology today is perhaps best understood as a field that incorporates a diverse range of approaches towards the study of performance, people and place. However, this broad definition belies the fact that even to those scholars who consciously engage with it, ethnomusicology is something of an enigma. Since the 1950s, it has been embroiled in unresolved debates about its status as a discipline, with some commentators advocating its reclassification as a field (Nettl, 1975: 68) while others perceive it as a method or approach (Blacking, 1987: 3). Born from comparative musicology, growing up in anthropology and historically married to the study of folk performance worldwide, most scholars agree that ethnomusicology is inherently interdisciplinary – and like many of my colleagues in music research, it was the experience of my interdisciplinary background that initially led me to become an ethnomusicologist.<sup>11</sup>

While contested, such hybridity also renders ethnomusicology a highly flexible field, as Anthony Seeger explains, “seemingly in a perpetual state of experimentation that gains strength from a diversity and plurality of approaches” (Seeger, 1992: 107). In addition to a preoccupation with the art of performance, both as the object and frequently, the method of study, fieldwork can be every bit as creative and idiosyncratic as artwork, drawing on aspects of the whole researcher to negotiate and describe encounters with others. Ethnomusicologists may also be writers, broadcasters, documentary makers, photographers,

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<sup>11</sup> See Caroline Bithell for a personal account (2008: 80)

advocates and activists, and the products of music research may find their way into myriad contexts both inside and outside of the institution.

Perhaps the most fundamental distinction then, between work undertaken in the field of artistic research and current methods in ethnomusicology, is the way in which such practices are perceived and implemented. For ethnomusicologists, “applied” research is generally understood to be somehow distinct from the more serious labour of scholarship, part of the process rather than the results of an ethnomusicologist’s study, and this feels increasingly limiting.

Art practice may offer new ways to integrate the functions of both researcher *and* research with the object of study. Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén suggest that this requires a kind of embeddedness, a “being in the world” constantly in motion, and a sense of collaboration, “a sharp yet even beautiful ever-continuing reciprocity” (Hannula et al, 2005: 117). For ethnomusicologists, the task may not be to fundamentally overhaul the specific practices undertaken as research, but to begin to perceive them differently.

### **Why folk performance?**

I began my work on an expanded ethnomusicology with a study of folk performance. By this I mean that I started my research with a broad exploration of the myriad ways in which the concept of folk might be interpreted by performers and scholars inside and outside of the institution. For example, I examined the etymology of folk, and the movement that it gave rise to, the scholarship sensitized to its documentation and the disciplines historically associated with its analysis. As my research combined with an artistic sensibility, I also considered the use of folk

in other contexts, such as folk art and popular material- and music-culture, and I used my own practice as a way to think through the ideas I found emerging.

Folk performance seemed a highly appropriate entrance to my research because as well as being a personal interest, it is also a preoccupation for the ethnomusicology discipline, which has long been associated with the study of folk musics worldwide. However, this is not an uncomplicated alliance. Bohlman, for instance, suggests that the oft-presumed synonymy of ethnomusicology with *specifically* folk and traditional musics<sup>12</sup>, contributes heavily to what he perceives as the discipline's inherent resistance to newness (Bohlman, 2008). He writes of a "paradox of alterity" in ethnomusicological thought, attributed to "an obsession with its past, a deep and abiding concern for tradition and a rhetoric which becomes so normative that it ceases to be new" (Stobart, 2008: 12). Combining this with Hallam and Ingold's ideas about cultural improvisation (2007) which highlighted the problems of associating innovation with newness, it is easy to see how even a field already sensitive to the inevitability of change could find folk a struggle to pin down.

One reaction to the complex issue of tradition and repetition is the "fakelore" movement of the latter half of the 20th century. Fakelore was first introduced as a literary pun by the American folklorist, Richard Dorson,<sup>13</sup> and was later co-opted by scholars seeking to counter what they perceived as incidences of myth-making common to many descriptions and applications of folk. Fakeloric criticism was

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<sup>12</sup> This is no longer an accurate portrayal of the ethnomusicologist's research interest – concerned as it now is, with all musics. However, traditional and folk musics – as opposed to classical or art musics continue to predominate in this field.

<sup>13</sup> Dorson wrote of the fictional folk hero Pecos Bill, "the deliberately contrived product is not folklore, but what I have elsewhere called fakelore. Fakelore casts a warm nostalgic glow over the folk; it grins coyly at their fun, and drips tears over their tragedies" (Dorson, 1950: 201).

primarily levelled against the early folklorists, collectors and composers such as Cecil Sharp and Percy Grainger, but it was also directed towards contemporary performers who were felt to trade in sentimentalism and nostalgia. Gershon Legman (1964) wrote a caustic critique of “fakesongers” in the American folk music scene, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) identified and analysed “invented traditions,” such as clan tartans and dynastic heraldry and Regina Bendix highlighted the processes by which a sense of authenticity is created and assumed via the institutionalization of tradition (Bendix, 1997). Such “de-bunking” work is still going on. In 2011, Mat Levitt alerted scholars to the “meta-folklore” of today’s folk movement, arguing that the propensity of folk performance and scholarship to mythologise itself still remains intact.<sup>14</sup>

For my study, two main texts were especially formational. The authors, both established protagonists in the folk movement, articulated their dissatisfaction and challenged subsequent scholars to seek new solutions – perhaps revealing to the contemporary reader how little has actually changed. These were Dave Harker’s *Fakesong* (1985) and Georgina Boyes’ *The Imagined Village* (1993). Boyes presented a pragmatic revision of what she describes as the “received history” of the English folk revival, that seductive but inaccurate portrayal of the Folk as a specific community and their inevitable and urgent replacement.

Having created the category of the near-defunct and unconscious “Folk”, their replacement with a responsible, caring and knowledgeable body of performers and adapters could be presented as a vital and continuing cultural duty. (Boyes, 1993: xiv)

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<sup>14</sup> The same might reasonably be said of all communities and practices. Myth-making is by no means limited to folk performances alone.

Harker's controversial monograph critiqued the founding ideologies of the early folk song movement, in particular the "nationalist sentiments and bourgeois values" of Cecil Sharp, founding father of the English folk revival (Harker, 1972: 240). For Harker, Sharp's work was unsatisfactory, not just because it advocated the re-appropriation of cultural materials from the working classes, but also because of its role in the repackaging and sanitisation of folk through collection and performance – which he termed "mediations"<sup>15</sup>:

[B]y mediation I understand not simply the fact that particular people passed on songs they had taken from other sources, in the form of manuscript or print, but that in the very process of doing, their own assumptions, attitudes, likes and dislikes may well have significantly determined what they looked for, accepted and rejected. (Harker, 1985: xiii)

Harker, it is sometimes felt, viewed such actions as a personal betrayal, and motivated by the strong desire to fight what Edward P. Thompson had previously called "the gulf of class condescension" in the English folk movement (Thompson, 1979: 609), constructed his commentary around polemically class-political structures. Subsequent scholars, most notably C. J. Bearman in 2002 took issue both with the uncritical Marxist tone of Harker's text and a number of alleged inaccuracies in its statistical analyses.

However, both *Fakesong* and *The Imagined Village* continue to be highly influential publications for folklorists, the often uncomfortable impact of which can

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, the 1980s and 1990 saw a wave of literature expressing considerable venom towards the founders of the folk music movement in England. In 1989, Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase wrote with almost tabloid overstatement, "[i]t is hardly an exaggeration to say that the English folk-song was invented by Cecil Sharp. Of course the songs were collected from singers who were supposed to have learned them through an organic and continuous tradition. But Sharp's selectivity and editing were such a powerful filter that the neutral and scholarly act of collecting became instead the establishment of a canon... This unscholarly interference is explained by Sharp's ulterior motive." (Shaw and Chase, 1989: 13) While I take an altogether more moderate view – as a scholar of his time, Sharp's work is undeniably valuable – such statements reveal the strength of feeling surfacing at this time, which has since, I would argue, been buried rather than resolved in subsequent scholarship.

still be felt across the communities of scholarship and performance.<sup>16</sup> For some, including Boyes herself, the legacy of fakelore was to abandon the term folk altogether. In a personal email she explained:

*I proposed – and I hope demonstrated – that ‘the Folk’ don’t exist. The people from whom songs, dances and other traditions were and are collected are no different from anyone else... Some songs, dances and stories have a longer history than others, but it is singing and dancing which is ‘traditional’, not the songs and dances in themselves. (Email correspondence between Lucy Wright and Georgina Boyes, January 2012)*

However, while I cannot disagree with this interpretation, for me the overriding imperative of fakelore scholarship is its call to action for current researchers and mediators of folk materials. Although Harker’s work is admittedly polemical, perhaps its most important role is in highlighting the impact of (certain kinds of) scholarship upon the communities it describes.<sup>17</sup> In this way, fakelore must be viewed within the context of the social science-wide “crisis of representation” of the same period, which urged scholars to rethink their duties to the human subjects of their research. My research seeks to contribute to this vital and ongoing task.

### **Defining the field and selecting research participants**

Coherent with the “voyaging” aims of the research, the field sites and participants detailed in this thesis evolve over the course of the project. In seeking to decode and deconstruct folk, my research began by charting the experiences of extant folk performers. By this, I am referring to those who self-identified, and/or were

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<sup>16</sup> As Trish Winter and Simon Keegan-Phipps acknowledge: “the heritage of the English folk artist includes not just songs, tunes and dances but also a combination of often contradictory discourses to which their contemporary performance must speak.” (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 161)

<sup>17</sup> As Kay Shelemay notes, “as ethnomusicologists become engaged in research and living musical traditions and the people who carry them, they both intentionally and unwittingly become caught up in the processes and politics of transmission of tradition. Sometimes their interventions support continuity; at other times they engender change” (Shelemay, 1997: 197).

identified by others, as engaged in some interpretation of the term folk performance.

This initially appears to be in agreement with Winter and Keegan-Phipps' recent pragmatic definition of folk as "a cultural construct undergoing constant discursive renegotiation by participants of that culture" (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 8). In their broad study of contemporary English performance, the authors suggest that the term should be taken to mean "whatever those who identify most closely with it (folk musicians, dancers, audiences, etc.) proclaim it to be" (Ibid.). However, there are two clear problems with applying this definition uncritically. Firstly, there is an obvious substantive difference between the acts of identifying, and being identified, even though in some instances the two states appeared to coincide. For example, in my preliminary research with morris dancers and mummers' players, performers tended to both self-identify and be identifiable to others as in some way "folkloric", but more in depth interrogation revealed that individual experiences and attitudes towards such a designation were quite varied and sometimes contradictory. Secondly, approaching the field in this way means that insights are drawn from a position of embeddedness within a backwards reading. Since today's self-conscious folk performers are the inheritors of yesterday's theoreticians, there is a real danger of coming to perpetuate the same tired assumptions about folk, which fakelore urged us to reconsider. While my research is not able to resolve this difficulty at the outset, it attempts to remain alert and attuned to it as the study progresses.

My research also differs from Winter and Keegan-Phipps' work in the decision to direct my studies, not towards the experiences of professional folk artists, but to the comparatively informal spaces of folk performance, for example pub sessions,

folk clubs and festivals. In marked contrast to Winter and Keegan-Phipps' career-performers, my focus was on the performances of those for whom folk is "passionate avocation" (Rosenberg, 1993: 8) rather than a primary source of income.<sup>18</sup> There are a number of reasons for this decision. One reason has to do with the diverse and symbolically charged spaces of folk performance. I was particularly interested in group and "spectacular" performance types – like morris dancing and mumming – which are often conducted in public (as opposed to in a pre-designated performance space). They are thus more subject to chance encounters and unaffiliated spectatorships - and perhaps for that reason, are more integrated into everyday life and everyday places. This, for me, indicated one way in which folk performance might be differentiated from other forms of amateur and professional performance.

Another has to do with folk performance as a participatory experience (Mackinnon, 1993). Although there are participatory spaces for musical performance, particularly for folk singing, within the informal spaces of the folk movement, these are perhaps perceived as less widely accessible<sup>19</sup> and more likely to be influenced

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<sup>18</sup> The boundary between professional and non-professional performance is a very permeable one, and it is important to emphasise that I do not consider these to be absolute categories, in folk performance or elsewhere. Nor do I mean to suggest that non-professional (as opposed to unprofessional) folk performances lack quality, commitment or innovation as a consequence. Frequently the situation is quite the contrary. However, my experience as a semi-professional folk musician and singer suggests to me that a differently nuanced set of issues surround professionalized folk performance in contrast to amateur ones. A high proportion of prominent scholarship about folk has recently been devoted to these professional incarnations, perhaps seeking to persuade or account for the fact that for many people, folk performance is no longer characterized solely by an "ethos of non-professionalism" and an "opposition to commercial music" (Rosenberg, 1993:8). There are two main branches of this; the interpretation of traditional music and song by professional musicians coming out of the English folk movement – such as Bellowhead and the Unthanks (which might perhaps be conceptualized in a similar vein as Vaughan Williams composing variations on traditional tunes) and popular modern acts described as Nu-Folk who do not tend to use traditional materials, but whose use of the term references instead some other association of folk in the popular imagination – perhaps rusticity, simplicity or nostalgia. While completely valid interpretations of the term, without a corresponding body of scholarship into amateur performance spaces, such an imbalance may lead to further oversimplification of what folk already means in contemporary life. This study seeks to add to the current body of research, rather than unseat it.

<sup>19</sup> As Steve Guest of Lymm Morris summarises, *I can't sing and I can't play an instrument but I*

by the interconnected realm of professional folk musicianship and song. Folk dancing and drama on the other hand have never become a professional genre<sup>20</sup> and may therefore be differently revealing about folk as “a social movement, developing through the enthusiasm, enjoyment and creativity of thousands” (Boyes, 1993: xii). This initial phase of work involved members of The Long Company “mummers” and Lymm Morris men – approached as experts in their own practice – and in these instances, my existing status as a folk performer offered me privileged access and “an understandable role” within these groups (Baily, 2001: 95). Later, it was my developing practice as an artist that provided a comprehensible framework for research with Girl Guides, independent garment-makers and members of the girls’ carnival morris dancing community, who did not specifically identify with the term, folk.<sup>21</sup>

Cognisant of the profound taxonomic complexities in seeking to categorise different grades or increments of folk, this research acknowledges awareness of Gerald Warshaver’s model of post-modern folklore (1991). Warshaver differentiates between “customary practice”<sup>22</sup> (“Level 1”) referring to the broad and accepted practices adopted within any social group, not generally considered to be

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*thought ‘I reckon I could do this!’ (personal interview, 2011).*

<sup>20</sup> An exception may be the very recent emergence of touring professional folk shows which include displays of clog and morris dancing, for example the Demon Barber Roadshow’s ‘The Lock In.’ This changing situation requires further study in future.

<sup>21</sup> In accordance with the changing profile of my participants, and their varied roles in my research, ethical considerations associated with the project were also constantly reassessed. When working with adults, signed consent forms, following full disclosure of the aims of the research, were received from all named participants in this thesis. Consent was sought from all garment makers and terms were negotiated with each individual in advance. All makers are named as co-creators of work produced. When working with minors, consent was requested from parents / guardians, and all names – except those for whom consent was explicitly given – have been changed. Photographs have been carefully selected to exclude those not yet accounted for.

<sup>22</sup> This is Bob Trubshaw’s coinage. Warshaver uses the phrase “the lore produced by a given folk” (Warshaver, 1991: 220) but I prefer the former term because it does not re-emphasise folk as a term to describe a particular group.

“doing folklore”, “Level 2”, the collection, analysis and revival of folkloric practice, and “Level 3”, the self-conscious incorporation of folklore into modern creative activities such as video games, films and novels.<sup>23</sup> According to this model, my research can be understood as beginning in broadly Level 2 folkloric practice – which I describe using the term “the folk movement” or “folk scene” and ending in Level 1 – or customary practice, far less often considered as folk performance.

The location of my study is the Northwest of England. Despite not seeking to offer an idiographic account of this region, all performances included in this thesis, with the exception of The Long Company, take place in Lancashire and Cheshire. In fact, very much of my practice took place within walking distance of my home in South Manchester<sup>24</sup>. However, the Northwest does not represent simply a scenic backdrop to my research, but is an integral part of it.<sup>25</sup> The Northwest is historically overlooked in scholarship, and Boyes suggests that this may be because the region was home to the Industrial Revolution and the earliest and most rapid spread of urbanization, felt by many early scholars to preclude the existence of an authentic folk tradition. Although this belief has since been rejected, the Northwest remains underrepresented in scholarship. My own early researches indicated that the areas around my home represented a particularly rich site for industrial song and performance, as well as carnival traditions uniquely popular in the region.

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<sup>23</sup> Warshaver suggests that Level 2 and Level 3 folklore is more valuable to the modern marketplace. (Warshaver, 1991: 220)

<sup>24</sup> Travelling to performance events across the region and even further afield is a fairly common experience for folk performance enthusiasts today. As Valley notes, folk no longer represents the most readily available kind of performance for most people – it is a conscious decision to participate and functions as a leisure activity (Valley, 2008) Increased access to transport means that hobbies can be conducted outside of one’s immediate environment – in this way, certain forms of participation in the folk movement can be understood as a form of “leisure community” – as opposed to Kwon’s “place-bound identities” (Kwon, 2002)

<sup>25</sup> Nettl notes that “for over a century, ethnomusicology has always included the study of location as a principal concern, asking what one can do with the findings of geographic distribution and what geography means in the life of music.” (Nettl, 2010: 173) but this research is not simply an additional idiographic study of a particular region.

Perhaps *because* it was overlooked in scholarship, many customary practices in the Northwest had continued to evolve. In 2012, Boyes said of Northwest morris dancing:

[N]obody celebrated the fact that people from the Northwest...had kept this lovely aspect of culture going over years and years and years, and taken it with them when they moved into town to work in factories. That wasn't seen as a matter of celebration, it wasn't rural and therefore it wasn't good.<sup>26</sup>

I wanted to consider some of these less-studied traditions, to explore what they might have to say to understandings of contemporary folk. Practically, it was also important to my methodology to be able to revisit my field sites frequently, to develop relationships, and later, to work collaboratively. Wishing to capitalise on the relationships between folk, place-making and collaborative art practice, being rooted in a specific place offered insight into the ways that performance contribute to a sense of community. This was simultaneously a personal interest and endeavour. Having moved to Manchester to take up my PhD studentship, personal participation in folk performance helped me to get to know my new home region and make connections, vital both for scholarly and personal integration. Community came to be an important theme in my work, perhaps representing an applied example of the way that folk, as a practice, can lead to a rethinking of our relationships with the lived environment.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Deborah Bull's Dance Nation: The Dance of Old England. September 24<sup>th</sup> 2012, BBC Radio 4. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mvzll> (Accessed 1st. February 2014)

<sup>27</sup> The term "lived environment" (likewise "lived experience", "lived present") is used in this thesis with reference to the phenomenological approaches of Edmund Husserl (e.g. 1913, 1931), Martin Heidegger (e.g. 1927 – 1928), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) et al. In this context, the prefix "lived" suggests an understanding of human social and cultural behaviour which pays particular attention to experiences as they present themselves to the consciousness. It denotes a focus on experiential or first-person feature - that of being experienced.

Beginning with the flawed presumption that the Northwest could be approached as a discrete and homogenous region, my research went on to highlight the individuality of personal constructions of place, taking my research from a pre-occupation with creating folk performances for an invented non-place, to the ways in which folk might assist in reappraising and re-imagining our relationship with lived places.<sup>28</sup> Such a decision responds to Iain Biggs' (2009) call for increased critical solicitude – the suggestion that scholars have a responsibility to the particular lived environments in which they work, despite a marked rise in the possibilities for hyper-mobility.

### **Reading this thesis**

This thesis is organised into three main sections, which correspond to the three stages of my developing approach. There are six case studies.

Chapter 1 establishes a relationship between folk performance and making, focusing on areas of tension and overlap, and charts my preliminary experiments with art practice as research through fieldwork in the English folk movement.

Chapter 2 builds on this work to chart the methodological progression from personal art practice to a collaborative practice as research with others. It

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<sup>28</sup> Studying in a “home” location has a meaningful precedent too. Henry Stobart notes how in many parts of the world ethnomusicology is already identified with the mapping of a nation’s own indigenous “and (sometimes) popular music, whereas in western Europe and the US it is connected, historically at least with the study of the music of other nations or people.” (Stobart, 2008: 4) In order to continue to distance ethnomusicology from now-uncomfortable associations with exoticism and colonialism, research at home is a vital progression. As Kealinohomoku argued in the 1970s, true reflexivity could only be achieved when ballet was treated as a kind of ethnic dance, daring scholars to “view ourselves with the self-knowledge of how we approach ‘other’ cultures...to study his or her own dance culture as if it were anthropologically strange” (Thomas, 2003: 80).

includes documentation of three case studies, drawn primarily from research into customary practices in the locality of Whalley Range, South Manchester.

Chapter 3 combines practices and reflections from the previous two sections to test the efficacy of my approach in a potentially transformational site for folk scholarship. This section considers the possibility of return to the ethnomusicology discipline.

In 1972, Bateson coined the term “metalogue” to describe dialectics in which the form of the conversation adds something to its meaning. As a form of text-based metalogue, a variety of styles of writing are employed across the three chapters of this thesis. Some parts read like classical ethnomusicological text while others incorporate elements of creative ethnography. This is in accordance with the development of the research, from conventional to more experimental models. As in this introduction, literature is interspersed throughout the text.

The thesis also contains a large number of photographic images, which are organised into two categories; illustrations of actions, processes or events detailed in the text (numbered Fig.1, 2, 3, etc.), and images as an aspect of my creative practice (not numbered, but given a short descriptive caption). Although I am not a trained photographer and do not consider this to be a foremost aspect of my artistic practice, photography came to be an important way in which I recorded the often ephemeral products of my research, as well as being invaluable to the reproduction of such events for those who were not in attendance. In some projects, such as *Conversation Hats*, the creation of photographic imagery was integral to the design of the approach, however, I frequently found myself wanting

to preserve visual traces of the hidden, domestic spaces in which much of my research took place, and to consider how this intersected with the subjects that we discussed and the routes that my research came to take. My aim in including them is that they act as catalysts for the reader, as well as for myself, to interpret them along their own lines, without prescribing a meaning.

As with any artistic research project, the question of audience is problematic. The relatively egalitarian address of the visual, the potentially broad, “real-world” impact of art often increases the scope of the audience - but also raises questions about how to evaluate the products of research. My research begins (and possibly ends) in ethnomusicology, is conducted through folklore studies and art, and draws on work by theorists of place. In her essay on autobiography, Doris Lessing describes the disruption between the fluidity of life and the relative fixedness of words, exclaiming “why a book after all? Why do we have this need to bear witness? We could dance our stories, couldn’t we?” Coessens, Crispin and Douglas pose a similar question: “what does music tell us that painting may be inadequate to convey – and vice-versa? What does dance offer us, as opposed to writings?” (Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009: 13). As a kind of answer, this thesis is only part of the work submitted. The other part is a corresponding body of artwork and materials towards a written ethnography. The chapters that follow seek to complement and support this work, taking account of practice-led research as an emergent methodology, which – temporarily at least - eschews the use of text as the automatic and solitary means of knowledge production and dissemination. As the author, I note this irony.

However, as Stobart suggests:

Maybe ethnomusicologists need to get out more; have the courage to venture outside of the 'music box' and think carefully about how insights from their research can engage with and contribute to broader interdisciplinary debate. (Stobart, 2008: 6)

The project is relevant to ethnomusicologists<sup>29</sup> and folklorists, but it is perhaps more relevant to the new and flourishing field of art as research. I have already suggested that ethnomusicology represents a mid-point between artist-led artistic research and arts-based enquiry conducted by non-artists. While scholarship by artists offers insight into the role and function of art as knowledge, and research practices by non-artists harnesses and evaluates the value of art as a tool, ethnomusicology excavates its own position, distinctly in between and able to contribute something to both.

Hannula et al argue that as a point of primary importance, all artistic research projects must self-refer back to art:

The research should highlight the ways in which its own results connect back to the community's understanding of its own skill. The view presented in the research about the skill and its different dimensions means not only the increasing of theoretical knowledge (increasing insight) but also organizing skill in a new way (e.g. practice, education and institutions). The intersubjective assessment of these effects is an important dimension of the reliability of artistic research. (Hannula et al., 2005: 161)

In this way, regardless of its substantive focus or disciplinary diversions, this project is an artistic research project first and foremost.

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<sup>29</sup> It is true that my project is distanced somewhat from the historical remit of ethnomusicology - which tends to be more associated with the audio address of music-making - through a focus on the performative practices of dance and (particularly) drama. My own personal definition of ethnomusicology is "the study of performance with music" - in attempt to account for the social / anthropological underpinning of my own research interest, as well as musical performance as a multi-layered audio-visual medium.

## Chapter 1: An introduction to folk and making

### Summary

Chapter 1 details the introductory phase of my research about folk performance in the Northwest of England. It is concerned with establishing a relationship between folk and making – exploring how this relationship is intersected by place – and detailing my preliminary experiments towards new ways of working as an artistic researcher and ethnomusicologist.

Folk and making are combined in this chapter in two convergent ways, firstly as the subject of my research (folk performance and different kinds of making) and secondly as an approach to the study of, and importantly *with* it (the study of folk with and through making practices).<sup>30</sup> The research begins with a comparison of two extant group performances – ‘The Long Company Mummers’ from Ripponden in West Yorkshire and Lymm Morris Men from Lymm in Warrington, Cheshire. Both performances display prominent making processes - that is to say, the histories of both groups in their most recent incarnations can be traced within the last fifty years and involve some form of ongoing material practice. But The Long Company were selected as a self-proclaimed invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) while by contrast, Lymm Morris broadly identify their performance of the historic Lymm Dance as a “revival”. The substantive differences between invention and revival are considered, without judgement, through the lenses of folk and making, and in the process, I analyse both the material practices around costume and choreography and social practices of place-making engendered in and through the performance.

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<sup>30</sup> This oversimplified dichotomy is challenged as this chapter progresses but serves as a starting point.

In this research, “material practice” is used to indicate the actions performed through material culture, not just the artefacts themselves. Cognizant of Ingold’s description of the “flow” of materials agents (as opposed to passive raw constituents) and the maker’s role in “bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesizing and distilling in anticipation of what might emerge” (Ingold, 2013: 21), material practice in this work is situated in contrast to the hylomorphic model, which presumes the possibility of human mastery over the material world. It would be inaccurate, then, to conceive of a causal relationship between material practice and place-making which pits the making process in juxtaposition with its results. Instead, the model of material practice used here seeks to represent a fluid, dialogical relationship between maker, making and affect. A question that interests me, in short, is whether something *else* is being made when folk performances are revived, invented, adapted and performed. David Gauntlett suggests that in making we are also connecting with things – literally, in the sense of joining and combining different materials, but also as an act of sociability, connecting our own lives with those of others. Of this second kind he writes:

Making is connecting because acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people; and making is connecting because through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments. (Gauntlett, 2011: 2)

Connection with social and physical environments is encapsulated for me in the term “place-making” – used here not in the sense more commonly used in planning (having to do with the design of appealing public spaces that cater to

people as well as cars and businesses)<sup>31</sup> - but rather its interpretation by the ethnomusicologist, Thomas Solomon, who suggests:

Music does not simply 'reflect' pre-existing cultural structures, but rather musical performance is a social activity through which culture is created, negotiated and performed...[In this way] musical performance serves as a practice for place-making. (Solomon, 2000: 257)

For Solomon, places should not be perceived as simply the pre-existing backdrops for activity, but as actively made and imagined by people through social processes. The participatory nature of much informal folk performance is well-documented in scholarship (e.g. Mackinnon: 1993, Boyes: 1993, Valley: 2008) but this participation has not yet been considered in light of more recent developments in making as research, nor explicitly by scholars of place.

Secondly, the chapter charts the early developmental stages of my personal practice as a maker – following a trajectory away from established methodological techniques employed at the start of the work (such as interview and participant-observation), to material practices more associated with artistic research (such as costume-making and performance). The Long Company case study incorporates material from interviews with members of the group undertaken in December 2011, as well as attendance at two rehearsals and four performances of The Long Company mummers' play during its New Year tours in 2012 and again in 2013. It also reflects upon time spent as a participant-observer at the home studio of Annie Dearman, the artist-maker of The Long Company costumes who describes her materials-led approach to making which draws on the early twentieth century writings of designers, Enid Marx and Margaret Lambert. In contrast, *Conversation Hats* describes a personal making project which draws on research with four

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<sup>31</sup> Championed by Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte among others.

current members (and one former member) of Lymm Morris and attendance at two performances of the Lymm Dance in 2011. The case study begins with familiar methods of interview and observation, with a particular attention on the material practices associated with the morris costume (“kit”), followed by a period of independent personal art practice on the same theme.

This more generative methodology is developed in and through my interest in folk performance and making – mirroring the kinds of practice observed and experienced with The Long Company and Lymm Morris – as a means of embedding and embodying my research. Specifically, this phase of the project considers the possibilities of “thinking-through-making” - a term used to describe the re-(e)valuation of making as knowledge, and the personal experience of “coming to know” (Ravetz, 2011: 159) through doing.

The outcomes of this chapter, in a format ongoing throughout the thesis, are reflected upon using a phrase borrowed from Hallam and Ingold (2007) and developed by Schneider and Wright (2013). “The way we work” describes “the sorts of creativity employed within projects, the kinds of collaborations involved and the production of outcomes whether those are artworks or anthropological representations of one kind or another”. (Schneider and Wright, 2013: 1). This represents a way of approaching creativity and meaning as “something often emergent, rather than prefigured or planned. Theory is now in the way of making, rather than outside it” (Ibid).

## Research questions

This chapter deals with the following research questions<sup>32</sup>:

Starting from scholarly discussions on fakelore...

- What does an example of an “invented” contemporary folk performance look like? How is it organised, created and sustained?
- What does an example of a “revived” folk performance look like? How does it compare with an invention?
- What do the performances have to say to folk as a material practice - a kind of making that then sheds light on the creation and maintenance of a tradition, historical and geographical depth?
- How do the different kinds of making relate people to place and community, and what does it tell us about folk as a form of self-organisation?
- What does this research reveal about “the way we work” and a new approach to folk performance research?

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<sup>32</sup> The chapter can be summarized using a version of the scores of Allan Kaprow (2003) and Patricia Cain (in Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009: 59):

folk as making...  
making as research...  
    taking making  
    taking “folk”  
    asking Lymm Morris about their making  
    asking Lymm Morris about “folk”  
    making Lymm Morris hats  
    making to think  
    exhibiting

## Case Study 1: The Long Company

### Making and “invented tradition”

Figure 1.1.



The Long Company, (2012)

### An “invented tradition”

The Bridge Inn, Ripponden. January 2011.

We stand in a large and uneven circle. Us, hoarded and huddled together in our anoraks and winter woollens; them, strange and stately, their towering bodies and blank faces an obscuration of plastic ribbons, enlivened by a brisk January breeze. Red, green, purple, silver, black and white; six characters clad in bright crisp packet colours, they appear to shine. While the ribbons whip and dance, the figures are still, their presence almost otherworldly.

Each player holds a rough-hewn prop; a sword, staff, mattock or fork, allegories too heavy for an everyday person to carry, but these figures are larger than life. Larger than time itself, it seems. Moving serenely in and out of the glow of gas

lanterns, they incant words I can half remember. Nursery rhyming couplets to tell a tale of good triumphing evil, the plight of the labouring man and the turning of another year.

*In comes I...*

The utterances are proclamatory. Loud, but with little sense of theatrics, more like a ritual than a performance. When not performing the perfunctory actions of their role, the players stand motionless. Waiting, watching, shimmering. They are uncanny. Unnerving. They are facing us but they don't seem to notice us. Do they even know that we're here?

*We are the merry actors that traverse the street,  
We are the merry actors that fight for our meat...*

A stylised battle ensues, neither party putting up much of a fight.

Towards the end of the play, once the hero is revived and the villain slain, the solemnity is punctured by a local reference and the audience holler and laugh, that strange tension broken. I shake myself and remember that this is a modern-day performance. Children in fluorescent jackets are dancing beside a flaming oil drum and I can see somebody holding a pint of beer, taking photographs on a mobile phone. The Devil addresses the crowd, appealing for money in a burnt frying pan. Beneath his cloak I can see his worn black brogues. Then the figures form a tight circle, raise their tools skyward and slowly, silently process away. An assembled band in tattered hi-vis vests, strike up a seasonal song on whistles, accordion and tuba.

Some of the audience look alarmed or confused, but others look satisfied. There is no explanation. We turn our backs and go into the pub.

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The Long Company is a contemporary mummings' play,<sup>33</sup> performed by members of the Ryburn 3-Step (R3S), a folk development group based in the Ryburn Valley, South West of Halifax (Fig. 1.1)<sup>34</sup>

This performance was selected because, despite taking place just outside of my selected region, the play is sometimes referred to – by members of the cast and outsiders alike - as an invented tradition, self-consciously referencing Hobsbawm and Ranger's book of the same name (1983). In contrast to other well-known mummings' plays in the Northwest, such as Antrobus Soulcakers and Alderley Edge Mummings in Cheshire<sup>35</sup>, there was no established history of mumming in the Ryburn Valley upon which to draw when the idea for the play was conceived by

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<sup>33</sup> Mummings' plays, known variously as 'Souling', 'Pace Egging', 'Plough plays' etc., are a form of seasonal folk drama with variations across parts of the British Isles, Europe and North America. First recorded in the eighteenth century and most heavily documented during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the plays generally follow one (or more) of three established narratives. Eddie Cass and Steve Roud list these as the "hero-combat play", the "wooing", "bridal" or "recruiting sergeant play" and the "sword dance play" (Cass and Roud, 2002) - The Long Company representing an example of the former. Generally taking place at Christmas and New Year, they are primarily encountered outside of the traditional domains of the professional actor, more commonly performed in public spaces, such as pubs, the street and occasionally door-to-door, and are characterized by a diverse range of home-made – sometimes highly elaborate - costumes worn by the players, which often involve some form of masking or disguise. The performance has been interpreted by scholars as self-entertainment, street theatre and an act of "wealth transference"<sup>33</sup> (Cass, 2001: 5) although its origins remain a speculation.

<sup>34</sup> More information about the role and aims of R3S can be found at <http://www.ryburn3step.org.uk> (Accessed 18. January 2014)

<sup>35</sup> Antrobus trace their history back to the 1930s and Alderley Edge to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

the group in 2003.<sup>36</sup> Without an extant model to shape or determine a “revival,” both the script and the costumes worn by The Long Company cast are a modern creation, originated by members of the group. Although this is not in itself unusual – Cass and Roud state that “in England today just six teams have any credible claims to a history dating back beyond the 1940s,” (Cass and Roud, 2002: 21) - The Long Company performance is unusual primarily, I suggest, because it visibly confronts issues of modernity and change.

This is most evident in the play’s appearance and presentation. While in probability it would take a specialist to identify the script as a modern re-working,<sup>37</sup> the unorthodox and perceptibly contemporary materials used to make the costumes (e.g. neoprene, sticky-backed plastic, acetate) are a clear signifier of the play’s - or at least, the costumes’ - recent construction. In addition, the polished presentation of the event – with a clear demarcation between “stage” and audience, and highly formalized choreography – sets The Long Company apart from more “traditionally” presented mummings’ plays, like Alderley Edge, who impose their performance into a range of public spaces, and usually an unsuspecting audience. In some ways, The Long Company may have more in common with a piece of performance art or theatre than a customary practice, but the play intentionally locates and defines itself with reference to the conventions of the English folk movement. In 2009, a few months before I set off on my doctoral research, a series of YouTube videos showing The Long Company’s performance in its entirety were exchanged on internet message boards and social media

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<sup>36</sup> Pete Coe tells me later that he may have found evidence of a previous play in the area, but the other cast members are sceptical: “*EVERYWHERE will have had one at some time or other!*” someone says, “*that’s just what he wants YOU to think!*”

<sup>37</sup> It is actually a composite of a number of other local mummings’ plays, adapted and expanded by the group.

amongst members of the English folk performance community<sup>38</sup>. At that time the play was just six years old, but it was already becoming a unique and high-profile English folk event, drawing visitors and occasionally television crews from all over the country. In an age when traditional folk drama was felt by some to be in decline<sup>39</sup>, The Long Company it seemed were re-inventing mumming for a contemporary audience. But what did that mean?

Hobsbawm and Ranger define invented traditions as a set of practices “which appear or claim to be old”, but which have actually been constructed or substantially re-designed within recent history (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 1). These, they suggest, exist in contrast to “genuine traditions” which do not require such conscious maintenance and renovation:

[T]he strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the ‘invention of tradition’. Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented. (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 8)

The Long Company presents a complication for the invention of tradition, because although it has been constructed and designed within recent history, it neither claims, nor straightforwardly appears to be old. At the same time, its social role - its popularity with performers and audiences in West Yorkshire and further afield - suggests that the truism, “new = bad; old = good”, which underlies much of the rhetoric of invented tradition is not enough to explain the interaction of continuity and change in the mummers’ play.

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<sup>38</sup> Part one of the series of four videos, filmed by John Adams, can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqDqIIOcPii> (Accessed 21. January 2014)

<sup>39</sup> Cass and Roud describe a period of decline in their 2002 book *An Introduction to the English Mummers’ Play*, pp. 19 – 21.

In 2011, I interviewed five members of the group about their experiences with The Long Company. I was interested in how the performance had been created and what motivated the organizers to develop and maintain it in the ways that they had. What differentiated The Long Company from other mummers' plays – or perhaps more importantly for an understanding of folk performance - what made it the same? I began by visiting Annie Dearman, the artist-maker of The Long Company's striking costumes, at her home-studio in the Pennine village of Slaithwaite, which she shares with her partner, Steve Harrison ("Steve H."), a retired social policy professor who also plays the Doctor in the play. This was to be the first of a number of conversations between myself, Annie and Steve over the course of my project, as I sought to understand – and eventually to incorporate in my own practice – the complex but revealing relationships between contemporary folk performance, making and community.

I also spoke to Pete Coe – a professional folk performer and founder of R3S, who plays the Devil and provided the initial idea for a mummers' play in Ripponden; Adrian Jackson – who plays King Christmas; and Steve (Steve J.) and Jake Jones – father and son, who play the adversaries, the Prince of Paradine and Saint George. In addition, I observed at two pre-season rehearsals, and attended performances of The Long Company mummers' play in 2012 and 2013, during their popular local tours in the Ryburn and Calder Valleys. I took photographs at the events, and joined in at the post-performance music sessions at the pub. Since moving to the Northwest, it has become a part of my New Years' ritual too.

## The Long Company and material practice

Figure 1.2.



Detail of The Long Company costumes by Annie Dearman (2011)

### Inventing a tradition

How do you invent a tradition?

I ask the founder members of The Long Company – Pete, Steve H. and Annie - to recall for me their earliest intentions for the play before its inception in 2003.

*I wanted it to be a big event with a sense of occasion. (Pete)*

*Not a pantomime, not comedy, right from the beginning. (Steve H.)*

Annie remembers the project via the practicalities of her brief:

*The first thing that Pete wanted was for it to be done at night, possibly torchlight, and in the winter... So things to take on board [were] visibility of the actors, visibility of the costumes, warmth...props and whether you could use materials that would shine in the light. (Annie)*

For these responses, it can be seen that, in varying ways, the visual presentation of the play (the decision that it should be performed in semi-darkness, that it should not appear like pantomime, etc.) and the desired impact on an audience, were prioritised by the group from the very start.<sup>40</sup> Pete was particularly interested in archive photographs of mummers' from Hampshire, whose costumes are typified by heavy embellishment with streamers and fringing – strips made out of ribbons, rags and paper sewn onto everyday clothing and worn head to foot. Although this style of costuming is not historically common to mummers' in West Yorkshire, The Long Company was envisaged with reference to Overton mummers' in Hampshire and Marshfield Paperboys in Gloucestershire. *Why not?* says Pete.

To a greater extent, this take on tradition – as a springboard for creative re-imagining rather than a set of pre-existing constraints and expectations – underlies the project's eventual manifestation. If my first impression of The Long Company was surprise at the juxtaposition of a familiar “old” mummers' tale with the actors' strange, almost modernist appearance, perhaps the first realization to come out of my conversations with The Long Company members was that the problematic nature of tradition was a motivator rather than an inhibitor to the development of the play. Where fakelors such as Gershon Legman had critiqued the tendency of some folk performers to overstate their traditional credentials, writing:

No folksinger has ever been in the New York Public Library or British Museum, or knows where these institutions will be found. They have never read a book or gone past 3rd grade at school (to hear them tell it) so all their crud can be trusted positively and authentically 'folk-transmitted'.

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<sup>40</sup> Mummers' plays have a historical reputation as an unsettling public spectacle. The diverse appearance of the mummers' costume is described variously in written records as “mysterious” (T. F. Ordish, 1923), “fearsome” (Alec Barber, 1998) and “comical” (Miss Westwood, 1939), while A. J. Munby wrote of his encounter with mummers' in 1883, “[they wore] grotesque masks, strange hats, smocks or other guise over their clothes...I did not comprehend those vagrom men, but gave them a coin – as who should say, ‘We may never see the likes of you again!’”

(Legman, 1964: 494)

...here, the performers were quick to distance themselves from any notion of folkloric “authenticity.”

*We're not steeped in tradition*, says Jake, after recounting a tale from a previous year's performance (*...the handbrake wasn't on properly and there were four mummers in full dress trying to push the car up the hill, just as the spectators arrived.*) By “tradition” here, it can be assumed, Jake is referring to a rigid conception of an unchanging ritual, sequestered and divorced from the realities of everyday life. The group are, he wants to stress, just ordinary people.<sup>41</sup>

Steve H. agrees, explaining how it was the performers' familiarity with recent developments in folk scholarship that led them to purposefully challenge ideas about the inertia of tradition:

*In the past, people made judgments about what it [mumming] is all about. Best thing to do is sit on the fence...and not start saying it's a fertility rite, be careful about falling into saying it's an ancient thing... The same kinds of silly claims that are made about mumming are also made about other folk performances.* (Steve H.)

For The Long Company this “sitting on the fence” is achieved through directly but subtly referencing popular beliefs and known misconceptions about folk, while challenging them with a form of costuming which puts the group's modernity on clear visual display. The group seem to be saying, we *are* contemporary, but we're still folk.

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<sup>41</sup> “The term ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor,” writes Alan Dundes (Dundes, 1980: 6) but as Trubshaw suggests, “we can find it fairly easy to accept that members of such traditional trades as deep-sea fishermen or coal miners shared common lore. But common lore bonds such modern-day occupations as diverse as computer programming, ambulance and fire crews, or professional footballers.” (Trubshaw, 2002: 73)

## Costume

Costume is an integral aspect of The Long Company mummings' play for a number of reasons. Firstly, and as my own experience attests, it creates a powerful and lasting impression on its audience.

*The players are intended to shake up the people of Ripponden...scare the shit out of them. (Pete)*

*We freak people out walking along the canal. (Jake)*

Secondly, it creates a knowing sense of ambiguity for the players. The Long Company costumes confer anonymity (Fig. 1.4). This was initially a condition of the original cast. *The first Saint George was in a senior community position and didn't want to be recognized*, said Pete. However, disguise has also been a common interpretation of the mummings' costume historically, particularly when viewed through the lens of Survivals Theory. Alex Helm wrote in 1980, "it was a fundamental necessity to preserve anonymity, for to be recognized broke the luck," (Helm, 1980: 37) but Cass and Roud suggest, "there is little evidence for this," (Cass and Roud, 2005: 46).

Although the names of the players have since slipped into open secrecy among insiders at R3S, most outsiders remain unable to discern between the players and regular participants when socialising in "civvies" after the performance and the performers usually choose not to make themselves known to audience members. Pete says, *almost all the players have been asked once in the past afterwards if they enjoyed the play and if they'd come back again*. This is one example of the way that The Long Company knowingly play on common assumptions about folk

performance – in this case that it is a survival of pre-Christian ritual.<sup>42</sup> They maintain their “anonymity” even though it is no longer a requirement, in conscious and slightly irreverent reference to the canon of which their play is a part.

Thirdly, costume has a transformative quality for the performers. “Dress acts upon the body;” writes Banu Gokanksel, “it is not merely a shell, not only because it affects the experience and presentation of the self, but it also transforms the self physically and emotionally” (Gokanksel, 2009: 661). This is perhaps particularly relevant to a costume which covers the performer’s primary expressive features. *You have to make large gestures in a costume that has no face, big movements,* reflects Steve H. *It’s anonymous, yet highly personal. There is an element of character built into the costume but also strangeness.*

Steve J. and Jake too, reflect on the impact of wearing the mummers’ costume on movement and behaviour.

[Jake to Steve J.] *You do a good job of sweeping your costume around, to show it off.*  
[Steve J.] *Thanks.*

As such, perhaps it is fair to say that, while The Long Company costumes are influenced by the same “dual concerns of function and beauty” (or function and impact) identified by Thom Boswell in his account of costuming, for the spectators, “aesthetics reign supreme.” (Boswell, 1992: 6)

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<sup>42</sup> Cass and Roud offer a comprehensive overview of this problematic interpretation of the mummers’ play (Cass and Roud, 2002: 15 – 18)

## “Materials-led” making

Figure 1.3.



Detail of The Long Company headdress – ‘The Devil’ (2011)

Annie’s approach to costume making for The Long Company draws on her existing background as a maker and a scholarly awareness of her work in the wider context of mumming and folk art.

As a regular member of the R3S folk development group; a singer and step-dancer, with an established practice as a garment-maker, Annie was tasked with designing costumes for The Long Company in 2002.<sup>43</sup> She describes her approach to costume making as “materials-led.” By this, she is referring to an experimental process, which explores and embraces the specific properties of given materials, begun without a pre-determined final result in mind. *I did some*

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<sup>43</sup> She studied at Southend Art School as a teenager and gained a degree in experimental textiles from Bradford School of Art as a mature student, also working as a costume designer for the canal-network-based Mikron Theatre Company in Marsden, West Yorkshire. For twenty-one years in between she had been an insurance consultant in the City of London, but says that her interest in folk performance – with incarnations as an artist, scholar and performer - has provided a counterpoint throughout the various stages of her life.

*scribbles which I gave to Pete*, she remembers, but the majority of the “design” process was conducted in and through the making. She sourced her materials at a local arts education resource centre, recalling, *they had rolls of sticky-backed plastic...and foil that wasn't very sticky... It was there to be recycled into something artistic.* (Annie) She then spent a few days experimenting with the plastic and foil, exploring new ways of stitching and shaping it, assessing how it worked in conjunction with the neoprene she already had at home (Fig. 1.2, 1.3).

*I wanted to use something that wasn't normally used for clothing... I would look at using new materials, especially things that were disposable - that might have been thrown away... I'm a scavenger, making things out of nothing.* (Annie)

Such an approach requires openness and responsivity to the unexpected and unpredictable within the creative process.

*Serendipitously, the silver foil strips reacted when stuck to the back of the coloured plastic and curled after a few months... They look tatty and it fitted with the character of the poor man, so we left him like it.* (Annie)

*Annie is a very experienced costume-maker*, Steve tells me. *She doesn't use patterns...it's Annie's general way of working though, not a 'folk' thing.* (Steve H.)

However, in some ways Annie's way of working *can* be understood through the lens of folk practice. Helm's suggestion that “rags or bunches of cloth (fastened in some way to the ordinary clothes)” were a popular way for early mummers' teams to costume themselves, when “expense must be reckoned” (Helm, 1980: 37) is like Annie's account of the roots of her interest in recycled and inexpensive materials - *nobody has limitless money to spend* (Annie).

Further, Annie views the use of sticky-backed plastic as a *modern equivalent* of the scrap fabrics and papers used in the past.

- [Annie] *There are teams of [historical] mummers which use torn cloth or newspaper, anything they could get their hands on.*
- [Steve H.] *...at a time when people couldn't afford new clothes, but might be able to afford ribbons to prettify or change a costume.*
- [Annie] *And rags can be torn. It's a time-honoured way of finding costumes for nothing.*

As Helen Thomas suggests, there are at least two ways to approach reconstruction, one “authentic” to the original work and the other interpretative of its spirit (Thomas, 2003: 123). Engagement with the notion of spirit or equivalence is reflected in Annie’s interest in the iconography and literature of English folk art, citing Margaret Lambert and Enid Marx’ work on popular art and Barbara Jones’ book on vernacular art as formational influences on her early practice as a maker.<sup>44</sup> Lambert and Marx were concerned with “the art which ordinary people have, from time immemorial, introduced into their everyday lives, sometimes making it themselves, at others imposing their tastes on the product of the craftsmen or of the machine,” (Lambert and Marx, 1947: 7) while Jones focused her attention specifically towards the involvement of mechanical processes and their impact on taste and making practices.<sup>45</sup>

Folk art is sometimes read as “everyday” art, defined as Peter Millar suggests, as “that which lies outside of specialized activities” (Millar, 2005: 149). The belief that

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<sup>44</sup> The recent symposium, 'Enid Marx and her Contemporaries: Women Designers and the Popularisation of 'folk arts' 1920- 1960,' held on September 13th 2013, by Desdemona McCannon, Rosemary Shirley and Jane Webb at Compton Verney sought to reconsider folk art design and the work of women designers previously omitted from histories of art and design.

<sup>45</sup> Jones differentiated between folk arts which continued without artificial preservation and vernacular arts which continued to be produced, whether by hand or by machine. Interestingly she lists morris dancing and mumming as folk arts which are “dead,” - “Most of the folk arts are dead, or self-consciously preserved by societies. Most of them were handicrafts; we can say with certainty that smocking, quilting, Morris dancing, mumming, corn dollies, weaving and so on, are definitely folk. The things that were made by machine, or at least outside the village on a wholesale scale, have a different flavour altogether; the toy theatre, the fair, fireworks, waxworks and shop signs have a quite new quality, very difficult to define, but harder, cruder, brighter, much less tasteful. We might consider these as the vernacular arts. The decorations of food and clothes hover midway between the two.” (Jones, 1951: 15 - 16)

folk art can be differentiated from the work of the “creative individual” by a lack of skillfulness is countered in the work of Lambert and Marx, who argue that such making should be given value as simultaneously skillful *and* part of the everyday. Annie says she was inspired by *the discovery...that we have a tradition of untrained artists who did things – arts and crafts – and they were as valid and important* [as those made by trained artists] (Annie)

Although Annie is now a trained artist, her skilled practice continues to draw on her interest in folk arts, reflected perhaps in her commitment to using and improvising with readily available materials. While improvisation is sometimes perceived as an unskilled practice, Hallam and Ingold argue that it is inherently present in all creative work: “This does not mean, however, that life is unpredictable. Predictability, as we have seen, is a hallmark of the workmanship of certainty. And predictability, conversely, is often taken to be the essence of creativity.” (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 14)

Annie’s work is both skilled and improvisatory – she trusts in her ability to find ways to work with new materials, allowing them to take the lead in her design process.

Figure 1.4.



Performer's-eye view from inside 'The Devil' headdress (2011)

## **'The Long Company and place-making**

### Ownership

So what else is made through The Long Company mummings' play? Annie and the other members of the group stressed that since the initial period of (completed) making to envisage the performance, another kind of making has powerfully emerged in more recent years. This can be described as community place-making.

*It's become a tradition, a marker for the end of the year. (Jake)*

*When the email comes inviting us for practice, that's when I know it's really Christmas. (Steve. J)*

The cast agreed that the performance has become an important seasonal landmark (Fig 1.5). For the performers and supporters of the Ryburn 3-Step, it represents a time for celebration and reflection together:

- [Steve H.] *It wasn't envisaged when we invented the play but it's become a vehicle for social cohesion for Ryburn 3-Step. It turned out to be an occasion to get together and talk about the year and how things have gone.*
- [Annie] *A big piece of social glue.*

Annie suggests that despite being a comparatively recent creation, The Long Company has come to fundamentally *belong* to the people who are involved in it. *It's not quite the same as being an actor*, she says, comparing the play with those put on by amateur dramatics and community theatre groups. *You feel some ownership* [of the performance itself]. It is also felt to belong to the audiences who return each year for the performance. Jake says, *some of the Ryburn people know it so well they mouth along to all the words and pull faces if we get a word wrong.*

These affective experiences run counter to beliefs about the insubstantiality of invented tradition. Hobsbawm and Ranger state that although “the historic past into which the new tradition is inserted need not be lengthy...[it] seek[s] to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 1 – 2). This is perhaps one of the main reasons that the term has accreted negative associations with purposeful misleading and nationalist agendas, “*kultprosvet*” (Stalinist principles of “cultural enlightenment”) and commercialism. Invented traditions, it is presumed, are manipulative and - by virtue of their newness and presumed artificiality - less likely to evoke genuine feeling.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This also presumes that authentic traditions behave differently and affect people differently. However, Dalhaus writes of authenticity “its nature is to be deceptive about its nature” (Dalhaus,

However, perhaps contradictorily, The Long Company is perceived as belonging directly to its participants *because* it was made and not inherited. Where some self-conscious folk performances might seek to conceal their contemporary origins, The Long Company makes a strength of the play's ambiguous historical positioning and visible modernity to enable local people to take ownership of the tradition – to see their own hand in the performance - as integral and active participants.

For Jake, the performance itself is not even the most important part of The Long Companys' continuation:

*The play is actually not the most necessary [part of it]. It gives people an excuse to go to the pub and socialise and have a session. There's a play for twenty minutes, it's like the warm up. I don't think the reason I do it is because of the play... I guess that's what folk tradition is about. To bring everyone together as a community. (Jake)*

### Self-organisation

Ownership through making, both material and performative. points to another aspect of the successful invention of The Long Company mummers' play – the importance of self-organisation.

The Long Company, as part of the wider R3S programme, perceive themselves as a form of non-institutionalised culture, produced and supported internally by

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1967: 57) and Bendix suggests, "the quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing, at once modern and anti-modern. It is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity" (Bendix, 1997: 8).

members of the community in which it is performed. Annie says, *We're very proud that R3S is self-sustaining and doesn't rely on grants.*

For Annie and Steve, who also tour the country as a musical duo, this possibility to self-organise is key to understanding their involvement in folk performance. Describing themselves as “true community musicians,” they emphasise the importance of performing their material widely, “not just in festivals and folk clubs all over England, but for history societies, community groups, political events, weddings, birthdays and funerals.”<sup>47</sup> *The philosophy that Steve and I share*, said Annie in an email, *is that 'folk' is less about the music or song per se and more about the context of the performance, i.e. performing on a small scale for and with friends and acquaintances* (Personal email between Lucy Wright and Annie Dearman, 2013). In this way, folk performance might be viewed as a space for self-determination and a means of taking control of the immediate environment.

For Adrian, who plays King Christmas, this is a highly poignant experience:

*Folk has been fundamental to my life... It connects you with something DIY – not just entertainment provided for you. I met my wife through morris [dancing]... I can't put it into words. (Adrian)*

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.dearmanharrison.co.uk> (Accessed 2 February 2014)

## Continuity and change

Figure 1.5.



The Long Company in performance at The Bridge Inn, Ripponden (2011)

Despite a consciously creative beginning, since the first performance of the play in 2003, The Long Company members have tended to resist conscious change. *“It’s local because local people are there and we use local links...”* says Pete when I ask about the future, *“It works because we built it up here. We don’t want to do it anywhere else.”*

Annie and Steve are also clear about the importance of continuity in The Long Company performance:

- [Annie] *People have said to me, ‘can’t we change it? Can’t we do a different play?’*
- [Steve] *...which is about as meaningful as saying ‘can’t we have a rock band instead?!’*
- [Annie] *It wouldn’t be popular, because that’s how it is. The static-ness is the important thing.*
- [Steve] *The unchanging-ness...*

For Annie, this can be attributed to the durability and evocativeness of performances such as mumming in the lives of the people who encounter them:

*Steve's father remembers the Derby ram play in Sheffield. He's eighty-six and blind – and saying lines from an old mummers play from his childhood. It was very moving. It stays in the memory. (Annie)*

However, she is philosophical about the future of her costumes:

*It'll be past my time when they fall apart. Someone else will come along and reinvent them with whatever they have to hand. I'm not precious about it. (Annie)*

As Hallam and Ingold write, using the metaphor of building a house, “the reality is that no building remains – as the architect might wish – forever unchanged, but it has to be continually modified and adapted to fit in with manifold and ever-shifting purposes.” (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 4)

And members of the cast are already able to identify the subtle changes which have taken place as the play continues to be performed:

*It is nice to have a tradition. But it's also nice when the tradition adapts slightly. It does change... when new people come in, that changes it. (Jake)*

Hallam and Ingold summarise, “the continuity of tradition is due not to its passive inertia but to its active regeneration – in the tasks of carrying on” (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 6). The current fixedness of The Long Company performance suggests that the origins of a tradition quickly take on a less significant role than the social benefits of carrying on, but that this need not be considered at odds with the tradition of creativity or to the creativity of tradition.

Figure 1.6.



The Long Company musicians (2011)

### **“The way we work”**

So is The Long Company really an invented tradition?

In that it has been invented and perpetuated in living memory, probably yes. But to what extent does this differ from longer-established traditions – even those which have lost touch with the named individuals who originated them?

In the next case study I build on this research to consider the making practices of a morris dancing group who consider their performance to be a revival - directly referencing an established historical and geographically specific model – to help to clarify the substantive distinction, at least as it is understood by some contemporary folk performers.

The Long Company provides an important starting point to my research about contemporary folk performance. It suggests that historical and geographical depth are not necessarily prerequisites for a form of self-organised performance which is meaningful to its participants. It also makes the case for interrogating the relationship between folk performance and different kinds of making – as opposed to perceiving it as a kind of artefact to be uncomprehendingly transmitted and perpetuated.

However, as a literal hand-making practice, The Long Company is a completed task. Annie's materials-led practice is not a significant continuing project for the group, and my retrospective interviewing only goes so far to gain insight into contemporary folk performance.

My next case study seeks to achieve a more embodied understanding of what the project of making a tradition entails – through engagement with a personal making practice of my own.

## Case Study 2: Conversation Hats

### Thinking-through-making and “revival”

Figure 2.1.



Conversation Hats by Lucy Wright, worn by Lymm Morris at Lymm Rushbearing (2013)

October, 2011

At first, it is awkward. Perhaps we are both unsure, or embarrassed by the task.

*It's really tatty isn't it? It looks awful!* says Steve G., pushing his hat briskly across the table towards me, looking away. Henry greets me at the door dressed in the bows, belt and braces of the Lymm Morris kit over his casual jeans and shirt, self-proclaimed “Grow-more” hat perched on his head. *I wear my kit at all sorts of - what people might call - ‘strange occasions,’* he explains. Andrew and Rob produce for me a whole collection of hats worn over many years as morris dancers, but seem unsure why any of them would be relevant. *I'm not the biggest fan of the kit,* Andrew admits, *“it's just a little bit...maybe a little bit too girly for me,*

while Duncan, a personal friend, gently chides me about the “proper” way to conduct an interview. *Right. You start off with “Date, Time...*

We laugh nervously at the newness of this show-and-tell approach.

The first time I met the Lymm Morris men was a wet Wednesday evening in October at the Pickering Arms in Thelwall, near Warrington. Weekly morris dance practice had been cancelled but most of the group had still chosen to meet at their usual pub, sitting close around the small oval table to drink pints of blonde ale and bitter. Someone had brought their hat along for me to see and I was able to examine for the first time the details of its construction, a once-flimsy straw boater scaffolded by a tall wrap of chicken wire and liberally stuffed with plastic flowers, broken jewellery and Christmas decorations. It reminded me of some kind of portable shrine, or perhaps a roadside memorial. Gaudy, unsettling, fixating.

A few weeks later I arranged to visit the dancers individually at their homes to talk about Lymm Morris and to make photographs of their hats. Not everybody was interested in talking to me, perhaps deterred by my focus on “making” (*I’m not what you’d call an artist*, someone said doubtfully) but four people wrote down their contact details at the end of the night, and Duncan had already agreed. Now we are facing each other, one-to-one, conversing across a dining table, or settled in armchairs, or gathered around a glowing computer in a tidy, book-lined study. I ask each dancer to show me his hat and explain how, and why, it was made.

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*Conversation Hats* is my first semi-formalized attempt to bring together fieldwork and the development of a personal practice as a maker (Fig. 2.1).

My study with The Long Company mummers' had indicated that material practice might be a valuable way of thinking about contemporary folk, particularly as it relates to a self-proclaimed invented tradition, but I had completed the work keen to explore a different kind of performance – the kind with which The Long Company is seemingly at odds: the folkloric revival.

I was also interested in interrogating a performance that involved current and continued making practices, undertaken by the performers themselves. In a number of important ways, I could see that Annie's work with The Long Company - the finite project of a trained artist, not an actor herself - was not typical of the majority of performance groups associated with the folk movement.<sup>48</sup> For many morris dancing sides, for example, making a costume (or *kit*)<sup>49</sup> is a personal - and personalizing - task. Customizing a hat or jacket, or even stitching one's own bell pads are often an expected rite-of-passage for new members coming in to the group, usually undertaken in advance of the first public dance-out.<sup>50</sup> Rather than a one-off making exercise, these kinds of costuming might beneficially be

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<sup>48</sup> Although it is not uncommon for a member of the group with artistic training or interest to undertake the majority of incidental or one-off design tasks for a side – as is also the case in Lymm Morris. For example, the handmade “awards”, distributed at the yearly AGM were designed and made by Geoff Bibby, one of the founder members, who also works as an art teacher.

<sup>49</sup> *Kit* is the term generally used by morris dancers when describing their costume for performance.

<sup>50</sup> This process is not common to *all* morris dancing kits. Adlington Morris Men from Macclesfield, Cheshire have an established kit which was commissioned by the group and fulfilled by a local costume-maker. The purpose of this costume is uniformity and few personal alterations are permitted. However, certain morris dancing styles, such as Border and often Northwest favour a greater degree of individualisation. In this work, I am interested in such groups as these.

understood as a process, or an evolution<sup>51</sup> – the addition, loss or re-organisation of effects within the kit over a period of years also documenting a personal journey as a performer.

Learning about these kinds of making practice – making undertaken, primarily, by people without a professional background in costuming or design – would allow me to understand more about the meanings and implications of folk performance as a material practice. It might also offer insight into the substantive differences between an invented tradition and a revived one. What motivates performers to draw on an extant model and what does this tell us about tradition and change? To what extent is authenticity an issue or concern, and how does the site-specificity of the performance impact on lived experiences of ownership and community, as described by The Long Company?

In addition to learning from current folk performers, I also wanted to begin to integrate my own art practice into the research process. Through directing my interviews towards the making practices of others I also sought to find ways to explore and reflect on my conversations through making of my own. In so doing, my research might become more embedded and embodied, a way to fuse knowing and doing with folk performance, and to consider the possibilities for an artistic ethnomusicology.

My research involved members of Lymm Morris - an occasional morris dancing side who perform the historical Lymm Dance twice each year in Lymm, Cheshire - and it was planned as a project of two phases. In the first, I would hold interviews

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<sup>51</sup> Of course, the same might reasonably be said of The Long Company but this is an active and intentional process for some morris kits, while Annie's *completed* costumes evolve more gradually and incidentally, via the interactions of performers.

with the performers, using their making as the focus of our conversation. In the second overlapping phase, I would undertake a making project of my own, as a way of responding, expanding upon and consolidating what I had learned in the field.

Beginning in October 2011, I interviewed Henry Addison, Steve Guest (Steve G.), Rob Pracy and Andrew White, and a former Lymm member, Duncan Broomhead. I also attended two public performances of the Lymm Dance in 2012 and made photographs of the dancers with their hats at home, highlighting the contrast between the public role of morris dancing and the domestic interior in which the kit making primarily takes place. In 2013, following the completion of my own making on the theme of the Lymm Morris kit, I re-visited the group to exhibit the work and to offer opportunities to reflect collaboratively on the outcomes of the research.<sup>52</sup> I hypothesized that approaching the field in this way might offer new ways of sharing knowledge, returning “interview” to its original meaning, from the French “s’entrevoir” or “to see each other” - as well as providing a new space for personal reflection.

Lymm Morris was chosen for three main reasons. Firstly the contemporary Lymm Dance is a revival by members of Thelwall Morris Men, following a period of archival research during the 1970s. Unlike mummers’ in the Ryburn Valley, the Lymm Dance has a specific and traceable history in the Lymm area, performed today as the latest incarnation in a documented series of revivals since the earliest

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<sup>52</sup> The three hats were displayed at the Lymm Village Hall during the Rush-bearing festival and modeled by members of Lymm Morris after their performance.

known reference to the performance at the Lymm Rush-bearing in 1817.<sup>53</sup> Its continued annual performance at the Rush-bearing and May Queen celebrations in Lymm thus implies engagement with issues around site-specificity and rootedness within a particular community.

Secondly, the performers are recognizable by their distinctive and unusually tall flowery hats, which are hand-decorated by each dancer upon joining the side. While flowery hats are a familiar component of the English morris kit broadly, they are perhaps particularly associated with the Northwest style of the dance, and Lymm Morris base their current appearance on a series of photographs of morris dancing in Lymm, from the turn of the twentieth century. In this way, while the Lymm hats display significant variety amongst the members of the side – revealing the idiosyncratic processes and aesthetic preferences of different makers – they are also broadly uniform, modeled towards the replication of an existing design. This is in marked contrast to the aesthetic re-imagination of the mummers' play by Annie and The Long Company.

Interested in this tension, between “dynamic replication,” (Boyes’ term for the transmission aims of the early folk movement) and Rob Young’s model of “constant transformation” (used to describe the process of a living tradition in perpetual renewal – Young, 2010: 67), the Lymm hats came to function as a metaphor for my research. Through looking, handling and talking about the hats – in a practice which was affectionately termed “show-and-tell” - my practical objective was to learn about how they were made, the decisions and concerns that had shaped the choice and arrangement of the embellishments, and the stories,

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<sup>53</sup> Ormerod, 1882: 81 – 2  
([http://www.thelwallmorris.org.uk/lymm\\_book/rushbearing/lymm\\_rushbearing.htm](http://www.thelwallmorris.org.uk/lymm_book/rushbearing/lymm_rushbearing.htm) Accessed 21. November 2013)

meanings and ideas that were interwoven within their material construction. The hats functioned as aide-memoires for the dancers and expositional repositories of meaning for me – what Sherry Turkle has called “evocative objects” or “things we think with” (Turkle, 2007).

“Artistic creativity is methodological, but in its own artistic way,” write Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009: 20) and in this research I was able to mirror the subject of my study – making and revival folk performance – with the creative methods of my research. Through interrogating my own making practice, I was able to explore the making processes of Lymm Morris from a more embodied, “inside” position, through “perspectives, sensibilities and issues...that have not previously been accessible” (Cain in Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009: 72). The resultant objects – three hats – were also infused with questions and meaning.

## **Lymm Morris and material practice**

### Reviving a tradition

How is a tradition revived? What makes Lymm Morris’ material approach different from that documented by members of The Long Company?<sup>54</sup>

The obvious starting point is that Lymm Morris is the product of purposeful research into a specific dance, rather than a re-working of a more general performance-type. This work was led by Geoff Bibby, who, in addition to searching

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<sup>54</sup> Although morris dancing and mumming are different kinds of performance, they share a close conceptual status within the folk movement – as Trubshaw notes, “*nowadays frequently performed by the same groups of people,*” (Trubshaw, 2002: 140)

local archives for written and photographic records of the performance, conducted interviews with living members of the Statham Boys Team, the last known team to dance it previously in the 1920s (Fig 2.4).<sup>55</sup> Although Thelwall Morris Men predominantly perform in the Cotswold-style of dancing, the Northwest-style Lymm Dance initially formed part of the Thelwall repertoire, performed while wearing the regular Thelwall Morris kit. The performance did not assume a distinct identity until 1986 when membership of the newly formed Lymm Morris was opened to local dancers outside of the Thelwall side, and this new era was pronounced through the adoption of a different kit.

Similar to The Long Companys' focus on presentation and spectatorship, Rob remembers that the decision to change kit was informed by an interest in the possibilities of the visual spectacle and acknowledgement of audience reaction, in this case specifically from the wider morris dancing community<sup>56</sup>:

*We wore our standard Cotswold kit but without the bells... Somebody made a comment about it saying, you know, it was a shame... We went away and we thought about that comment and eventually said, 'you know, we ought to dance in the right kit,' and when we did put the right kit on, the dance felt even much better. (Rob)*

However, the use of the phrase "right kit" reveals something significant about Lymm Morris' underlying motivations, in contrast to the comparative lack of stylistic predetermination in The Long Companys' approach. Where visual appearance was a space for creative re-imagining by The Long Company, with an eye to enhancing audience experience, for Lymm Morris, the change in appearance was

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<sup>55</sup> Very comprehensive notes about the dance, its history and revival can be found at <http://www.thelwallmorris.org.uk> Accessed 21. November 2013)

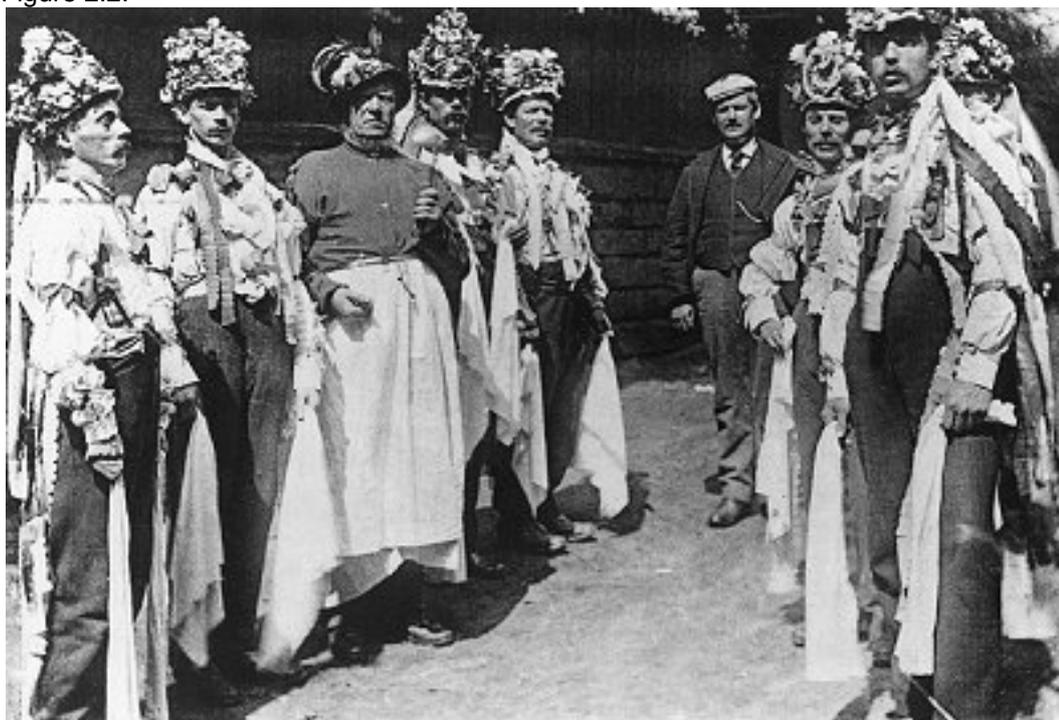
<sup>56</sup> Thelwall Morris Men are a member side of the Morris Ring – "The National Association of Men's Morris and Sword Dance Clubs" (<http://www.themorrisring.org> Accessed 24. January 2013) and perform at the annual Thaxted meeting.

catalysed by pre-existing expectations about the role of morris dancing in the wider folk movement – that it should accurately portray the performance upon which it draws.

*It was just loosely based upon the pictures we had, says Andrew, when I ask how the Lymm Morris kit was decided upon. Rob agrees, there was never really much debate about it. That was what we were going to go for.* The group sourced black trousers, black shoes and white shirts and made belts of ribbons, bow-covered braces and straw hats decorated with flowers to match those shown in the archives. Extra-large white hankies were made by Andrew's wife to ensure the uniformity of size and colour, while hats and belts were left to the individual dancer to fulfil. This accretion of different elements – some specific, some generic – lead to overall teamwear cohesion, while also allowing for personalisations. *Basically it's the same template, but everybody's is just unique, says Andrew.*

## Lymm Morris Men – archive photographs

Figure 2.2.



Oughtrington Morris Men (1899) Morris Ring Photographic Archive

Figure 2.3.



'Lymm Morris Dancers' (1904) from a series of 6 Coloured Post Cards of Lymm; photograph by C. E. Arden, Lymm, Cheshire.

Figure 2.4.



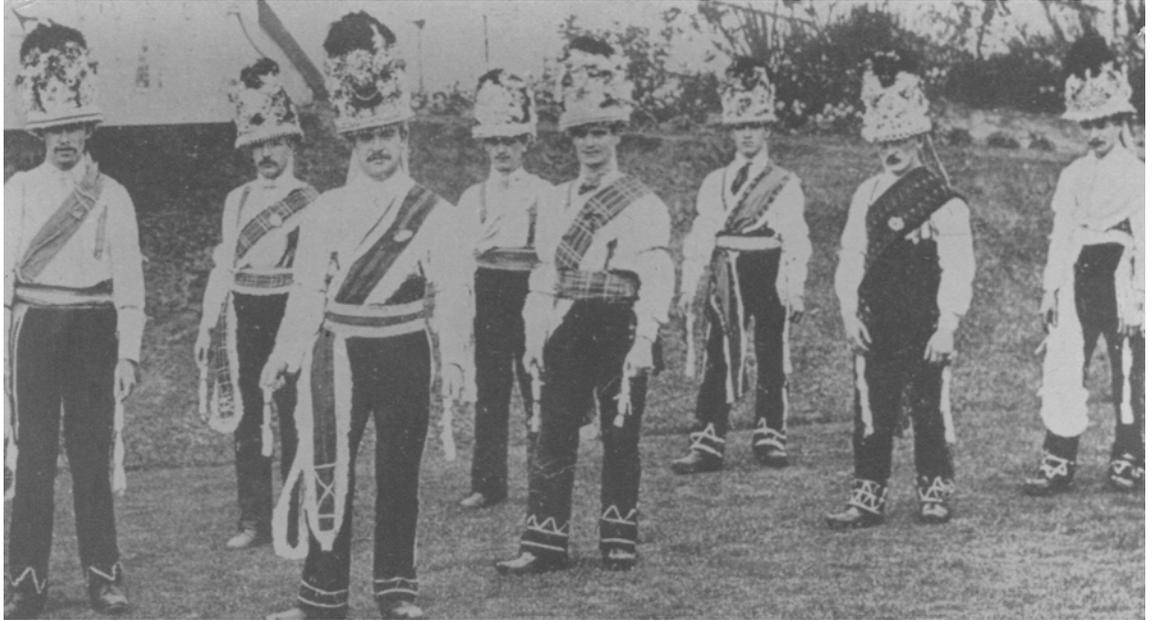
Statham Lads Morris Team (1923) Morris Ring Photographic Archive

Figure 2.5.



Lymm Rushbearing, c.1840 – York Art Gallery collections

Figure 2.6.



Middleton Morris Dancers (1885) Morris Ring Photographic Archive

## Everyday making

Unlike Annie and The Long Company, few of the Lymm dancers claimed to have a background or interest in making, as it relates to “arts and crafts.” Steve G. says, [I have] *absolutely no artistic skills whatsoever...hence the hat!* [laughs] and Andrew jokes, *DIY? Don't Involve Yourself!* For most of the members interviewed, working on the hat thus represented a departure from everyday practice,<sup>57</sup> some admitting that they had received help from a spouse. Rob says of the stitched on badges, *my wife did this... I'm not much of a sew-er... if I sew a button on a button hole, they all fall off. I'm separated now, so if I have to do any more sewing, I will have to improve my technique*, while Steve G. confides that he has not told the other dancers, but *well my wife has done...virtually all of it. She's far more skilled than me.*

However, for Andrew, a solitary process is a matter of pride:

[Me]            *Did you make this? Did you put the flowers on yourself?*  
[Andrew]      *Yes I did. Despite getting married, that was one thing [I still did]*

The association of “domestic” practices such as needlecrafts and floristry with “traditional” constructions of femininity is well-documented,<sup>58</sup> but the discomfort shown by some of the dancers when asked to talk about their making might also be understood as symptomatic of a wider system of beliefs about the nature of art and craft. “[Artists] are expected to behave in expected ways,” writes Kathleen Coessens, “to follow the rules and habits of the aesthetic cultural field of society, to

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<sup>57</sup> I am using this term with reference to Certeau's book, 'The Practice of Everyday Life' (1984)

<sup>58</sup> For example, Roszika Parker suggests that embroidery's categorization of craft rather than art is revealing of a deeper gender hierarchy within material practices (Parker, 2010)

have great skills and talent and to show a level of excellence in a specific aesthetic domain” (Coessens, 2011: 1 – 2). Art and artists, in short, are perceived to have a special status, existing separately from the lives of everyday people – perhaps a bit like one reading of folk performance.

Although most of the dancers were keen to distance themselves from any notion of artistry,<sup>59</sup> many made easy reference to occasional making practices undertaken in other areas of life. Rob is a war games enthusiast and makes and paints highly detailed models for gaming, while Henry says, *I don't do arty stuff as such...[but] I like to work in wood*, and Andrew describes making cards and gifts for friends using his computer, *I won't do craftwork but... I do some creative things occasionally*.

Making a Lymm hat may have been an unusual task then, but it was also one which most of the dancers felt able to complete despite a perceived lack of artistic specialism. The products might be understood as “everyday making”<sup>60</sup> – not an institutionalized art form, but – like folk performance itself – an accessible and social creative practice.

### Improvisation

Whether constructed independently or in collaboration, most descriptions of the hat making process included reference to various kinds of materials-led

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<sup>59</sup> This situation may have been foregrounded when interviewed by a researcher from an art department.

<sup>60</sup> Cresswell (2008) debates the usage of the terms “everyday” and “practice,” distinguishing between the mundane and “the rarefied and perhaps avant-garde moments of performance, art and counter-aesthetic,” sometimes associated with the term, Cresswell suggests that “the kinds of ‘everyday practices’ that are often talked about...aren’t everyday life.” In this case, making for folk performance might represent a bridging of that conceptual gap.

experimentation. In The Long Company we have already seen that creativity and improvisation are synonymous processes, however in contrast to Annie's practice, the making of Lymm Morris was not underpinned by an established approach. Most of the members recalled a process of trial and error leading to the completion of the task. Rob's current hat is a composite of a number of older, unused ones:

*It got built up over the years... All of the flowers have been replaced because the original flowers that I had were horrible plastic things. Now it's horrible silk. (Rob)*

Henry spoke at length about his difficulties in balancing his aesthetic and ideological intentions for the hat, with the practical considerations of dancing.

*When I was making this kit I made an error. Of course the ribbon they would have used in the old days isn't like the ribbon today - it would have been heavier. So I looked round for heavier ribbon, you know velvet or something like it, which of course makes your ribbons too heavy. I found I couldn't actually support them on my hat. (Henry)*

Later members, such as Henry and Duncan were able to draw on the experience of original members, like Andrew, Rob and Steve G. After a few false starts Henry remembers:

*I'd started asking how the other lads made their hats [laughs] you know, common sense, and they were saying most people use chicken wire and they wire it on to it... you know they put them through and then the end there they put a twist of wire around it... so I sort of worked on that. (Henry)*

New members were also offered spare materials left over from the making of others. Duncan remembers, *when I got mine I was given just a huge bag of odds and ends of ribbons. I think I got loads of off-cuts from someone, it was like a bin bag full.* This suggests that Lymm Morris' making has become somewhat cumulative between the group, perhaps even towards an established practice

which might be replicated by new members. If this hypothesis holds true, it may reveal that Lymm Morris' making is more similar to The Long Company than is initially evident.

### Authenticity

Decision-making around the selection of appropriate materials is also revealing about Lymm Morris' engagement with notions of authenticity – a marked contrast to the consciously contemporary *equivalence* of The Long Company's costumes.

Andrew muses about different types of plastic flowers:

*It was a bunch of daffodils and I just cut them off... it's just I could get a lot of them, big bunchy things... 'cause I mean daffodils is a bit...of a strange one to put on...because if Lymm Rushbearing was August, you'd not get a lot of daffodils. (Andrew)*

The quest for accuracy was a common theme in my conversations. Most of the dancers had employed both a close reading of the extant archive photographs as well as research into the historical context to direct their making.

*I did particularly go for velvet ribbons... says Rob, because... [the] occupation in Lymm was fustian cutting... It's sort of poor man's velvet. Henry describes the kit of another Lymm Morris dancer, not interviewed, [he] does the archaic stuff... very dark coloured ribbons on his... His aren't actually ribbons, they're torn strips of cloth, while another non-interviewed member doesn't like the idea of using plastic flowers so he always gets real foliage on his... even in winter - he will actually put green branches and leaves, if he can't get any flowers (Henry).*

In this way, perhaps Lymm Morris' approach to revival is like one understanding of "re-enactment" – an example of what Marc Augé has called "the pleasures of verification, the joy of recognition" (Augé, 1995: 184). The work of the artist Allison Smith deals with the material culture of historical re-enactment groups and the role of craft in constructions of national and gender identities, which may be relevant to an understanding of folk performance. She writes:

Living History is founded on the idea that historical events gain meaning and relevance when performed live in an open-air, interactive setting. Here, performing...has everything to do with crafting objects in such historically accurate detail that they can actually facilitate time travel. (Smith, 2013: 294)

Interrogating the apparent need to replay the American Civil War over and over, as a collaborative form of history "in-the-making" her work suggests that such actions facilitate a sense of contemporary ownership and control:

[T]hrough re-enactment... history is revealed as an active, participatory, and collaborative process... Just as imaginative portrayals of the future in science fiction novels and films reveal the fears and aspirations of the time in which they are created, it is important to remember that historical reenactment is always about the present. (Smith, 2013: 295, 301)

This is in some ways reminiscent of the philosopher Marshall McLuhan's suggestion that "there are many reasons why most people prefer to live in the age that's just behind them. It's safer. To live right on the shooting line, right on the frontier of change is terrifying" (McLuhan, 1997)<sup>61</sup>. This suggests that while Morris dancing sides might prefer to fall back on established imagery rather than newly created and contemporary styles, as Malcolm Chapman writes of traditional dress, "frozen in its frame... [it is] a repeated statement about the modern condition...it is the symbolic inversion" (Chapman, 1995: 26). This is particularly relevant given

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<sup>61</sup> ABC Radio Network lecture, transcribed from original footage, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImaH51F4HBw> Accessed 25. January, 2014)

the origination of the early folk revival during a period of extensive change brought about by industrialization, the sense of a “direct and urgent response to a cultural crisis” (Boyes, 1993: 1).

However, Lymm Morris are simultaneously conscious of the paradoxical nature of seeking to stem the tide of change. Rob acknowledges the limits and relativity of the team’s efforts towards replication:

*I don't think you can reproduce it exactly can you? And does it make any sense to do so, you know? You're not trying to be a museum piece... I don't think at any time we say 'you know we should go back to this recording of what the morris team are'. It's worthwhile being aware of them and watching them [the sources] but you're not trying to copy something exactly. (Rob)*

And Andrew too expresses a similar ambivalence about a deeper “authenticity”. Equating it with the notion of tradition, it is, he says, *quite low down the list of reasons for doing it if truth be told... I mean yes we are keeping something alive... it probably won't die anyway cause there's enough people keeping it alive.*

Instead, the group portray their practice of revival as a kind of diversion or augmentation of the primary goals of the performance. Personal enjoyment is the stated key to participation for most of the dancers. As Steve G. says, *the prime reason I'm doing it is because I enjoy it*, continuing:

*I would say [tradition is] interesting rather than important if you like. I mean it interests me because I'm interested in folk music and the past and in traditions and that sort of stuff, so it's interesting... If it was a new thing, if it had...only been invented in the 1940s and I'd seen it in the 1970s, I think I'd still be interested. But it's a little bit more interesting that it has got this history. (Steve G.)*

Perhaps in intentional contrast to the practice of the historical re-enactors, the Lymm Morris hats provide a conscious space for individualization. When viewed

from a distance, the performance might appear an authentic reproduction of the earlier model, but closer up, it is possible to see that the hats are decorated with badges, buttons and other small trinkets, bringing a historical kit into contemporary focus.

Some of the chosen embellishments are related to morris dancing: *[I've] got badges celebrating [Morris] Ring meetings - 1985 that one, that's 1988...* says Rob turning his hat over in his hands. *Some of these we got from when we were in Ireland, says Steve G. We've been to Ireland three times... And this scrawny thing here is in fact...he's a little leprechaun.*

Other badges have more personal meaning to the performers' lives outside of Lymm Morris. *For many years I worked in the gas industry so there's something a bit individual there,* says Rob indicating a badge from British Gas. Andrew shows me a colourful cloth patch commemorating the Hawaii Solar Eclipse in 1991, and an 'Astronomy is looking up' pin which he wears for his late wife:

*[She] was a keen astronomer... We've been to, I can't remember how many - eleven or so - total solar eclipses...that was almost like our holiday so... She was the driving force in that. (Andrew)*

In these ways the Lymm Hats are neither historical artefacts nor contemporary re-enactments – but when interpreted by the maker, might become contextually meaningful to both the wearer and the spectator.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Henry observes, *there are some people that really go overboard... just like you'll see hikers with their stick with little shields, you know, halfway down it and people used to do the thing with car stickers... You know, they had windows that you couldn't see out of for the stickers on it... I don't take it to that extent.* Andrew explains how the dancers have become wary of affixing items of significant sentimental value to the hats, *I wouldn't put anything on the hat that I wasn't prepared to lose... because one of our lads put quite interesting badges on, from places he'd been... and we were in Warrington town centre and somebody asked him if they could try his hat on... He gave this lad his hat [and he] cleared off with it.*

**Conversations with Lymm Morris Men (2011)**

Andrew White

Figure 2.7.



Detail of Andrew's Thelwall Morris hat (2011)

Figure 2.8.



Detail of Andrew's Lymm Morris hat (2011)

Figure 2.9.



Andrew White at home (2011)

Rob Pracy

Figure 2.10.



Detail of Rob's Lymm Morris hat (2011)

Figure 2.11.



Assorted morris hats (2011)

Figure 2.12.



Rob Pracy at home (2011)

Steve Guest

Figure 2.13.



Detail of Steve's Lymm Morris hat (2011)

Figure 2.14.



Detail of Steve's Thelwall Morris hat (2011)

Figure 2.15.



Steve Guest at home (2011)

Henry Addison

Figure 2.16.



Detail of Henry's Lymm Morris hat (2011)

Figure 2.17.



Henry Addison at home (2011)

Figure 2.18.



Lymm Morris at The Star in Lymm (2013)

## Lymm Morris and place-making

How does Lymm Morris' material practice relate to the sense of community and shared ownership described by The Long Company?

### Identity

Most of the conversations highlight the multi-layering of issues around team identity inherent in the idiosyncratic nature of the Lymm Morris kit.

For Duncan, the hat in particular, locates Lymm Morris within a wider Northwest tradition of morris dancing. *Nowadays my guess is that the majority of sides dancing Northwest wear large flowery hats*, he says, also stressing its importance in developing a shared team identity amongst the performers. *You got to think of it as a team... You do it for the team and it's not about the individual... 'cause dancing's got to be as a team.*

In addition, Henry explains how the kit articulates both a team identity and an understandable role to various audiences:

*We don't normally actually have the name of the side written all over you - people get to recognise your team colours if you like... And the kit makes you stand out more as a spectacle, having a certain amount of bright colour... If you're just in black trousers and a white shirt dancing in the street, they wouldn't necessarily know it was morris. (Henry)*

In contrast to the organizers of The Long Company, whose earliest aims were to unsettle onlookers through visual address, one of the primary concerns for Henry is that the Lymm Dance is clearly recognisable and relatable to its spectatorship, a consequence perhaps of the differing performance spaces chosen by the two

groups. While The Long Company directly invites its audience to witness a mumming event at predetermined locations advertised in advance, the Lymm Dance is more liable to be encountered incidentally when performed in public places<sup>63</sup> thus rendering an understandable role more necessary.

However, like The Long Company costumes, the Lymm kit has a transformatory effect on both the dancers and their performance. Rob's interpretation is highly personal, signifying the transition from an everyday identity as a worker to that of morris dance performer – a process he describes as a kind of ritual<sup>64</sup>:

*It's all part of a ritual though, getting dressed... and it takes me a few minutes... it is part of a whole process of doing it.*<sup>65</sup> (Rob)

For Henry too, the kit enables him to assume a role as a performer, which represents a departure from his everyday persona:

*Inherently I'm actually quite a shy person and it is... always a great help... to put on... something which, you can hide behind... You know there's a feeling that there is this barrier between you and the world.* (Henry)

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<sup>63</sup> This is perhaps more relevant to Thelwall Morris who perform year-round, while the Lymm Dance is rarely performed outside of the Lymm Rushbearing and May Queen which are fixtures in the team calendar.

<sup>64</sup> But Andrew describes the inverse of this position, highlighting the outsider status that might be conferred by dressing in an unconventional way, particularly when acting in isolation: *I'm more uncomfortable wearing kit...if I'm on my own, going anywhere, because... I don't feel threatened, but I think that... I'm more noticeable, cause there's just you like that.* (Andrew)

<sup>65</sup> Rob highlighted the difficulties of balancing work commitments with a priority to morris dancing, *I was working down the midlands sort of three days a week and down South and I quite often found myself packing my kit on a Sunday night. So Wednesday night I'd be coming back and I'd come straight from Birmingham, drive up here to dance... I know my priority is morris dancing. The only thing that stops me morris dancing sometimes is if I'm working.*

In addition, the performers agree that the adoption of the kit made a significant impact on the way that the Lymm Dance is performed, particularly the adornment with ribbons on the hat and belt.

*It just totally transforms the dance! I've never seen anything like it... When it's windy all the ribbons here just absolutely fly around you... A lot of the show in Northwest [morris dancing] is about actually a presence when you're dancing. (Rob)*

*There's so many dangly bits [on the hat and the belt] you can't really drive... It's a whole new lifestyle wearing that kit [laughs] (Andrew)*

### Site-specificity and ownership

As a site-specific revival – performing the Lymm Dance primarily in Lymm where the performance originated – Lymm Morris' engagement with place differs from the gradual accretion of ownership by the communities around The Long Company. What did it mean to the dancers to revive a specifically local, rather than a national or generic performance?

Here, my research surprised me. Although the Lymm Dance has a long and traceable history in the Lymm area, few of the performers I interviewed considered *themselves* to be straightforwardly local and this led to a somewhat contradictory attitude towards place-based ownership. Of the dancers interviewed, none were born or currently lived in Lymm, although all were based within twenty miles of the town.

Duncan is the only participant who had been brought up in Cheshire and I ask him, leadingly, if it feels different to dance a local dance, compared with his regular – and nationally performed - Cotswold style:

*It was...technically different, completely different... [but] I was kind of detached - I like Lymm as a place but the architecture and everything round there is different to the architecture I was brought up in. (Duncan)*

This reaction foregrounds both the relativity of tradition – he goes on to cite his father’s involvement with Cotswold rather than Northwest morris dancing despite growing up in Cheshire, *you had the EFDSS zealots who were going round teaching everyone Cotswold morris - I mean my Dad living in Manchester was taught Cotswold morris*<sup>66</sup> – as well as the idiosyncrasy and specificity of the sensing of place. If I had made the mistake of considering Cheshire as a fairly cohesive or homogenous area, Duncan reminded me that place-identity is personally constructed and unique, despite geographical proximities.

For the other dancers, locality and belonging are equally complex quantities, negotiated on multiple levels. Rob views his shifting sense of place-identity as compounded both by multiple house moves and even changes to county administrative boundaries:

*I'm a 'fairly local.' I mean was born in Manchester...which is not that far away [from Lymm] but...I went to Uni in Newcastle... I got quite a few affinities to the North East. Of course this [Warrington] is Cheshire now. (Rob)*

As a consequence of his own plurality of experience, Andrew stresses a different kind of belonging to Lymm Morris which is earned over a period of years living and working in the area. Originally from Leeds, he clarifies *I've lived in Warrington longer than I've lived anywhere else*, and foregrounds the importance of regular commitment to both the Lymm and Thelwall sides as integral to his own sense of belonging in the Northwest. He also suggests that he is primarily interested in

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<sup>66</sup> The dominance of Cotswold morris dancing is well documented by scholars such as Howison and Bentley (1986) and Boyes (1993) who note the relative paucity of attention paid historically to other morris dancing styles. Howison and Bentley write, “if the Northwest morris is less widely known than the Cotswold tradition, this is not because it died out long ago, but because it was not subjected to the detailed and systematic attention that Sharp devoted to the Cotswold dances.” (Howison and Bentley, 1960: 42)

morris dancing, and far less in any notion of upholding a local tradition, which in his view, could just as well be performed elsewhere in the country:

- [Andrew] *I don't have any feelings towards it being a local dance. In some ways it's nice that we're the [only] people that do it, but by the same token...I would have no objections at all if it was danced elsewhere... I think it would be nice to have it acknowledged more as a morris dance.*
- [Me] *So is correct to say that for you, the dance itself is the most important thing, not so much the performance?*
- [Andrew] *For me it probably is.*

However, Steve G. expresses a different view:

*I feel quite kind of – 'possessive' isn't the right word but I...it sounds pompous to say 'we're the guardian of the dance' but in a sense... I suppose there's a sort of pride, a sort of ownership...because it is local and we're the only team that do it... Far more than Cotswold [morris] 'cause...we know it's not from round here...we know it's just something we've learned. (Steve G.)*

If The Long Company makes the case that a performance need not be particularly old to fulfil an important role in place-making and community, Lymm Morris men demonstrate that lengthy historical and geographical continuity may actually be a fairly arbitrary condition for some contemporary folk performers. Duncan says that morris dancing generally provides a *network of friends...and a social life straight away*, wherever in the country he has travelled.

For me, this marks a shift away from a kind of certainty about folk performance – that it can be characterized by certain quantifiable aspects and belongs fundamentally to those who most readily associate with it – towards a state of uncertainty, suggesting that what is currently understood by tradition may be both unrepresentative and limiting.

## “The way we work”

Like The Long Company, a significant contributing factor to Lymm Morris’ sense of ownership over the Lymm Dance resides in the material practices required to revive a tradition. To what extent can my own making practice help me to understand more about this experience, as well as the efficacies of artistic research?

### Making as research

Figure 2.19.



*Conversation Hats* in progress, by Lucy Wright (2011)

I gather most of the materials I need while walking in the streets around my home in Whalley Range. The chicken wire and straw boater base are singular and undemanding props to source. I stop at the pet shop and fancy dress hire on my way home from the bus stop. But I easily underestimate the armloads of plastic flowers each hat will take, forcing me to make multiple trips to the nearby pound superstores, handing over wads of notes and returning home like a pageant queen bowed under the weight of my gaudy rainbow bouquets.

The flowers, once trimmed of their long posable stems are wired into place around the conical mesh framework I have stitched to the hat in preparation with sturdy upholsterers' cotton. I select a carefully haphazard blend of colours, varieties and shapes, to suggest the lack of conscious artistry. Or perhaps a conscious artistry of a different kind than I had previously considered as a BA student in Art History. "Forthrightness", "gaiety", "delight in bright colour" and "well-balanced design," are my mantras – channelling Lambert and Marx' description of the characteristics of popular art. Like Annie, and like the Lymm Men in their differing approaches, I allow the materials to take the lead. I haven't made sketches, but as I work, somehow I *know* the direction, if not the detail of what I am trying to achieve.

At first the repetition and the sharp wire stalks cut into my hands, turning them raw and pink and punctured, but once begun, I find that I am unable to leave any visible trace of the silver armature lying beneath (Fig. 2.19). I work feverishly, like a smoker who lights a new cigarette before the old one is half-extinguished, clipping filament with one hand, clamping bloom with the other, but it is satisfying and almost meditatively absorbing. As the work progresses, I bargain with shopkeepers, haggling for bulk discounts and wholesale prices, fifty stems for £40, and my fingers grow tougher and thicker with every new batch.

Once fully stuffed with flowers I bestow the hats with the effects of individuality, supplementing a few items from my own trinket collection with other small pieces found rummaging around charity shops and market stalls. A broken brooch for 'Mother', tiny Limoges dishes, a silver shoe charm and horseshoe from the top of a wedding cake, to bestow good luck. Old strings of beads and used bottle caps and two small faux-taxidermy birds also find their way onto these repositories of symbolism and memory, but the mythology created is hardly my own. Instead, as I work, I imagine meanings for objects which once belonged to others. I craft myself into the role of the photographer and writer, Rosamond Purcell, who picks through the debris and wealth of a junkyard in Maine to curate a collection of artefacts whose heritage will almost always remain unknown.

"Rarely, if ever, do I learn an object's actual history," she writes, "usually, I do not care. I am after the butt ends after all – the fact-free, provenance-lacking, bucket-kicking, burnt-out, no-good nameless shard," (Purcell, 2003: 65) and I think to myself, isn't that somehow like my current approach to folk? My interest is in its present form, its immediate façade rather than any conceits about the truth of its origins. Folk is a construction, an abstraction, I feel, and I don't want to pin it down or make it untouchable, I want to use it to ask questions, about itself and about the places it resides, the tales it tells and has told about it, and what it means to be created and recreated time and time again.

### My making outcomes

The first hat subverted the form through scale. Almost comically oversized, gigantic, it was unwearable for dancing, like Henry's description of his first attempt.

This was largely an aesthetic experiment, but it was also informed by research into the conventions of Northwest morris kit. Photographs in the Morris Ring photographic archives reveal that hats were, at certain times and amongst certain sides (particularly in the early years of the twentieth century) significantly larger than those worn by the current Lymm Morris men. This was perhaps encouraged through the historical practice of prize-givings and formal competitions at the carnivals and public celebrations which were amongst the primary performance opportunities for Northwest morris sides. Sides would be judged on their appearance, as well as other aspects of their performance on procession and display on the field.<sup>67</sup>

Due to its enormous size, the piece became less of a hat and more of an installation, divorcing it from its original function to become a kind of monument to the individual dancer.

The second hat is called *Purity and Quality Maintained* for the old cardboard milk bottle tops incorporated into the design. Purity is also an evocative issue for folk performance and this is reflected in the persistence of Survival's theories around pre-Christian fertility rites. Popular superstition tells that a woman who wears a morris dancer's hat will be pregnant within the year, and Rob jokes, *we pedal that too... it's the sort of the thing 'the Fool'<sup>68</sup> tells people*. However Duncan says, *it's a total myth as far as I know*, before adding, with great self-awareness, *what we call morris dancing now, it's just a term... A lot of the earliest references were court records and church records*.

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<sup>67</sup> Although Lymm Morris no longer attend formal competitions, Steve G. and Rob highlight the informal competition and team pride played out at morris dance-outs: "You wanna look better than they [other morris sides] look." (Steve G.) and "If I'm dancing out I'm there to dance as well as I damn well can. I never dance out to just...go through the motions" (Rob)

<sup>68</sup> Occasional character who accompanies the morris dancers

Intrigued by this revelation, I developed my second piece to emphasise this historic relationship in variance to the more frequently presumed pagan one. Topped with an LED crucifix, this piece looks more like an 'In Memoriam' floristry display. The milk bottle tops make a playful comment on the perceived role of folk performance as a discrete and impermeable entity.

The third hat subverts the basic form of the Lymm hat, building up the same display of flowers and trinkets on a baseball cap, selected for its contemporary ubiquitousness and equivalence in everyday clothing to the straw boater historically worn. Recognising that the photographic archives also traced a kind of social history of fashion, I wanted to consider the possibility of the Lymm hat as a continuing evolution.

This was an issue that I had discussed with the performers. Given the relatively relaxed attitudes expressed towards the preservation of tradition, the suggestion of changing the kit raised some contradictory opinions. For some, it registered as an affront to the dance itself. *Completely changing the kit?* asks Rob, *I'd be disappointed by...because I think we're losing elements of the dance then*, while for Steve G. the evolution of the kit can already be traced through the use of modern materials, *we do sort of, keep on with the - what is essentially nineteenth century-looking kit - but with totally different materials, you know?*<sup>69</sup>

However, Andrew muses, *the kit now...really...is essentially the kit that they were wearing when Cecil Sharp collected... [It] hasn't evolved from what they were*

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<sup>69</sup> Figure 2.5 reveals that in 1840, morris dancing in Lymm looked very different.

*wearing... What it could evolve to I don't know... but that's what fashion's all about in a way, isn't it?*

### “Thinking-through-making” as a methodology

The development of a personal practice of making around the Lymm Morris hat provided new ways of thinking about the research. Amanda Ravetz terms this “thinking-through-making” to explain “how processes of making are valid means of researching and coming to know” (Ravetz, 2011: 159). Like Sennett’s suggestion that the craftsman does not do the thinking separately, in advance of the mechanical processes of making (Sennett, 2008), Ravetz makes the case that making and thinking are intrinsic and indivisible. Positioning this in contradiction to making-through-thinking, which she suggests is a somewhat inaccurate description of the theory-led research I had previously engaged in, she cites Ingold’s “forwards-moving processes”, an anthropological approach to creativity and perception that is attuned to emergent knowledge to making the case for the re-evaluation of reverie and play. Reminiscent of Annie’s work with The Long Company, this “redrawn anthropology” allows the practice to direct and orient itself in research “without a pre-planned destination.” (Ibid.)

These ideas of improvisation, play and thinking-through-making, resonate with writings by Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) about the value of improvisation in interdisciplinary practice, and linked too with a stance I had already begun to embrace as a scholar of a mixed disciplinary background, namely the conceptual emancipation of ‘getting lost’ from disciplinary conventions. If as an ethnomusicologist I had been taught to make-through-thinking, then it was by reversing this formula that I was able to disrupt my habitual practices. Deciding to

accept a state of temporary disciplinary lostness, I freed myself from rigid preconceptions about the nature and appearance of research, and permitted myself to experiment, broadening the kinds of practice I would undertake and the standards by which I would judge my creative output. Contradictorily, it was while lost from my discipline, and lost in making, that I came to see my work more clearly. Becoming a maker allowed me to re-evaluate my relationship with the research, returning to ethnomusicology intermittently to check back in with expanded insight and the benefit of unexpected new juxtapositions, while simultaneously ploughing new and un-predetermined furrows. As Hannula et al suggest, “one must dare to trust the fact that the practice of artistic research creates itself, step by step.” (Hannula et al, 2005: 164)

“Thinking-through-making” made possible the development of a personal practice which embodied the aims and tenets of the research. This is perhaps like a version of Cerwonka and Malkki’s model of the “knowledge-production process” – which “flexibly adopts approaches and tools as a consequence of the questions being asked, not as a consequence of the methodological constraints dictated by the history or current hegemony within a given discipline” (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 14). It saw connections between what I experienced during this phase of the research and current discourses about craft, where craft is viewed not as a discrete set of disciplines but “a way of thinking through practices of all kinds” (Adamson, 2007: 7). Becoming a craft-maker was a response to the discovery of practical making implicated in the servicing and performance of traditions like morris and mumming, but as an unexpected aside, it also facilitated a thinking process, distinct and different in feeling tone from other kinds of research conducted towards the same scholarly ends. Ravetz describes a kind of reverie that can accompany making processes of e.g. drawing and filmmaking, “an absent

mindedness that paradoxically generated action” (Ravetz, 2011: 160). In a similar vein Natalie Depraz (2003) talks about self-induced suspension, a break of loss of our natural attitude and the textile artist Trish Belford, speaks of “letting go” in order to expand the possibilities of collaborations between craft and industry, “When I embark on these trials no matter what the desired outcome is, importance is placed on play. I close my ears to cries of ‘that will never work’. So far, the process of crafting techniques has never failed to deliver, even if it is an undefined spark at the beginning of the process” (Belford, 2013: 136).

In this piece, making was integral to my research, employed as an expansion of interview technique, which framed and directed the conversation, and integrated through a personal practice which facilitated an embodied exploration. In mirroring the making of others I was able to step inside the research, but also to begin to see it from the outside, a way of reflecting upon the processes and practices of making and performance and to test subversions and new juxtapositions.

However, concerned that my practice should not just constitute a convenient way to illustrate theory, I felt that the methodology needed to go further. I needed to create a tradition of my own.

Figure 2.20.

**Warrington Guardian** SOUTH WARRINGTON **160**

## It's hats off to Lucy and the Lymm Morris men at Rushbearing

2:28pm Wednesday 28th August 2013 in [South Warrington](#)



It's hats off to Lucy and the Lymm Morris men at Rushbearing

A PhD student from Manchester has put an unusual spin on this year's Lymm Rushbearing. Lucy Wright worked with Lymm Morris Men to rework traditional morris dancing hats. And the Manchester Metropolitan University student posed with group members, above.

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Article in the Warrington Guardian (August 2013)



Rob Pracy at Lymm Rushbearing (2013)



Detail 1 (2011)



Detail 2 (2011)



Duncan Broomhead at Lymm Rushbearing (2013)



Detail 3 (2013)



Andrew White at Lymm Rushbearing (2013)

## Chapter 2. From personal practice to collaborative practices

### Summary

In Chapter 1, research methods of observing and participating, learned as an ethnomusicologist, were added to and subtly changed through a project of personal making. This was approached as an introductory and consciously experimental phase in the development of a practice as an artistic researcher, which also sought to achieve symmetry with my object of study - contemporary folk performance in the Northwest.

The work undertaken functioned as a process of thinking-through-making - a means of reflecting and expanding upon experiences in the field through art practice. It helped me to identify common threads between a revived and invented tradition as being to do with making, employing the term to refer both to material practices of crafting and producing (e.g. costume-making and performance) and shared, community practices of place-making (events understood as *a big piece of social glue*, in a conversation between Lucy Wright and Annie Dearman, 2011). The research suggested to me that personal engagement with materials and with others are instrumental factors in the relationship between folk performance, ownership and belonging – creating and preserving a vital sense of non-institutionalised and self-determined community.

However, while this practice generated some insights into the conditions of contemporary folk, particularly as it is understood by those who most readily identify with the term (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013), it suffers from two fundamental flaws. Firstly, it suggests that performances self- and popularly associated with the term folk may be an over-simplistic way to define what is and

is not folk performance. Recognising that performances widely acknowledged as folk often involve a “backwards reading” of tradition (Ingold and Hallam, 2007), work with The Long Company and Lymm Morris actually makes the case that contemporary folk might (also) be discovered outside of the conventional spaces of the English folk movement.

Secondly, the methodology can be criticized for employing art practice as a tool rather than an integrated aspect of the research process. In using methodologically conventional practices to generate data about a subject, before reflecting upon it in an art practice - which is separate from the time spent in the field - the work could be accused of illustrating theory rather than generating new insights.

This could also be considered an example of what Ingold has called “turning away” – a consequence of the conceptual segregation of “the field” and “the life-world” (Ingold, 2010 cf. Husserl, 1936: 108 - 109). Ingold rejects this common stance on qualitative research, writing:

[T]o do anthropology, you do not have to imagine the world as a field. 'The field' is rather a term by which the ethnographer retrospectively imagines a world from which he has turned away in order quite specifically that he might describe it in writing (Ingold, 2007: 28).

He argues instead for the integration of researcher and researched and the liberation of anthropology from ethnography, the latter he feels limits the former by its commitment to “descriptive fidelity”<sup>70</sup> (Ingold, 2013: 6).

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<sup>70</sup> This is not to suggest that Ingold is seeking to devalue the role of ethnography. Rather he is concerned with challenging the conflation of the “documentary” project of ethnography and the “transformational” project of anthropology (Ingold, 2013: 3) - perhaps comparable to the goal of artistic researchers such as Anne Douglas to clarify and articulate what makes art’s contribution to research distinct and valuable. Although ethnography might be expressed creatively and located in fields other than anthropology (for example the use of ethnography by contemporary artists like

The next chapter and phase of work seeks to address these issues, through the development of a practice which does not “turn away”, and charting a shift in approach from personal practices of thinking-through-making towards “relational” (Bourriaud, 1997) models of “thinking-through-making-together.” It explores my developing role as a maker on the theme of folk performance as a material and social practice and is divided into three case studies, each of which constitutes a progression towards the integration of research and participation.<sup>71</sup> This corresponds with three artworks produced as explorations on the theme of Georgina Boyes’ “imagined village”, using my relationship with my adopted home environment in Whalley Range, South Manchester to consider the interconnection of folk and lived experience.

### Work undertaken and research questions

*Bear Dance* describes a brief artist-led experiment on the theme of “invented tradition”, undertaken in 2012, which involved the making of a costume for performance using materials sourced locally in Whalley Range.<sup>72</sup> The piece draws on a description of a historical bear dance performance found in a book of Lancashire mill traditions and this discovery sets in motion a trail of thinking and making on the theme of textiles and identity in Manchester which borrows from the costume making of Yinka Shonibare and the performance art of the artist and dancer, Nick Cave. Through the work, I explore at first hand how a sense of place

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Roy Villevoye, and Brad Butler and Karen Mirza) this does not mean that there is no distinction between empirical and theoretical work.

<sup>71</sup> Although the three artworks are described in sequence, this does not accurately represent their chronological order within the project.

<sup>72</sup> This practice of walking is explored with reference to Michel de Certeau’s ‘Walking in the City’ (1984) and Roanna Heller’s ‘Becoming an artist-ethnographer’ (2005)

is created through making and research, while simultaneously pushing at the boundaries of what a folk performance can be – and look like.

In *Rose Queen*, I collaborated with Girl Guides in Whalley Range to revive a specific local tradition - the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival - which was performed in the area from the 1930s to the 1970s. The project involved workshops with the Guides to design and make costumes for a re-imagined Rose Queen event and a final performance developed and staged on the site of the previous Manley Park Rose Queen Festival, in July 2013. In this work, my research begins to incorporate relational practices of making together as a means of exploring the social role of folk performance with a community. If *Bear Dance* was envisaged as an extension of my research with The Long Company – an experiment in developing an artist’s brief to answer questions about folk - then *Rose Queen* is more cognisant with my experience of Lymm Morris in *Conversation Hats* in which an established model was researched, then developed in and through making with others.

The final case study in this chapter, *Sewing Difference*, also functions as an introduction to girls’ carnival morris dancing, a site identified during this phase of work as an appropriate one through which to potentially re-enter ethnomusicology – following a period of “lostness” from the original framing of the research. However, *Sewing Difference* does not deal directly with members of the town carnival movement, of which carnival morris dancing is a part. Instead, completed in 2012, the research involves collaboration with three professional garment-makers<sup>73</sup> from Whalley Range to produce costumes inspired by girls’ carnival

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<sup>73</sup> These were Aazar, Sindie Peel and Clare Louise Vincent, all based in Whalley Range, South Manchester.

morris dancing – at a time when my only mode of access to the performance was through observation of its visual appearance.<sup>74 75</sup>

In contrast to the first chapter which was directed towards extant folk performance groups, this chapter is primarily directed towards the development and evaluation of a making practice with research participants who do not primarily identify with the term “folk”. In so doing, folk becomes the theme for the research - seeking to understand its meaning (what does folk performance do?) rather than to gather data about specific performance types. In Chapter 3, we return to the research goal of an “artistic turn” for ethnomusicology and Harker’s call for a new way to approach folk materials to test the methodology in research with members of the girls’ carnival morris dancing community - a novel field site for English folk performance.

The chapter deals with the following research questions:

- What can be learned through inventing a tradition (*Bear Dance*) and what kinds of practice / aesthetic decision-making does it entail?
- What can be learned through reviving a (site-specific) tradition with others? (*Rose Queen*) How does it compare with inventing a tradition?

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<sup>74</sup> Girls’ carnival morris dancing was discovered by chance in photographic archives of Northwest morris dancing and experienced “live” for the first time at a NEMDCO (‘North of England Morris Dancing Carnival Organisation’) weekly competition event in Tyldesley near Wigan, Greater Manchester in August 2012.

<sup>75</sup> The costumes made as part of *Sewing Difference* were later brought into my research in the carnival morris dancing community, forming the basis of a performance piece choreographed with members of the Irlam Royalettes, from Salford, Greater Manchester. This will be performed as part of my doctoral exhibition in April 2014.

- What does an exploration of diverse garment making practices in Whalley Range (*Sewing Difference*) tell us about the intersection of folk, art and identity? How does this inform my developing artistic research model? What might girls' carnival morris dancing have to offer as a novel field site for English folk scholarship?
- what does collaborative making / relational art practice add to an exploration of folk performance and community and what does this reveal about the way we work?

### Case Study 3: *Bear Dance*

#### Thinking through making an invented tradition



*Bear Dance* (2012) Performance by Edwin Beasant. Costume by Lucy Wright

The lad who was elected to be the bear wore an old sack over his head. There were holes to enable him to see. The bear's face was indicated by chalk marks; the ears were the stretched corners of the sack tied with string.

To the bear was attached a few yards of string. The lads stopped at street corners and the lad holding the string put the bear through its paces. The bear ran in a circle, and the traditional song was: "Arry om, pompay; arry om pompay; arry, array om pompay," with the first part at speed and the latter somewhat slower...

After the performance, the collecting box was taken round.

(Mitchell, 1977: 72)

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*Bear Dance* is an experimental making and performance piece which takes William R. Mitchell's description of the historical Lancashire street performance (above) as its starting point.

A reflective and heuristic response to ideas introduced in *The Long Company* and developed through *Conversation Hats*, the project functions as both a personal site for thinking-through-making and an applied exploration of the intersection between revived and invented traditions and folk performance.<sup>76</sup> I wanted to explore ideas about place and placelessness in relation to folk and what might be learned by consciously inventing a fakeloric product.

In May 2012, I designed and made a costume for morris dancing which re-imagined the historical bear dance for a contemporary audience. To develop the piece, I drew on continuing conversations with Annie from *The Long Company* and on the practical assistance of Border Morris dancers Daisy Black and Steven Naylor. In August 2012, and again in 2013, the costume was worn in performance by Cotswold morris dancer Edwin Beasant, in Stockport and Manchester respectively.

This case study is presented in two stages, firstly a description of the artistic brief and making process and secondly a series of photographs of the *Bear Dance* performance with some concluding thoughts on its role in the trajectory of my research. Although the piece culminates in a performance, this project was primarily undertaken as a means of thinking-through-making on the subject of invented tradition. Initially conceived as a performance for a non-place (Augé,

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<sup>76</sup> I felt that this was apt because the historical bear dance appears to represent a middle ground between mumming and morris dancing in intended role and presentation. Originally described as being performed to a "traditional song," it was also a form of street theatre and an act of "wealth transference." (Cass, 2001: 5)

1993), I later found that my collaborations helped the work to develop meaningful connections within my lived environment.

### **Developing an artistic research brief**

I found the description of the bear dance in a book of Lancashire mill traditions. It was an oddment, offered by the author with little pre-amble or explanation. There was no date attached to the performance, but from the general era addressed in the book, I presumed it was referring to the 1930s or 40s. I talked to friends with longer histories in the Northwest than my own, but no one could remember seeing the bear dance performed.<sup>77</sup>

The costume description resonated with me because it was so simple and yet I could imagine that it was an effective disguise. I tried it for myself at home, rolling and tying the top of an old T-shirt and scissoring a couple of jagged holes for the eyes and mouth. Just the suggestion of ears and teeth denoted “bear” and I immediately adopted a stronger posture, raising my elbows and hooked fingers to simulate claws. But it was also a very human disguise, a terroristic image in one light, a make-shift balaclava to obscure the features and signal unspecified threat, while in another, cartoonish and comical. The prototype highlighted the diffuse connotations around the masked and dissembled face.

Interviews with The Long Company and Lymm Morris suggested that parallel conditions of necessity and ambiguity were inherent in many historical as well as contemporary folk costumes. The audience reaction is unrecorded in Mitchell’s account of the bear dance but it is identified as the creative domain of young boys,

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<sup>77</sup> It is unclear from the source whether the bear dance was a widespread practice, or instead a recollection of a specific or singular performance.

presumably neither financially empowered nor artistically trained. Their improvised costume with sacking and rope represents an inventive solution to the problem of symbolizing an exotic animal - and the desire to make a public impact. As a new maker, I wanted to capture a similar kind of materials-led process when developing my own costume. How could I create the most striking performance possible, using the simplest and easily available components?

Figure 3.1.



Making with Annie (2012)

Annie invites me to her studio again and we spend a morning crafting bear masks from stiff paper, leather and fur found in her studio as a means of consolidating my ideas (Fig. 3.1). As we work we talk about the practicalities of creating a performance tradition. Who do I want for my audience? What am I trying to convey? She challenges me to think about form and function. How does the costume dictate or enhance the movements of the dancer? What restrictions or breadth do the time and location of the intended performance place upon the design requirements?

I am unsure about many of my answers, but am convinced that my costume should be contemporary in appearance. “There is no unified (or even predominating) methodology for a reinvention of traditional material or performance,” write Winter and Keegan-Phipps (2013: 10), but few self-defined folk performances stray too far from established norms of aesthetic address. However, my research with The Long Company suggested that a consciously invented tradition – which did not conceal its contemporary origins - could fulfil an important role in the social lives of the community from whom the play developed, equally or perhaps even more so than one with longer roots in the area. I want my performance to similarly challenge the folkloric status quo and I set out to produce a work of fakelore – what Dorson called a “deliberately contrived product.” (Dorson, 1950: 201)

In addition to extant folk performances, I also draw on the making of contemporary artists whose work with costume and identity felt relevant to a project about invented tradition. In particular, I am drawn to the costumes of Nick Cave, a fabric sculptor and performance artist whose powerful costumes and choreographed dance performances explore and reiterate cultural, ritualistic and ceremonial concepts. Inspired by tribal dress around the world, his ‘Soundsuits’ are full body garments made from layered and textured metal, plastic, fabric, hair and other found objects which are designed to transform and sonically emphasise the performer’s movements - in some ways like the morris dancers’ leg bells which accentuate the rhythms of the dance. Cave’s costumes appear simultaneously “timeless” and resolutely modern, contributing to a dialogue about the aesthetics of traditional performance and the various material practices which might challenge or subvert it.

## Thinking through costume making

The curator June Hill suggests that not having all of the information about an object or performance makes you work harder to “relive” it in the imagination (Barber-Swindells, 2011: 15).

I begin by collecting materials from shops in my local area and take my inspiration from them. I find the bolts of Dutch wax print cloth at a local African outfitters as I am shopping for groceries a few streets from my house. The prints and their connotations strike me as bold and provocative, and I have to privilege-check my response to something so instantly seductive. Already intended for use in the making of specific traditional garments, what might it mean to re-appropriate the fabric for a different kind of costume? What might it reveal about folk performance in the English Northwest?

I am instantly reminded of a comment by the textile and performance artist, Yinka Shonibare. Best known for his works substituting African motifs in historically white spaces, such as English period costume, Shonibare describes himself as a “colonial hybrid,” making work to challenge notions of African authenticity and the systematic writing-out of people of colour from British history. Concerned with the politics of representation, to counter the assumption that artists of African origin should produce “authentic African art”, in 2012 he remarked, *I wondered why none of my British school colleagues were asked to make art about morris dancing?!<sup>78</sup>*

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<sup>78</sup> Twitter, August 31. 2012. <https://twitter.com/RoyalOperaHouse/status/241593697056223232> (Accessed 27. November 2013)

As a British artist actually making work about morris dancing, my interest in Dutch wax prints stems from their relative duplicity:

The fabrics I use are thought to be African exotic but in fact they are not authentically African at all. When you realise that they are designed and produced by people in Dutch and English factories, then that completely destroys the methodology of this seductive African thing. Therefore it is important that I don't go to Africa to buy them, so that all African exotic implications remain fake. (Shonibare, 2004: 41)

While reading as a potent symbol of African identity, Dutch wax prints are also symbolic of hybridity and cross-fertilisation. The fabrics I bought in Whalley Range were manufactured in Manchester and shipped in large quantities to West Africa, but perhaps like folk performance, the visual complicity of the prints mask a greater complexity. Manchester has come to celebrate its historical links with the cotton industry, but such heritage has a darker side. The community artist, Dan Dubowitz, draws attention to this in his 2011 project in nearby Ancoats:

[T]he so-called Atlantic trade triangle brought goods from Britain to the west coast of Africa, where they were exchanged for slaves. (Dubowitz, 2011: 68)

Work with such fabrics makes links with a changing and osmotic Northwest, which is neither fixed nor bounded. Their ready availability in Whalley Range also highlights issues of different kinds of Englishness, relevant to a project about contemporary folk.

Fieldworking in the spaces of the English folk movement, I came across relatively few people of non-white background.<sup>79</sup> Why might this be the case? In 2010,

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<sup>79</sup> This has not gone unnoticed by scholars and commentators of folk performance and Englishness. In particular Winter and Keegan-Phipps tackle the recent cooption of English folk music by members of Nationalist and Far Right groups, which has caused widespread backlash throughout the folk movement. (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 158 – 168)

Channel 4 showed a short documentary by the broadcaster and comedian, Hardeep Singh-Kohli called 'Hardeep Does Race' in which the secular Sikh, dresses in morris kit to join a London traditional morris side. *You'll never guess what I'm about to do...* he says with a sly smile. *Hey nonny no, no, no? Hey nonny yes, yes, YES!* The cameras pan back to show him taking his place in the dance. *But should such pastimes be the preserve of white folks of this nation?* he asks, *or is anyone welcome to join in. even if he wears a turban?* Although the dance is treated with the comedian's customary lightness, Singh-Kohli makes an important point.<sup>80</sup> *And why shouldn't a Sikh join in traditional English pastimes. The English eat our curry after all! Shouldn't we share and share alike?* Is the folk movement predominantly white due to circumstance, or do English folk performances lack relevance or openness to people of non-white backgrounds? Pauline Greenhill suggests that "morris mythology locates it in a time before subaltern colonized peoples began to relocate from their places of origin to imperial countries" (Greenhill, 2002: 231). Thus, "the manifold indifference of most people of colour participating in morris now may refer to its profound irrelevance to their own socio-cultural values." (Ibid.) How might the use of "African" fabrics contribute to this debate?

Two friends from a morris side help me to make the prints into a rag jacket. This tattered garment – taken to its extreme by The Long Company is also a common costume for morris dancing, particularly the popular Borders style. Daisy shows me how to mark straight lines on a worn-out men's shirt, blue chalk on pillied white cotton, while in the corner, Steven works on making a shirt from scratch, trimming pieces from a creased and crumbling pattern. Taking the stiff waxed fabric she

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<sup>80</sup> The morris men interviewed show themselves to be liberal and inclusive, *I think you fit in as anyone else fits in. You're a member of this nation, why shouldn't you fit in... does it matter?* (transcribed from the television).

makes folds on folds, cutting to release a confetti of short narrow strips. Then she demonstrates how to layer them in overlapping fringes, secured by tiny stitches. It is a painstaking process, but simple enough for a beginner like me, and as with my practice based around the Lymm Hats, its repetitive, cumulative process becomes almost meditative, keeping my hands busy while freeing up my thoughts. As we make we talk about our work and our homes. Based at different universities in Manchester, we are all PhD students, and new to the city. I comment on the irony that as “blow-ins,” we have all found a sense of community through interpretations of dances and songs which allude to a time before such widespread travel and dispersal.

Steven says that for him folk performance represents a reaction against specialism. At a time when the contemporary job market seems to insist on specializing further and further down, folk is a space in which you can “dabble” and “play”, try lots of different things and never have to stop creating and learning. Daisy is an enthusiastic craft-maker. *Things you make yourself have more meaning than ones bought from a shop*, she says, but I am not certain if she is referring to the jacket she is stitching or the performances it would be used for.

I made the bear’s head using a baseball hat left over the *Conversation Hats*, built up with chicken-wire ears and embellished with pound shop flowers and bells. This gives the costume a contemporary appearance, using one of the most recognizable symbols of everyday “street” clothing. Ted Polhemus cites the ubiquitousness of the baseball cap as evidence that “high culture has given way to popular culture”. He suggests that the notion of “the real” is key to street style’s seductive appeal - “like holy relics, street style garments radiate the power of their associations...if today more and more people use their dress style to assert ‘I am

authentic', it is simply evidence of our hunger for the genuine article in an age which seems to so many to be one of simulation and hype" (Polhemus, 2010: 7). In dealing with notions of authentic and egalitarian identity, is street style a kind of folk costume for the twenty-first century<sup>81</sup>? Inspired by a historical street performance, the contemporary *Bear Dance* seeks to harness the authenticity of street style in combination with the various authenticities from debates about folk. However street style is also perceived by some to represent a negative influence. The banning of hoodies in some public places links to a fear of (especially) young men, perhaps particularly those of colour. The bear might thus be a somewhat threatening figure, from a dystopian village.

### **Thinking through performance**

*Bear Dance* was primarily envisaged as a personal making project – a way of thinking through making about invented tradition. However, the costume came to be animated in performances by the Cotswold morris dancer, Edwin Beasant,<sup>82</sup> which offers a new window on the making process – particularly as it relates to place. Edwin wore the costume to perform two improvised jigs, first to an audience of friends at home in Stockport and again at my *Rose Queen* event in 2013. Although I had little input into the performances themselves, working with Edwin draws me away from a preoccupation with non-places towards a greater engagement with my lived environment and the people around me. This development – while minor at the time - proved integral to my later making and

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<sup>81</sup> Folk performers too have seen the potential crossover between folk and the street: "the only Morris tradition that matters if 'street credibility'," writes Tony Forster, "To be worth doing, Morris must not be a museum piece or quaint tourist trap but something that appeals to those who do it and those who watch it in the 1990s. If research or myth assists the performance of this street theatre, it is valuable: if it creates restricting barriers, it should be ignored." (Forster, 1990: 56)

<sup>82</sup> Edwin is a fellow member of Pilgrims' Way, our English folk band.

research.

I began *Bear Dance* with the intention of creating a performance for an “imagined village”, borrowing Boyes’ epithet for the mythical idyll into which the author suggests “the folk” were invented. Like Anderson’s “imagined communities” (1983), Boyes’ notion of the “village” foregrounds the processes of people in and as places. Anderson distinguished between the nation as social construct, and the everyday, face-to-face communities of interaction, while “The Imagined Village” argues for a reassessment of the English folk revival (Boyes, 1993: xii). Perceiving it as an inherently nostalgic movement, Boyes suggests that folk might be a reaction against what Fintan Vallely has called the “trauma of modernization” (Valley, 2008: 78) It is “utopian escapism,” he writes, “the desire to keep in touch with the folk values of an idealised or ruralist past.” (Valley, 2008: 76) The “imagined village” thus represents one of Lakoff and Johnson’s “metaphors we live by” playing “a central role in defining our everyday realities” (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 124) as they relate to folk performance and English identity. The existence of the “imagined village” concept shapes the ways in which many self-conscious folk performances continue to be communicated and identified.

Although little explicated in the book, Boyes later described the term as an evocative summary of the key ideas of her research,<sup>83</sup> which emphasises the crucial but often fraught relationships between folk, place and authenticity. The use of “imagined” from the Latin ‘*imaginare*,’ meaning to form an image of or represent, is perhaps like some kind of Harkerian mediation, which suggests that place and folk are constant and creative negotiations. As Hallam and Ingold write,

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<sup>83</sup> Initially suggested by Manchester University Press editor Pete Martin (personal email, Georgina Boyes, 2013)

“real people, as the living organisms they are, continuously create themselves and one another, forging their histories and traditions as they go along” (Hallam and Ingold, 2007: 6). The word, “village,” makes the pervasive link between folk and rurality, and implies timelessness and purity, but we know that “while bucolic ideals may exist, village life...is filled with complexity.” (Leyshon and Bull, 2011: 168). At the same time, McLuhan’s conception of the global village seems increasingly prescient, as advancements in electronic and digital technologies seem to contract the globe and rendering physical distances more breachable.

For me, this had originally brought to mind Marc Augé’s non-places (1995). When I moved to Manchester, I was struck that while distanced and dislocated from the home I had previously known, and too new to feel that I belonged in this new place, I found comfort in familiar spaces such as shopping centres and supermarkets.<sup>84</sup> I was interested in the kinds of folk performance which might happen in a non-place – what might they look like or entail - or perhaps they was an impossible paradox?

My research to date had indicated that folk performances played an integral role in place-making and this was mirrored in my own experiences. Even at a time when I was unfamiliar with much of my new home environment, I knew that I could walk into particular pubs on particular nights and play music, share songs and tunes that were familiar to me and to everyone else there, and I could feel at home that way too. Who I was and where I had come from were secondary to my participation – and this in itself granted me a recognized role. This, I related to the non-place – as Augé describes:

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<sup>84</sup> Augé notes that “a foreigner lost in a country he does not know ('a passing stranger') can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains.” (Augé, 1995: 106)

A person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver...Subjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while - like anyone who is possessed - the passive joys of identity loss and the more active pleasure of role playing. (Augé, 1995: 103)

Exploring the notion of folk performance as a non-place – in which the lived environment is irrelevant – I planned *Bear Dance* without an audience, or perhaps only one which might incidentally be in the same non-place at the right time. However, in developing a real performance with Edwin, I began to question this straightforward understanding of non-place and my research. It reflected a sense of personal displacement, somewhat inevitable when new to an area, but this was transformed in and through the performance. Once animated through Edwin's dancing, the *Bear Dance* no longer belonged to a non-place, but to specific real, lived places. The work also gave me an insight into the value of working with others.

*Bear Dance* offered a valuable opportunity to be involved in the development of a folk performance from start to finish – recognized in The Long Company and Lymm Morris as vital to a sense of belonging. However, while previous work had considered the making practices of others, this work foregrounded my own making, expanding the possibilities for re-imagination and reflection engendered by personal practice.

Methodologically, the development of a performance around the re-envisaged *Bear Dance* acts as an extension of Baily's 'learning to perform as a research technique' (2001) towards the development of a performance as research. Specifically focused towards dance, Cynthia Cohen Bull writes, "[a] close study of

the physical, sensuous experience of dancing provides us with knowledge as unmistakable as that provided by the more conventional study and analysis of cultural beliefs and concepts and of other aspects of emotional life.” (Bull, 1997: 268) William Beeman argues that performance is amongst the principal means by which people come to understand their world, reinforce their view of it and transform it, at both small and large scales.<sup>85</sup> Working in this way offered a way to get inside the practice experientially, and to analyse the way it works from the perspective of creator, performer and audience.

Working with Edwin, as well as with Annie, Daisy and Steven gave me the impetus to develop my practice with others. “Folk’s not about people, it’s about collaboration,” Edwin said, as we were discussing the project. The next stage of the work seeks to capitalize on this suggestion through the development of a practice, which is fundamentally underpinned by collaboration.

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Anthropology/publications/PerformanceTheory.htm>  
Accessed 22. November 2013.

***Bear Dance***

Performance by Edwin Beasant, Stockport (2012)



Performance by Edwin Beasant, Manchester (2013)



*Bear Dance at 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen (2013)*



*Bear Dance at 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen 2 (2013)*

**Case Study 4: 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen**

**Collaborative practice and site-specific revival**



2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen (2013)

## Reviving the Rose Queen festival

*I suppose fifteen year olds now are very different, aren't they? Whereas then it was quite, you know, a rite of passage. Now maybe it wouldn't be the same?*

Janet Robertson, 1966 Manley Park Rose Queen (2013)

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2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present *Rose Queen* was a collaborative making and performance project completed over a period of six months in 2013 with members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides in Whalley Range, South Manchester.<sup>86</sup> Although not strictly chronologically contiguous, it extends and develops work begun in *'Bear Dance,'* centralising the use of co-creative practices to answer questions about folk performance and making.

The project staged a consciously contemporary revival of the historic Manley Park Rose Queen Festival, which took place annually at the Manley Park Methodist Church in Whalley Range between the 1930s and 1970s. Working with the Guides, I re-envisaged the event through design, making and performance, culminating in a "coronation" event to a local audience at Manley Park Methodist Church in July 2013. Drawing on archive photographs and conversations with people who had previously taken part, my intention for the piece was to confront ideas about folk, nostalgia and identity through "everyday" material culture, while the research goals of the work were to learn more about young people's understandings and experiences of community and tradition in South Manchester. How might the formerly popular Manley Park Rose Queen celebration be

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<sup>86</sup> The Girl Guides in the UK are officially "The Guide Association" and go under the operating name of "Girlguiding".

understood and interpreted by modern youngsters in the area, and what might be inferred from the form their re-invention would take?

Primarily, the work functions as an experiment with collaborative making, both as an approach to research and a way of thinking about folk. As a visual spectacle, the piece addresses the notion of “everyday creativity” as a form of making accessible to those who might not primarily identify as artists or performers (Millar, 2005), explored through creative practice with the Guides. In addition, the work explores the performance of nostalgia in Whalley Range, leading to reflections about the role of folk performance in preserving “absent communities” (Biggs, 2009).

### **Description of work undertaken**

*2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen* is best understood as a dialogical artwork, containing multiple strands created through conversations between myself as an artist-ethnographer and a range of collaborators. These included previous participants in the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival, local Guides given the task of re-imagining it, fellow makers in the Whalley Range area who were involved in producing the costumes and the audience of the work, the current Manley Park Methodist Church congregation and the Guides’ parents. The work also contributes to the broader discussion of its context – the development of artistic research methodologies towards a new way to think about folk performance.

The Manley Park Rose Queen Festival was first encountered as a nostalgia piece in a Whalley Range community newsletter in 2012, requesting memories and

photographs of the former event as part of the centenary celebrations at Manley Park Methodist Church. This established the context for the event, as an aspect of shared community memory.

Making contact with the author of the article, I was able to access the Manley Park Methodist Church photographic archive, kept by churchwarden and community spokesperson, Russell Kirby, who came to act as a conduit between myself, the Guides and the Methodist Church. I then recorded a first-hand account of the event from conversations with Janet Robertson, a retired primary school teacher and resident of Firwood in South Manchester who was crowned Manley Park Rose Queen as a fifteen year old in 1966 (Figs. 4.5, 4.6). In a spoken interview, Janet provided a historical model for the previous Manley Park Rose Queen Festival which functioned as a springboard for re-imagining with the Guides.

Manley Park Rose Queen Festival took place annually over two days in June as part of the Methodist church calendar and included a procession by the congregation through the streets of Whalley Range (called a “Walk of Witness”) and the coronation of two girls selected from the Sunday School to be the Rose Queen and Rosebud.<sup>87</sup> A further supporting cast was also involved in the event, performed by local children, in the roles of *train-bearers – they’d hold your dress and cloak in different places, the ladies in waiting, page boys... Sometimes there would be a mock wedding.* (Janet) Organised and created by and for members of the church community, the Rose Festival also attracted spectators from across Manchester. Janet recalled, *It was such a big event.* [When I look at the photographs] *I think, were there really that many people there?* (Janet) In common with many similar events across the Northwest, the Rose Queen Festival

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<sup>87</sup> A younger girl in a “training” role for the Rose Queen. Janet was also crowned as Manley Park Methodist Church Rosebud, aged nine in 1960.

experienced significant popularity during the 1950s and 60s, but lost momentum during the 1970s, eventually ceasing to be performed. Janet perceived this as *an indication of how the church has declined* in community life, a reflection on the changing face of organized religion in the ward today.

In 2013, I compiled Janet's memories and a range of archive photographs across two presentation boards, which were displayed at the English Martyrs' Catholic Church Hall in Whalley Range. I also began to develop a workshop to (re)present the tradition to local people. I was particularly interested in Janet's suggestion that the event might no longer be relevant to teenage girls, who had previously been its primary performers. Also cognizant of the reduced status of women's and children's traditions in scholarship about the English folk movement (Boyes, 1993: xii) I wanted to explore and address this imbalance, soliciting the involvement, specifically, of young women, thus marking a shift from previous projects which had (more conventionally) gathered the experiences of older male performers.

With this in mind, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides were selected as appropriate collaborators in this work for a number of additional reasons. Firstly, they offered the possibility of equivalence with the earlier event. Aged between ten and fifteen and living in the Manley Park area, the Guides were identified as a potentially accessible leisure-community within Whalley Range, whose membership broadly mirrored the previous participants of the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival. However, the group is not straightforwardly equivalent to the Sunday School, which no longer runs in Manley Park. Although the Girlguiding organisation was originally underpinned by Christian ideologies, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides are consciously non-denominational, with around half of the troupe coming from non-

white and non-Christian households,<sup>88</sup> a reflection of the current demographic breakdown of Whalley Range.<sup>89</sup> They thus function as a potentially contemporary, secular equivalent, at a time when the Christian church is no longer the singular and dominant institution in community life in South Manchester.

Secondly, the Guides were understood in this context as a small-scale and comparatively self-organised community, not specifically sensitized to ideas about folk or tradition. Although 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides is structured around the formalized Girlguiding framework, at an everyday level, the troupe leaders, Ann Knowles and Audrey MacDonald stress that they seek foremost to provide a supportive environment for young women in Whalley Range to discover and develop their interests and enjoy social activities together.

As a community within a community, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides can be considered through the lens of folk. As Trubshaw writes, "every place of work has its own traditions and lore." (Trubshaw, 2002: 73 - 74) despite the term being more readily associated with people from specific groups or backgrounds. Working in collaboration with the Guides offered an opportunity to think about folk from the perspective of Warshaver's "Level 1" – the customary practices of groups not consciously engaged with folkloric practice - also marking a shift from previous projects defined by engagement in the English folk movement, towards one of expanded possibility in the wider community.

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<sup>88</sup> Guiding was in the national news, reflecting its diverse demographic in 2013 because the promise made by all members upon joining was reworded, replacing the former "to love my God" with "to be true to myself and develop my beliefs" and "to serve the Queen and my country" with "to serve the Queen and my community."  
([https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/news/welcoming\\_more\\_members\\_with\\_ou.aspx](https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/news/welcoming_more_members_with_ou.aspx) Accessed 4. December 2013)

<sup>89</sup> According to the 2001 census:  
<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=3&b=5941629&c=Whalley+Range&d=14&e=13&g=352072&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1387051199874&enc=1&dsFamilyId=47&njs=true&nsck=false&nssvg=false&nswid=1280> Accessed 14 December 2013)

Thirdly, a number of archive photographs show Guides in uniform at previous Manley Park Rose Queen Festivals, offering an appropriate entry point to my work with 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides. Sarah Mills (2011) notes how the Guides' appearance has changed markedly since the organisation's inception, with a movement away from the military-style uniform depicted at the Rose Festival, towards a mix-and-match range of leisure clothing with Guides-branded insignia, reflecting the changing aims and requirements of the contemporary organization. Few of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides wore a "complete" uniform to meetings, most combining school uniform, casual clothes and individual elements of Guide merchandise, and so the change in Guides' costume, visible in the photographs highlights broader changes in the community, providing a means of articulating the difference between the earlier event and the re-imagined one planned in this work.

Later, I secured an invitation to perform the Guides' *Rose Queen* event at Manley Park Methodist Church, which opened the further possibility to explore the Rose Queen as a form of embodied site-specificity – the chance to explore a performance in its original location, in front of people who may have previously taken part. In this way, the work dealt directly with ideas about revived and invented tradition and facilitates a lived appraisal of the significance of folk performance as an aspect of place-based community making.

**'2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen'**

Archive Photographs - Manley Park Rose Queen

Figure 4.1.



Manley Park Rose Queen Festival Programme 1966

Figure 4.2.



Janet Robertson, nee Smith as Manley Park Rose Queen (1966)

Figure 4.3.



Janet Robertson (2013)

Figure 4.4.



Girl Guides at the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival (date unknown)

Figure 4.5.



Girl Guides at the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival (date unknown)

Figure 4.6.



Crowning at Manley Park Rose Queen Festival (date unknown)

Figure 4.7.



Morris Dancers at the Manley Park Rose Festival (date unknown)

## Developing the brief

*What I'd like to do this evening is imagine we were going to revive the Rose Queen Festival in Whalley Range...* (Lucy)

Initially, my goals for the project were open-ended. Having already developed a personal practice around costume making and performance, I wanted to use the coronation photographs of the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival as inspiration for a contemporary re-working with the Guides. Perceiving such staged photographs as revealing about the time and place in which they were taken, I was interested in the range of hypothetical forms such a performance might take today. Where would it sit on the continuum between visual continuity and change and what could be inferred from either possibility? Putting participants at the centre of the aesthetic decision-making would offer insight into the significance of visual appearance in the construction and perceptions of community and tradition, particularly as it is viewed from outside of the English folk movement. Following a short presentation about the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival to the workshop participants in March 2013, I asked the Guides to explore their ideas on the theme of a contemporary Rose Queen, through drawing and collage.

I was particularly interested in possible interpretations of the costume worn by the Rose Queen and Rosebud figures and the event's staging and presentation. A practice-led approach was beneficial in this, as it was important to me that the task did not constitute the passive transference of information, or be unnecessarily hindered by a perceived hierarchy - that of an academic (and outsider) "educating" young people about an aspect of local history. Intended as an active and participatory experience, the work was also sought to extend a practice begun in *Bear Dance* - using the task of designing and making to free up a conceptual

space for discussion. I called this “thinking through making together” to mark the progression from the more personal experience of thinking-through-making.

Costume seemed a particularly appropriate place to begin our approach to *Rose Queen* for a number of reasons. During her interview, Janet had stressed the importance of clothing in the previous Manley Park Methodist Church Rose Queen Festival, describing it as the intersection between performers and the wider community:

*when I was the Rose Queen my great aunt made the dress for me because she was, you know, a dressmaker. I think there were a few ladies in the church who helped out with the dresses. (Janet)*

Viewing my role as the facilitator rather than primary maker in this work, I invited local boutique dressmaker, Sindie Peel, to be another collaborator, working with me to compile and create dresses based on the Guides’ designs.

As a potential area of tension, Guiding is historically associated with proficiency in practical and domestic skills around dressmaking and needlework, reflecting the gendered skillset imagined for its early female membership.<sup>90</sup> Keen not to contribute to an unnecessary gendering of the project space, while still capturing the attention of the Guides, I emphasised in my brief that the Rose Queen was not intended to be a beauty pageant, and that the project welcomed all variations and interpretations of the Rose Queen costume.

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<sup>90</sup> While the ongoing endeavor to gain award badges remains an integral aspect of the Girlguiding framework, they are now less obviously gendered and stress participation, teamwork and personal development. The adult leaders recognized the potential for the project to fit into the pre-existing frameworks planned for the year, in particular thematic collaborative tasks called ‘Go for Its!’ which are selected and pursued by the Guides in groups across a period of weeks. Rose Queen involved activities which were relevant to the themed ‘Passion 4 Fashion’ and ‘Blast from the Past’ which deal with clothing and local history. During the course of the project, the Guides were also able to contribute to gaining their Culture, Performing Arts and Craft badges.

My own intentions for the work did not originally look far beyond the initial design stage. I speculated that, financial restraints-permitting, the project might successfully conclude with the creation of two dresses to be worn by the Guides in a staged photograph to add to the Manley Park Methodist Church archive, but the primary goal was initially to generate ideas, rather than a performance. However, the workshop participants envisaged the work differently from the outset. After a period of personal design work, I held a group brainstorming session in which the participants were invited to discuss their reaction to the work. In my fieldnotes I reflected on the fact that most of the Guides immediately perceived the project as an *event*, rather than, as perhaps I had, as a more primarily visual exercise.

Janet had also spoken about the importance of performance within the former Rose Queen Festival, not otherwise visible in the photographs:

*there were lots of rehearsals beforehand...we had to practice so much, you know, sitting still and walking beautifully and all the rest of it. It was a very serious thing. (Janet)*

This led to the realisation that my perception of the Rose Queen Festival via the stillness of photography, overlooked much of the lived experience of participating in a dynamic community event. In order to embody the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival, it felt necessary to begin to approach it in this way.

Several of the girls were particularly enthused about the historical event, urging their leaders and myself to assist them in reviving it in Whalley Range. When asked if - as Janet had suggested - young people in the area like themselves would be interested in being Rose Queen, most agreed that they would. However, their suggestions for the form this would take presented a disparate range of

potentialities. Some responded particularly to the historical elements, seeking to closely reproduce the previous event with a procession through the streets and a formal crowning, while others preferred to use the crowning as a theme for an evening of entertainment for family and friends. Some expressed concerns about the difficulties of maintaining a tradition in the city because “*people move house a lot*”, and others said that the event should be brought up to date, but still be old-fashioned. The requirement - simultaneously nostalgic and contemporary - seems to summarise one of the paradoxes of folk and tradition, explored further in this work.

Studying the Guides’ drawings after the workshop, and reflecting on our conversations, I created a series of possible designs for the two dresses as a composite of the girls’ ideas. These designs were fed back to the Guides in another workshop in which finalized designs were debated and agreed.

**'2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen'**

'Designing traditions' workshop, January 2013

Figure 4.8.



Guides designing dresses (2013)

Figure 4.9.



Guides designing dresses 2 (2013)

Figure 4.10.



Pipe-cleaner crown

Figure 4.11.



Dress design: Megan (2013)

Figure 4.12.



Dress design: Eva (2013)

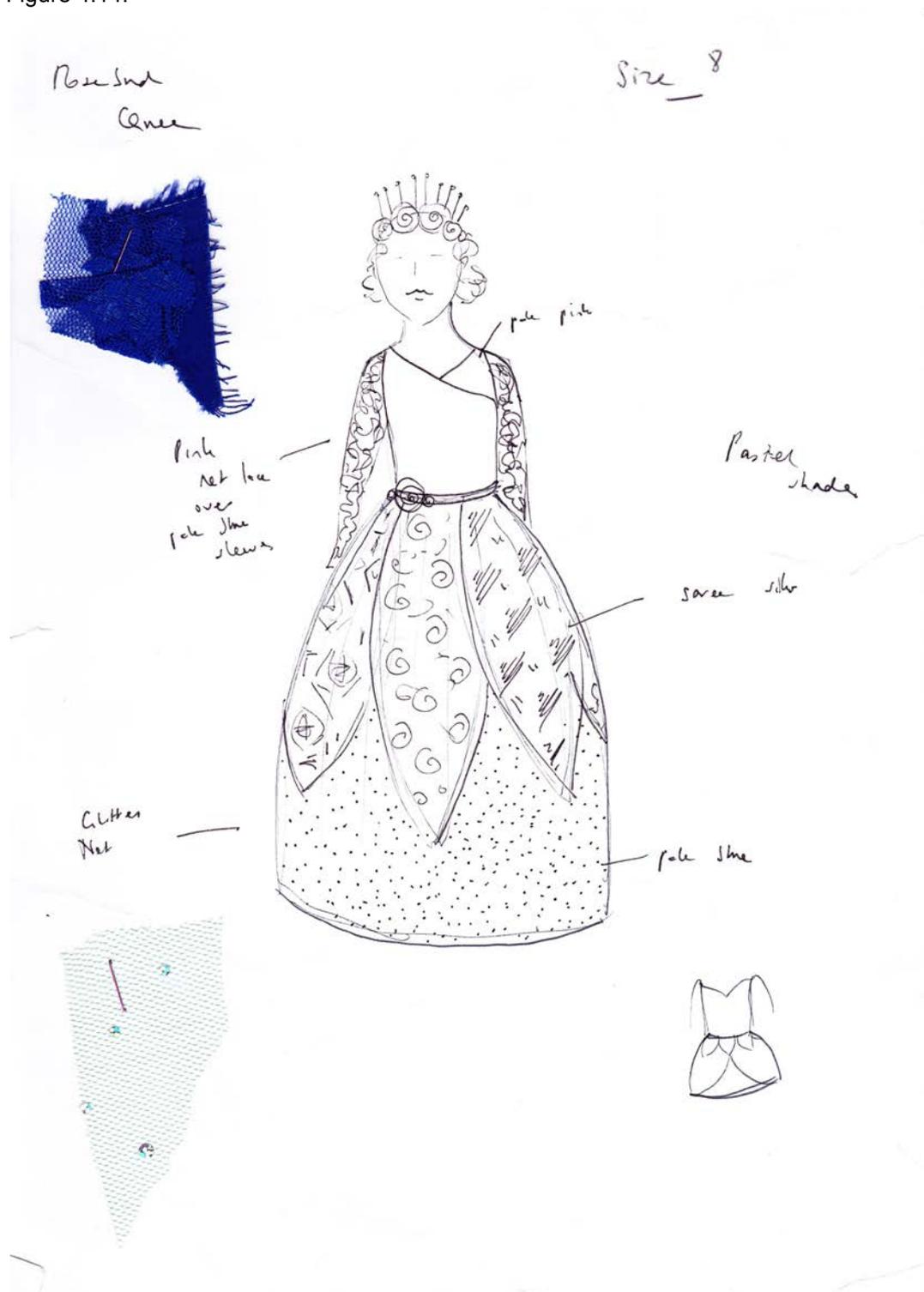
Figure 4.13.



Dress design: Zara (2013)

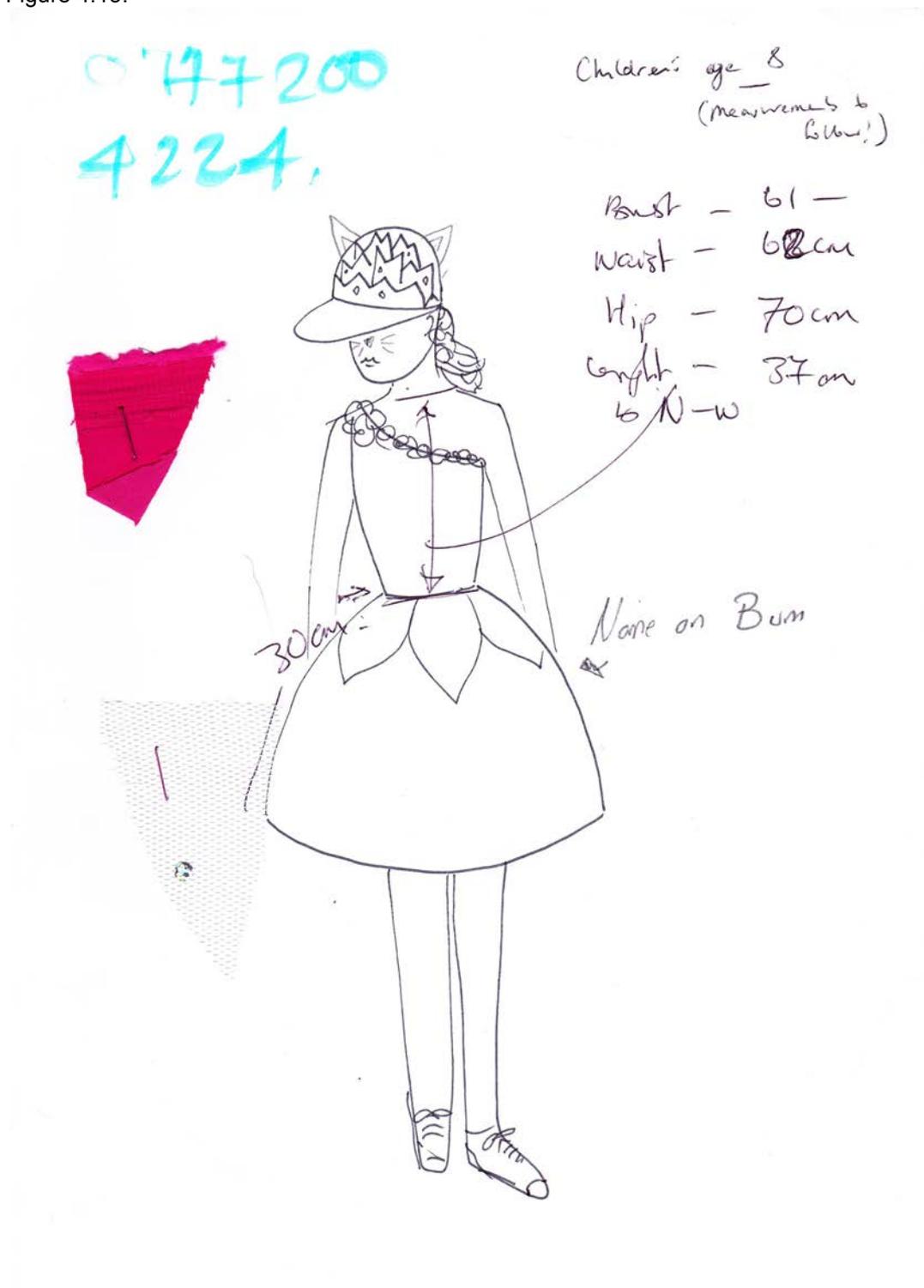
## Design development

Figure 4.14.



Design development: Lucy Wright (2013)

Figure 4.15.



Design development 2: Lucy Wright (2013)

Figure 4.16.



Design development 3: Lucy Wright (2013)

## Everyday creativity

The development of a performance for *Rose Queen* can be considered to engage with the notion of “everyday creativity.” Involving a number of potentially specialist practices - design, making and event planning - it was also a fundamentally self-organised and collaborative project with the Guides.

The costume designs reflected a variety of influences, which were discussed as a group and incorporated into the final dresses. Megan’s design included large petal shapes arranged around the waistband in bright *exploding colours*. (Fig. 4.14) This idea was highly popular with the Guides who agreed that the dresses should be both *princessy* and colourful. I suggested the use of saree fabric sourced from local Asian outfitters, but the group preferred the idea of the bold African prints, regularly used by Sindie in her work.

Several Guides made reference to the recent nuptials of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, also pointing me to the newspaper cutting depicting Kate Middleton aged nine wearing the uniform of a Brownie Guide pinned to one of the communal noticeboards. Eva’s design was popular with the group because of its use of lace and the final Rose Queen costume was white with a royal blue bodice with long lace sleeves, reminiscent of the Duchess’ engagement and wedding dresses which had been heavily featured in the media the previous year.

The Rosebud dress was a smaller version of the Queen’s costume, but with a one-strap magenta bodice and a shorter, tutu style skirt. Both also had a “petal” trim made from off-cuts of Dutch wax print fabrics from Sindie’s studio.

Over the course of a number of weeks of planning, a Rose Queen-themed event

took shape, which drew on the historical model, while simultaneously and seemingly unproblematically interweaving elements of contemporary culture and material practice. Deciding to eschew the historical procession - mostly for reasons of practicality - the Guides prepared instead for an entertainment evening for family and members of the Manley Park Methodist Church. The event was scheduled to coincide with the closing of the school year in July, and culminated in a party to mark the last Guides meeting before September.

Much of the entertainment was provided by the Guides, with everybody given the chance to "do a turn" individually or as part of a larger group and included dancing, drama and singing. A range of local performance groups were also invited to attend, including a youth bhangra dance act and a school steel band. As part of my own wider project, I arranged for *Bear Dance* to be part of the programme, also providing an opportunity to test its impact on a non-folk movement audience.

The centerpiece of the event would be the coronation of the Rose Queen and Rosebud, who had been unanimously nominated by the group. Janet Robertson was invited to provide the crowning as the last-known "out-going Queen."

Inspired by archive photographs and Janet's memory of the event, the Guides felt that the *Rose Queen* should have a celebratory theme and lots of party decorations were collected and donated by members of the wider community. The Guides approached local businesses and received contributions of food and a red carpet for the Queen's entrance.

In addition to the costume, Janet stressed the performative elements of the coronation. *I remember the music. And you know, it was all very serious and*

*solemn as we went up the street. And we had to practice so much, you know, sitting still and walking beautifully and all the rest of it. It was a very serious thing.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park envisaged their Rose Queen as a much more informal affair. They selected to process into the church to a recording of the 'Gold and Silver Waltz' as described by Janet and to take their positions on the stage to the sound of a royal fanfare, but this was closely transitioned into improvised dancing to the 'Harlem Shake' by Baauer, selected by the girls as a currently popular internet meme which had gone viral on YouTube in February 2013.

Figure 4.17.



Detail "crown" making (2013)

In place of a traditional cloak, I sourced two red velour hoodies, which were hand-embellished with an "ermine" trim, made from a found piece of dalmation-print fur. This gave the dresses a "street-style" feel, and the Guides responded enthusiastically to this development. I built the crowns around two baseball hats, decorated with deconstructed plastic party crowns from the local fancy dress shop (Fig 4.17). Heavy gold chains and other "bling" jewellery were provided by the

girls, who also held their own make-up and hair “salon” in the “dressing room” before the performance. In addition to the Rose Queen and Rosebud, the Guides also worked on costumes for two Ladies’ in Waiting, Flower Girls who carried large bouquets of artificial flowers, Garland Girls, Petal Throwers and Crown Bearers. Those who did not have named roles were invited to dress in their best clothing, many opting to include personalizing touches such as Doc Marten boots.

2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park presents *Rose Queen* represents a bringing together of specialist and non-specialist practices, as essentially equal, i.e. handmade decorations and accessories are valued as highly as professionally made dresses. The notion of “everyday creativity” is best summed up for me in the “orb” carried by the Queen which was made from a Manchester United souvenir football, spray-painted gold and decorated with sequins and broken crown – a form of improvisation with available materials and an act of community appropriation.

As a tangent, my work with the Guides also made me think about what might constitute contemporary folk art. Cognisant that Deller and Kane’s ‘Folk Archive’ (2005) had made the case that as art practice has changed in recent decades, then what might be considered folk art has similarly changed (“we must take into account performance and action, video and installation” Millar, 2005). I was particularly interested in the informal creative practices undertaken by the Guides – such as “bedazzling” mobile telephone cases and making key-rings from “Scooby” plastic strings – not widely valued as art. These practices were generally learned from each other, or video tutorials online. I began to collect objects of this

nature, which can be seen in Exhibition Guide, Figure 33. as examples of “contemporary folk art.”<sup>91</sup>

### **The Rose Queen and “absent community”**

*Rose Queen* explores the notion of folk and site-specificity in multiple ways: firstly through the revival of a specific local tradition, the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival, in the site in which it was originally performed, at Manley Park Methodist Church; secondly its performance by contemporary participants who might historically have taken part - the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides, and thirdly, the performance was for an audience of local people, some of whom could remember its previous incarnation. How does this differ from work on Bear Dance and what does it reveal about the relationship between folk and community-making?

Research with The Long Company suggests that site-specificity is a relative quantity – people can be sustained by performance practices which lack significant historical depth, so long as they have a sense that the performance belongs to them. The ownership of a cultural product such as a performance appears to result primarily from a combination of factors including having control over it, perhaps through creative and evolving processes of making and variation, and its repetition and geographical continuity over a period within living memory. Lymm Morris deals with a revived tradition, performing the Lymm Dance in a reproduced kit and only ever in Lymm, but the significance of such site-specificity is of varying importance to the group, many of whom stress enjoyment of participation and membership of a leisure community as higher priorities than maintaining a specific

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<sup>91</sup> This idea is underdeveloped in this work, but I feel that there may be some currency in the idea of exploring the making practices of girls and young women, and the impact of the internet in shaping and disseminating everyday creativities.

tradition. However, direct links to the past are an integral priority of the group, who express little interest in changing the kit despite awareness that such a fixed visual identity represents a degree of artificiality.

Time constraints precluded the evaluation of *Bear Dance* as a potentially site-specific performance. Designed from a comparatively generic model (a description in a book) it was envisaged as the product of an “imagined village” based on Whalley Range. *Rose Queen* differs as the collaborative project between myself and a local community group.

Biggs suggests that due to the reorientation of dominant cultural mentalities, “any sense of the primacy of place-based community is now present in our lives largely through its absence.” (Biggs, 2009: 7) He describes the use of songs to create “imaginal landscapes with temporal depth” which can be carried with people as they travel (Ibid: 10). But the *Rose Queen* event and others like it deal with a form of non-specific nostalgia which is enacted in places. Svetlana Boym (2001) describes nostalgia as an inherently modern condition which manifests in a sense of longing for a home which no longer exists, or may never have existed. Described as “utopian” it is not always directed to the future, nor to the past, but is linked to defensive mechanisms around accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheaval, “a romance with one’s own fantasy.” (Boym, 2001: xiii) Boym suggests that rather than being site-specific, nostalgia may instead be a “rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.” (Ibid: xv)

Nostalgia is generally perceived in negative terms, for some reflecting the abdication of personal responsibility - “heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than shame” (Kammen, 1991: 688) - while for others it is inextricably

connected with an unflattering sentimentalism; “nostalgia is to memory as kitsch is to art” (Maier, 1999: 273). Boyes’ “imagined village” metaphor also ties the sense of nostalgia to a sensing of place.

Manley Park Rose Queen was one of many similar events which took place across the region, achieving great popularity during the mid-twentieth century, before gradually losing momentum. The crowning of a local girl is still practiced in some places, coming to be associated with the town carnival movement. Although little documented in scholarship, the character of the Rose Queen is directly attributable to the better-known May Queen figure, and is limited geographically to the Northwest. This may be due to a convergence between Wakes and other summer festivals and the May Day and the desire to increase the chances of fine weather – as community celebrations were more likely to be successful during June or July, the title of Rose Queen was adopted in place of “May.”

Many Rose Queen events were based on the highly visible model of Knutsford Royal May Day (given its “royal” prefix after a visit by the Prince and Princess of Wales) created with the express intention to bring tourists to the area on the new railway line. At a time when industrialization was changing the shape of the English landscape, both socially and physically, Knutsford Royal May Day was envisaged as a nostalgic event - Joan Leach (1987) suggests that, “a conscious effort was made by the organizers to retain a rural element – cows and cowmen, shepherd and shepherdess, milkmaids, gleaners, village wedding and gipsy king and queen were attractions in the procession,” offering visitors from the new urban settlements in Manchester, Warrington and Northwich a taste of life in a fantasy rural idyll. Christina Hole (1976) suggests, “the arcadian, rose-tinted and almost

entirely erroneous conception of the 'Olde Englishe' May Day very much appealed to middle-class Victorian sentiment" (Hole, 1976: 161)

Idealisation of the countryside has a long history in England – rural civilization until the nineteenth century, but by 1851 more than half of the population lived in towns – in the midst of new urban society, ruralism “rose up, reborn” (Wiener, 1981: 47). Cities were portrayed as symbols of modernity, attracting praise and criticism accordingly. “Rural life was the repository of the moral character of the nation. It could not change, or England itself would be in mortal danger.” (Ibid: 56) Cultural polarity between Englishness identified with green and pleasant land, and industrialism – the dark satantic mills eventually led to dampening of industrial energies, a country at war with itself. “All the values projected on to rural life – simplicity, purity, directness, unaffected beauty – were suddenly given focus and made available in the concrete forms of song and dance... At a stroke the possibility appeared that the urban working class could be re-made in unthreatening form and provided with a role in a culture for all.” (Boyes, 1993: 71) The Rose Queen with its “Merrie Englande” connotations may have been a symptom of this understanding.

Manley Park Rose Queen Festival represented a continuing making practice. Janet says that costumes were re-made every year, *they would choose a colour each year, you know, a different sort of colour*, however, photographs of the event across the decades suggest that the basic model for the costumes were very similar. The Guides had not heard of the event before my workshop, but their designs mostly quite conservative – despite stressing the free range of possibility for the event, most preferred a “traditional” bridal style dress – repeating the media-friendly truism that *every girl wants to be a princess for a day!* While I had

visions of a highly contemporary event, something which I felt might be more relevant to young people in 2013, the girls seemed more inspired by the idea of an “old fashioned” event. When pressed what the term “old-fashioned” meant to them, they described an idealized image of community togetherness and environmental beauty – seen as at odds with the lived experience of growing up in Whalley Range.

*Rose Queen* displayed some similarities and some differences to the Manley Park Rose Queen Festival and other cognate events. Unknowingly, the Guides’ unanimous peer selection of the Rose Queen and Rosebud, Tanith and Megan, mirrored Ruskin’s guidance, in 1881 that the May Queen should be the most “likeable and loveable” as voted by her classmates. (Cook, 1911: 379)

Several new suggestions were made for naming the event including ‘Rose Rally’, ‘Rose Rush’ and ‘Flower Fun Day’, but when put to a vote, *2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen* was selected. This reflects the sense of ownership felt by the Guides over this performance, marking its distinction from the earlier Manley Park event while continuing to borrow and engage with it.

Referencing the Knutsford Royal May tradition of “sanding” which is considered to be unique to Knutsford, the pavement outside the Methodist church was decorated with patterns and pictures in coloured sand.

The performance of the *Bear Dance* as part of the *Rose Queen* project is symbolic of the bringing together of the artist’s imagined place and the physical lived environment. While *Bear Dance* was envisaged for an “imagined village,” a reflection of a personal experience of placelessness, *Rose Queen* marks a shift in

perspective towards re-engagement with the lived environment and communities. If *Bear Dance* made the case for emotional and cultural investment in non-places, *Rose Queen* dwells on the responsibilities to physical and geographical community-places. Cognisant of Biggs' (2009) concerns about transnational professionalism and metropolitan localism, this work argues that one of the key qualities of folk performance may be the ability to bring into being a lived sense of community even as it enacts a form of longing for return.

### **A new way of defining folk?**

In contrast to previous work with individuals and groups who are consciously engaged with some understanding of "folk" (performers located within Warshaver's "Level 2" of postmodern folkloric practice), this project selected to work with people who are not generally identified with the term, and who are not directly associated with the English folk movement. This reflects a shift in focus from researching extant folk performances (with participants studied as experts / informants about their own specific practice), towards an exploration of the broader meaning of "folk".

In this work, two different communities are approached as potential sites for contemporary folk performance: the Guides and the Methodist church. This might be perceived as being at odds with populist understandings of folk.

In doing so it explores the possibilities of defining folk primarily by reference to its use of material practice and self-organisation with communities, in this case amongst people who might not ordinarily associate or identify with the term. This selection was coherent with the status of *Rose Queen* celebrations in the

Northwest, as a site in between the more recognized and studied “folk performances” such as morris dancing and mumming, and the lesser studied and more freely evolving community events, such as town carnivals (which are more likely to fall into Warshaver’s Level 1). Trubshaw continues, “unless we are exceptionally reclusive, we are all 'lots of folk', as we shift from one group to another in the course of a day.” (Ibid.)

In this way it differs from the approach to folk described in the introduction – that folk belongs to those who use the term. The problem with Winter and Keegan-Phipps' definition of folk is that it implies that qualities around tradition can only be found in the folk movement, but this is obviously untrue with the presence of community events like Rose Queen. This is not to suggest that folk performances which take place in the English folk movement should no longer be viewed as “folk.” Mumming and morris dancing can still be considered as folk performance because they involve material practice and self-organised community-making, instead of because the particular dance or play being performed is “traditional.” Suggesting that folk performances associated with the folk movement have tended to become fixed to an ideal and unchanging model, rather than evolving naturally (as it can be assumed they had prior to recording and enshrining in scholarship) this poses the question of what sort of performance might constitute “folk” today? This work seeks to learn more about community events which might play a similar role to mumming and morris dancing but are not generally called folk to see what they might add to a representative contemporary definition. In exploring the Rose Queen celebration with members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides, I was able to ask questions about the role and appearance of “folk” in contemporary Manchester as well as developing the specific tools to approach it.

## Evaluation of collaborative approach

*Rose Queen* was conceived without a fixed destination or outcome in mind, beginning with personal research practice and developed in and through collaborative work with others. It was originally conceived as a design and brainstorming task, but the piece gathered internal momentum as the participants invested and exercised their own intentions as co-creators. This suggests not only that artistic research methodologies need not be seen in isolation from other forms of research practice, instead one of many tools in the ethnographer's arsenal, but also suggests that collaboration, and what might be considered a form of shared reverie, can direct and propel a project towards new insights.

Representing an applied experiment in creating a folk performance with others, the work contributes to an evolving personal practice of "thinking-through-making-together" as a valid means of researching. In the past my practice had primarily involved using my own making to reflect on theory and experience in the field, but in this work I assumed a more directive role as catalyst and facilitator, identifying the value I might add as the instigator rather than the primary creator of art works. The object of this was to allow the creativity of participants to evolve within transformational frameworks, thus representing, as far as possible, the interests and ideas of both researcher and "researched".

This methodological progression was directed by the sense that lived processes of tradition and change could not be adequately considered by the artistic researcher in isolation. Seeking to develop an embedded and embodied research practice, it felt important to leave my personally constructed "imagined village" and re-engage with my lived community, directly and openly. Initially one of a number of potential

“lines of flight” considered at this stage of the work (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) I was unsure of the significance or viability of the research until it had gathered internal momentum via the conceptual and practical investment of others. Striving to keep an open mind to the trajectory and appearance of the performance as it developed, the work was co-steered by the workshop participants towards a shared outcome, which belonged to myself as artist in little more than its foundational concept – the notion of re-imagining the Rose Queen Festival.

In this way, the project draws on Bourriaud’s theory of “relational aesthetics”, which imports the language of the 1990s internet boom to describe “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.” (Bourriaud, 1997: 14) Suggesting that the role of artworks “is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist,” (Bourriaud, 1997: 13) this work identifies the potential analogousness between relational art and folk performance, both representing participatory sites for the modeling of “possible universes” (Bourriaud, 1997: 53). *Rose Queen* tests the efficacy of developing such an approach to qualitative research about folk, aiming to provide the foundational premise and context for others to explore and express their own experience, rather than automatically assigning them the roles of passive recipients of art and scholarship.

Methodologically it was an experiment with relational art; setting up a scenario – the re-invention of the Manley Park Rose Queen – to reflect retrospectively on the social meaning of such an event, and to allow others to develop their own creative response. That response is also interpreted as revealing about the participants

and later their audience.

While the Manley Park Rose Queen is the fulcrum of the work, I sought to permit space for different themes to exist. An exploration of historical memory and a consideration of how the past is understood and transmitted in the present day, it is also concerned with contemporary lived experience, the ways in which folk performances are understood and recognized by the wider public, often the incidental witnesses and participants to “spectacular” forms like morris dancing and mumming.

The work finds a number of important parallels with the work of the conceptual and installation artist, Jeremy Deller, in particular two pieces, ‘The Battle of Orgreave’ (2001) and ‘Procession’ (2009). In its site-specificity and collaboration with local residents who remembered the event’s earlier incarnation, *Rose Queen* is comparable to Deller’s work ‘The Battle of Orgreave’ which set out to re-enact the historical site of resistance during the Miner’s Strike in 1984-85. Deller uses the term “living history” to describe the stories of people living in the here and now who were involved in, or are representative of events deemed historically or culturally significant.<sup>92</sup> (Correia, 2006: 94) Deller also creates interventions in everyday culture in works such as ‘Acid Brass’ (1997) - a musical collaboration with members of the Williams Fairey brass band from Stockport, performing a repertoire drawn from the musical genres of acid house and Detroit techno, and

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<sup>92</sup> In and through the curation, collection, organization and observation of the activities and products of everyday people, Correia suggests that Deller is an artist-ethnographer, whose work on the Battle of Orgreave contributes to current debates around the ethics of collaborative public art and socially engaged practice. Deller undertook an eighteen month period of research prior to staging the re-enactment and his ‘Battle of Orgreave’ was staged to be as ‘real’ as possible. However, the piece differed from a conventional historical reenactment in its overt engagement with a social and political context.

'Procession' (2009).<sup>93</sup>

Functioning as an experiment in artistic research approach, *Rose Queen* provided a chance to evaluate the efficacy of a consciously collaborative practice as well as an intervention into an established performance.

Borrowing from *Conversation Hats* my initial intention had been to use the workshop as a space in which to garner ideas about community from the participants, but in actuality, it proved difficult to focus discussion in this area. 2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides represents a fluid and informal participation group, with some members attending sporadically and infrequently. Not everybody was able to attend the event, perhaps due to confusion around the change of venue from the usual weekly meeting place. As such, the performance was completed by those who turned up, rather than necessarily those who had contributed the most to creating and developing the event.<sup>94</sup>

The event was covered by the Manchester Evening News and inspired a series of nostalgia pieces in the newspaper about historical Rose Queen events in the

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<sup>93</sup> 'Procession' (2009) was commissioned by the Manchester International Festival as a tribute to the historical tradition of processions in the Northwest. Involving disparate communities from all over Greater Manchester, the parade combined features of a traditional procession, such as marching bands and rose queens, with more contemporary and subversive inclusions. Deller says of 'Procession', "*I love processions – as humans, it's almost part of our DNA to be instinctively attracted to big public events that bring us together. A good procession is in itself a public artwork: part self-portrait and part alternative reality.*" (<http://www.mif.co.uk/event/procession> Accessed November 22. 2013)

<sup>94</sup> Another issue was gaining consent. From fieldnotes: "*Photography consent forms are becoming a problem. They were delivered several weeks ago but despite lots of reminders, stressing their importance, I've still only received a handful back with parental signatures, meaning I can't photograph much in the way of event preparations workshops, despite the girls' insistence that their parents don't mind. I just hope there will be enough returned to photograph the final event.*" (Lucy Wright, 2013)

city.<sup>95</sup> A more in depth evaluation of collaborative making as a research technique is offered in the following piece, *Sewing Difference* and Conclusion.

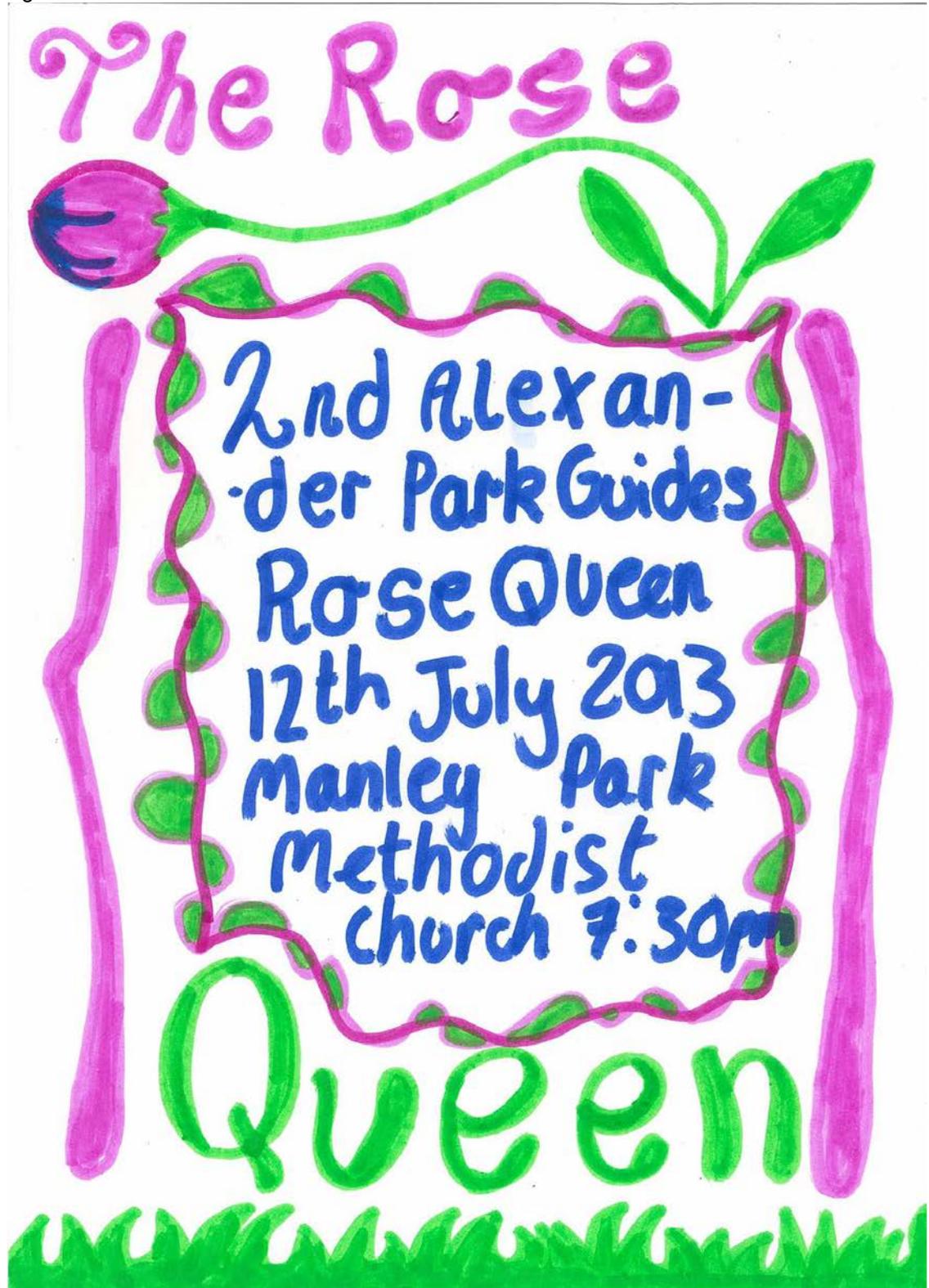
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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/its-hoodies-harlem-shake-modern-5263179> (Accessed 2. February 2014)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present Rose Queen**

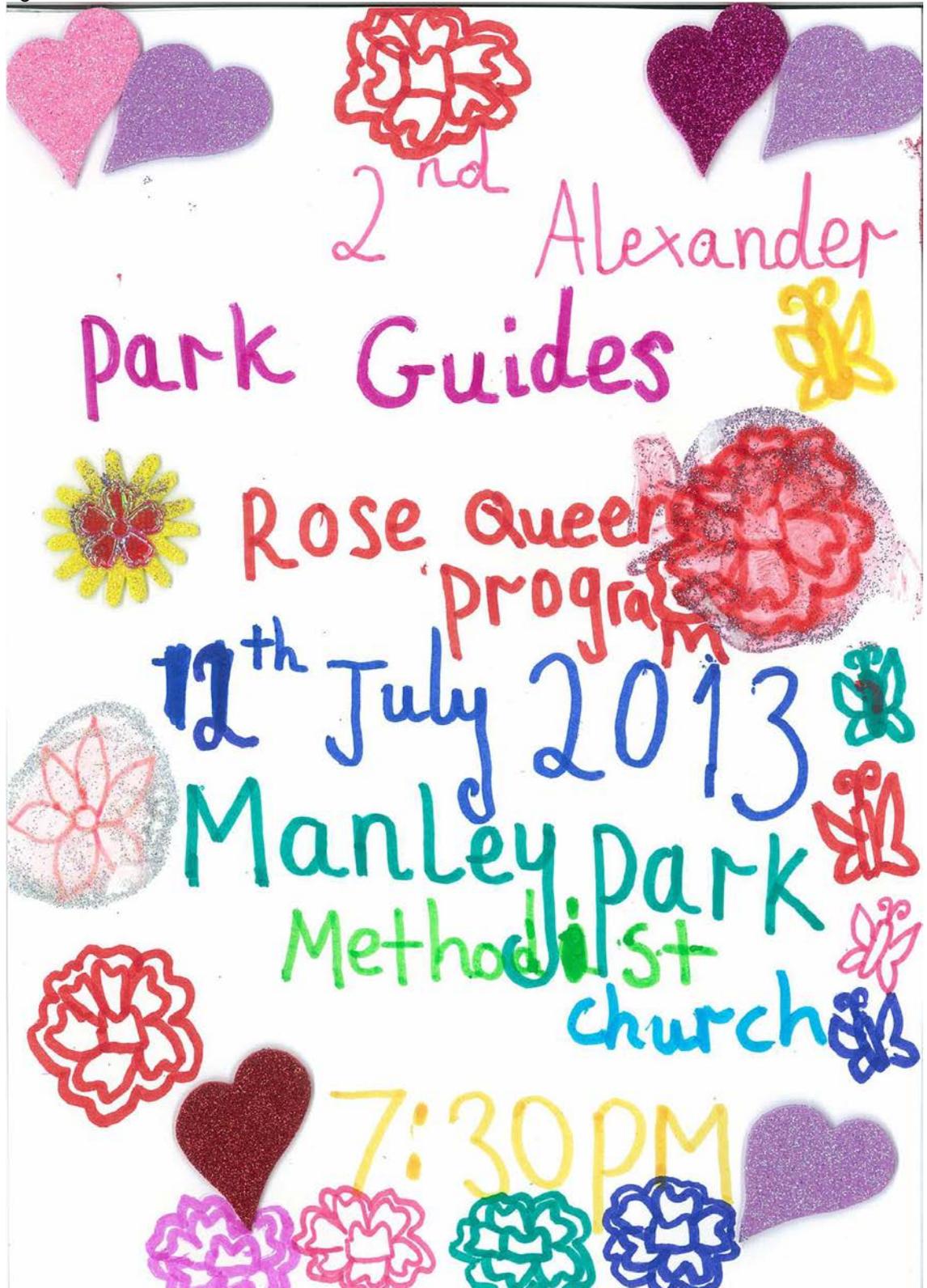
Performance, July 2013

Figure 4.18.



Programme 1: Zara (2013)

Figure 4.19.



Programme 2: Alesha (2013)

Figure 4.20

The screenshot shows the Manchester Evening News website. At the top, the logo for Manchester Evening News is on the left, and the weather is 8°C with light rain and a 5-day forecast on the right. A navigation bar includes links for HOME, NEWS, SPORT, WHAT'S ON, BUSINESS, and IN YOUR AREA, along with a search box. Below the navigation bar, there's a 'Hot Topic' section with 'Crime - Politics - David Moyes - Transport' and 'Follow Us' links for Facebook, Twitter, and Newsletters.

The main article is titled "It's hoodies and a Harlem shake for modern heirs to the rose queen throne" by Amy Glendinning, dated 23 Jul 2013 10:42. The sub-headline reads: "Girl guides in Whalley Range designed their own fake-fur trimmed hoodies, Big Fat Gypsy Weddings-inspired dresses and crowns made from baseball caps to wear at the event." Below the article text are social media sharing options for Twitter (7), Facebook (Like), and a Share button.

A large red banner on the right side of the page says "The ultimate online guide to What's On in Manchester".

The article features a gallery of photos from the Rose Queen ceremony. The main photo shows a group of young women in elaborate costumes sitting on a stage decorated with balloons and streamers. A "View Gallery" button is overlaid on the image. Below the main photo is a row of smaller thumbnail images from the gallery, with the caption "Rose Queen gallery" underneath.

Below the gallery, the article text continues: "A 100-year-old tradition was brought up to date – with a rose queen ceremony featuring hoodies and dancing the Harlem shake." and "Girl guides in Whalley Range designed their own fake-fur trimmed hoodies, Big Fat Gypsy Weddings-inspired dresses and crowns made from baseball caps to wear at the event." The final paragraph states: "The ceremony was a project between MMU academic Lucy Wright, who studies music and history, and members of the 2nd Alexandra Park".

On the right side, there is a "Recommended in News" section with a "Login with Facebook" button. It lists several articles:

- Greater Manchester**: "Live: Manchester Breaking News – February 5, 2014" (marked as LIVE).
- Stockport**: "Tell us your top Stockport pubs and bars".
- Manchester**: "Violent street robberies could all be by the same gang, police say".
- Manchester**: "Pub brawl thug jailed after years on the run in Spain".
- Stockport County FC**: "Stockport County 4 Vauxhall Motors 1: Kristian Dennis at the double".

Article in the Manchester Evening News (2013)



2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Guides present *Rose Queen* crowning (2013)



Alexandra Park Guides present *Rose Queen* fanfare (2013)



'Harlem Shake' (2013)



Maggie and Eva sing 'Delilah' (2013)



Bhangra dancing with Shivani and Sumit (2013)



Molly as Lady in Waiting (2013)



Cora and Begona as petal throwers (2013)



Rosebud Megan and Rose Queen Tanith (2013)



Eva, Maggie and Molly (2013)



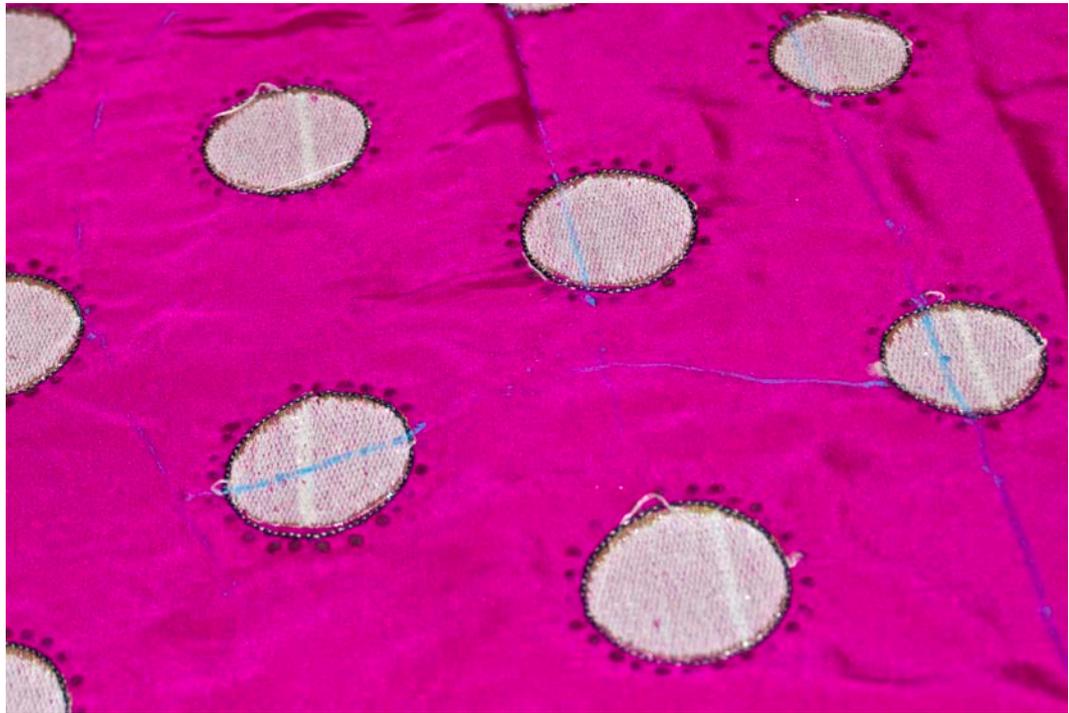
Guests at the Rose Queen (2013)



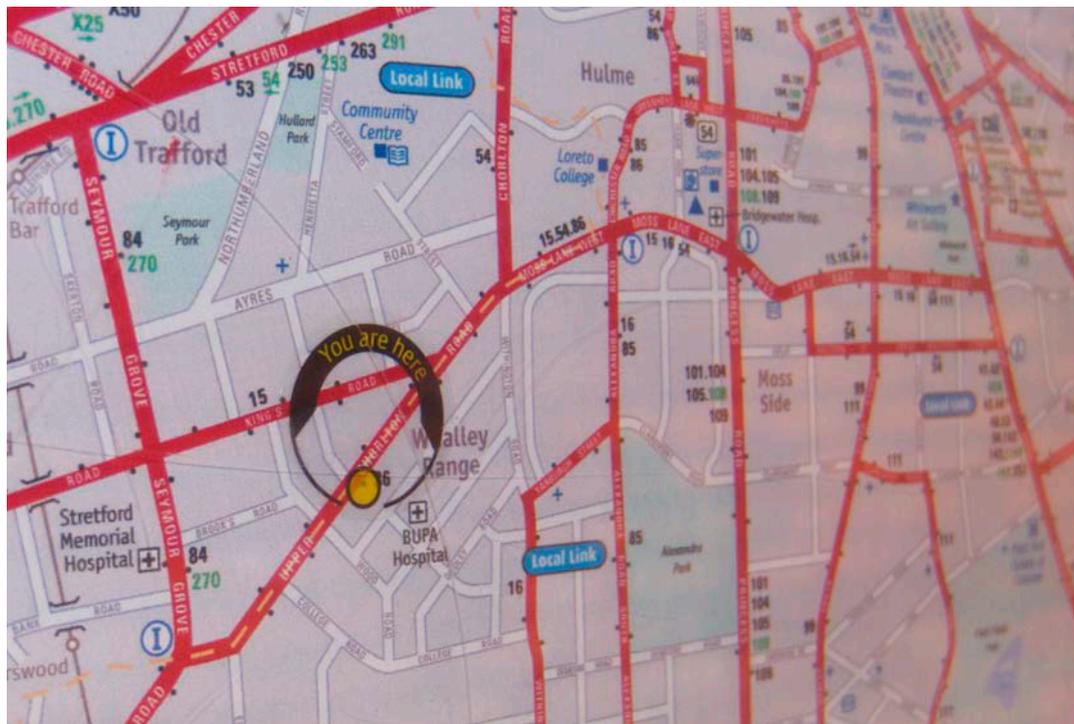
Sumit (2013)

## Case Study 5: Sewing Difference

### Towards a collaborative practice-led research



Aazar's work in progress (2012)



Map of bus routes in Whalley Range (2012)

## **A site for transformation**

Fred Longworth High School, Tyldesley: May 2012

I have entered another world.

Driving through the school gates I realise quickly that this weekly competition is a much larger event than I could ever have imagined. There are people everywhere.

Candy-coloured coach-loads of children and adults throng the driveway as I fight to park my car; chatting, laughing, practicing routines, changing clothes. The air is thick with the scent of syrup and fried onions from a stationary burger van, and there is a powerful sense of anticipation. Conviction and deeply held tribal allegiances are dressed up in glittering sequins and fairground neon. I feel unaffiliated. I'm not sure where I am.

The Sports Hall is over-crowded, as a mayhem of children and adults spill inside and out. I enter through an open fire door and survey a brightly lit gymnasium heaving under an uneven sea of folding chairs and packed lunches, bright spangled dresses on hangers and on the floor, white plimsolls, hair spray and make-up bags.

In the top third of the room a line of teenagers stand in a height-orderly row, while a pair of middle-aged women circle around them with clipboards. They examine socks, headbands and skirt lengths, scaled up and down like a set of Russian dolls. After a short period, some loud, recorded pop music starts up and a pulsing beat thunders through the hall:

*I threw a wish in the well,  
Don't ask me I'll never tell,  
I looked to you as it fell,  
And now you're in my way*

The girls begin their routine, marching, high up on their toes, tiny silver bells thrilling with every downwards step. Then the leader signals with outstretched arms and the troupe seamlessly transition into driving triplets, the 'pas-de-bas', precise and formational. In their hands are the kind of pom-poms you might normally associate with cheerleaders in American teen movies. Their arms punch out, together, up and back, but they're not cheering. They're not really smiling. They are pounding the rubber floor in perfect synchronicity, with knees raised and feet pointed, forming shapes and patterns that are military in their accuracy. From a distance they appear like finely-tuned components in a complex machine, always moving, always in time.

It is mesmerising.

The music stops abruptly before the end of the track. The girls scatter and the audience, those who are actually watching, clap distractedly. The judges, now seated behind a long desk scribble on their clipboards. Then the next group is called on.

*It's morris Jim, but not as we know it!* I text my friend, and fellow Cotswold morris dancer, Edwin.

*It IS morris, Jim, he agrees, but as it used to be in the Northwest.*

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Girls' carnival morris dancing, sometimes known as "fluffy" morris dancing represents a novel field site - both personally and for scholarship – with the potential to transgress and unsettle dominant assumptions about folk.

I came across it first in photographic archives and followed up my research online. Modern in appearance, urban-centred and female-led, it is little known outside of its primary territories in the Northwest of England.

Archival research suggested that carnival morris dancing had once been an integral part of the popular town carnival movement in Cheshire, Lancashire and parts of North Wales. During the first half of the twentieth century, it seemed to evolve in parallel with other forms of Northwest morris dancing now more associated with the English folk revival. However at a certain point, this association appeared to cease and two distinct camps had formed.<sup>96</sup> Today girls' carnival morris dancing operates at a fundamental remove from the conventional spaces of the folk movement, self-contained and demographically distinct,<sup>97</sup> in sports halls and community centres across the Northwest. It neither self-identifies, nor is straightforwardly identified as folk performance.

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<sup>96</sup> The precise history of girls' carnival morris dancing as part of the town carnival movement and its relationship to the English folk movement requires considerable scholarly attention in the future. See Conclusion for a discussion of this.

<sup>97</sup> While much self-identifying folk performance has come to be associated with an aging and predominantly middle class participation profile (Mackinnon 1993, Brocken 2003), carnival morris is primarily performed by young working class girls and women.

“It has almost no literature,” writes Mike Heaney in his *Bibliography of Morris Dancing for the English Folk Dance and Song Society* (Heaney, 2006: 39).<sup>98</sup> Although it is occasionally mentioned in broad-brush nomothetical accounts of folk dancing (Dommett, 1986: 3 – 7) and regional histories of Northwest morris styles (Bentley, 1959: 65, 68, Buckland and Howison, 1980: 10 – 13, Boswell, 1981, 1984 and Howison and Bentley, 1960: 42 – 55, re-published 1986), it has been overlooked by more recent studies of English folk performance. However, scant scholarly attention does not reflect a corresponding lack of popularity in the regions in which it is performed – although its involvement in town carnivals has dramatically reduced in recent decades and it is now rarely performed in public, conservative estimates suggest there may still be more than 8000 current participants.<sup>99</sup>

Why then is girls’ carnival morris dancing so neglected in scholarship? What has prevented it from becoming readily identified with folk performance? Daniel Howison and Bernard Bentley suggest that its propensity to change as female performers “began to evolve their own form of dance” led it to “almost entirely [lose] touch with its traditional roots,” (Howison and Bentley, 1960: 44) however we have already seen that resistance to change represents a paradox for folk performance. Traditions which are unable to adapt to a changing world tend to become irrelevant and require conscious preservation. What happens if we re-evaluate girls’ carnival morris dancing via a re-nuanced forwards-reading of tradition? Might girls’ carnival morris make the case that folk performance scholarship needs to look closer at contemporary practices?

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<sup>98</sup> Heaney’s *Morris Dancing Bibliography*, published by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) in 2006 contains only two entries under ‘Carnival’, compared with nearly 100 for Cotswold morris, 58 for Northwest and 18 for Border.

<sup>99</sup> Personal calculation - approximately 180 current troupes with between 30 and 60 members – mean number = ±8000.

The vignette above describes the first time I witnessed girls' carnival morris dancing. Following a series of leads online I had been able to secure an entrance to one of the community's private competition events, hosted by the North of England Morris Dancing and Carnival Organisation (NEMDCO) in Tyldesley near Wigan. I was confident that this "new" kind of morris dancing would be an important addition to my research about contemporary folk performance in the Northwest.

However, I found it initially difficult to make personal contacts in the community. While my existing participation had made access to the folk movement comparatively straightforward, my specific performance background did not correspondingly prepare my way into the carnival morris community.<sup>100</sup> Coupled with a paucity of dedicated literature, my earliest research into the dance was thus primarily framed and circumscribed by visual concerns – glimpses of information I could glean from photographs and YouTube videos. This seemed in many ways appropriate, as girls' carnival morris looked fundamentally unlike any other kind of folk performance I had encountered. Temporarily stalled, but keen to explore girls' carnival morris dancing as a site of transformation for folk, I wanted to develop an artistic research project which took the performance's striking appearance as its theme.

### **A collaborative making brief**

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<sup>100</sup> I later heard that television crews looking to make exposé documentaries about them had left many performers wary of outsiders. "*There are several TV companies around at the moment trying to get feet in the door to make 'Shameless' or 'Jeremy Kyle' type programmes about morris dancing and a lot of troupes have become very suspicious of 'outsiders' who want to do 'features' on them.*" (Interview between Lucy Wright and Ian McKinnon, May 2013)

*Sewing Difference* is a making project on the theme of girls' carnival morris dancing undertaken in 2012 with three garment makers whose contrasting working premises are situated within walking distance of my home in South Manchester. The research involves three separate collaborations, each one between myself and a garment maker, to produce dresses which re-interpret the carnival morris dancing costume – two dresses per collaboration.<sup>101</sup> These collaborations were with Aazar, Sindie Peel and Clare Louise Vincent, all professionally based in the suburb of Whalley Range.<sup>102</sup>

Conducted across a period of six months, one aim of this project was to further my understanding of the relationships between folk performance, making and community. Photographs of girls' carnival morris dancing costumes suggested that designs loosely signalled a trajectory of trends in everyday fashions, fundamentally revealing about the time, place and community in which they were made. The three garment makers I selected also made clothing which articulated something important about the social and cultural context in which they were created: Aazar's shop specialises in bespoke Asian outfitting for the Muslim community in Whalley Range, Sindie's fashion boutique draws heavily on her West Indian background and Clare's parallel career as a ballroom dancer informs her heavily embellished "team wear" designs.

I asked the makers to produce reinterpretations on the model provided (Fig. 5.1)<sup>103</sup> employing their regular making styles and materials.<sup>104</sup> This develops ideas from

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<sup>101</sup> Morris dancing dresses are typically designed in pairs, one to be worn by dancers in the main line and a variation - often more elaborate – worn by the leader.

<sup>102</sup> Importantly, the performance phase of this work is yet to be completed, see below.

<sup>103</sup> A carnival morris dancer's dress I had found on the fancy dress rail in a local charity shop.

*Bear Dance* about folk performance and different kinds of Englishness – and the diverse ways in which identity and community are constructed and communicated, particularly through clothing and performance. The makers also agreed to be photographed at various stages of the work. While collaborating on the project, I was also able to conduct informal interviews about their experiences and interpretations of place-making, material practice and understandings about folk performance.

However, the project was also an interrogation of making. Unlike previous case studies which employed personal and collaborative making as a means of getting inside a specific folk performance and understanding more about its meaning, this work was directed towards the experience of being a garment maker – how the role intersected in and through lived community and place. Developed from a position of limited access to girls' carnival morris dancing, but with a growing confidence in the use of artistic research practice, particularly thinking-through-making-together, I wanted to focus my attention for a while on the making process itself.

In common with other experiments throughout this thesis, *Sewing Difference* represents an improvisation rather than a pre-worked out set of stages, but the research was fundamentally conceived as a collaborative project. Chronologically completed shortly after *'Bear Dance,'* it represented the first occasion in which I felt able to conduct my research this way, integrating art practice and research from the outset. As Cerwonka and Malkki write:

to get up to the point of improvising well, the ethnographer, like the jazz musician, must have devoted countless hours to practice and preparation of various kinds. (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 182)

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<sup>104</sup> I was involved in selecting the materials – Aazar's came from a fabric shop a few doors from his studio, Sindie sells fabrics at her shop and Clare went with me to her local haberdashery supplier.

If previous case studies had prioritized my own making and experiences with others, this research attempted to look outwards – permitting the practice of other makers to evolve within the loosely constructed frameworks I provided.

In addition to making, *Sewing Difference* also includes a performance component. However, this part of the research is yet to be completed, forming an integral part of my doctoral exhibition. The dresses made with Aazar, Sindie and Clare will be worn for a performance of girls' carnival morris dancing – as a representation of the multicultural reality of the Northwest, thus providing a comment on folk performance and identity in South Manchester. Photographs of the dresses produced and worn for the performance can be found in the Exhibition Guide (Figures 1 – 12.)

Figure 5.1.



Model dress given to the garment makers (2012)

## **Walking, thinking, making**

Although this research was conducted collaboratively, it was fundamentally shaped by following personal creative practices of walking, thinking and making, around my home in Whalley Range.

Initially perceived as an incidental part of my daily life in the city, during '*Bear Dance*,' I came to recognize the potential of walking as a space to think outside of the constraints and expectations of my working day. It had also – crucially - forced me into direct contact with my surrounding environment and its people. In paying closer attention to the interventions of others in this shared space, I found that I was able to find new ways to interact with people in my community and to consider possible new interpretations of folk.

Walking enabled me to be able to find my co-creators. I had already visited Sindie's boutique during materials-sourcing for '*Bear Dance*,' but the idea of approaching her as a collaborator did not materialize until the chance discovery of Aazar's workshop during a trip to a local fabric store. Beginning my research from there – discussing the project into fruition with the two garment makers - I later found Clare's handwritten notice in a nearby post office and invited her to join as the third.

The development of a conscious practice of walking draws primarily on Certeau's description of cultural (re)appropriation (1984) and Roanna Heller's account of "becoming an artist-ethnographer" (2005). Both works reflect a ground-level subjectivity - advocating the interrogation of the lived environment as a kind of text or "rhetoric" - to cultivate a dialogue between ourselves and the world around us – a notion which seemed highly appropriate to my work about folk.

A key argument in Certeau's essay is that while the social sciences possess the ability to study the components of culture: its traditions, symbols, languages and arts, it lacks a formal means to examine the ways in which people re-appropriate these actions in everyday life. This omission renders ordinary people as passive, "subjects" of culture, a misinterpretation borne out in the term "consumer". By engaging with the notion of re-use, Certeau suggests that the rituals and representations imposed by institutions might be subverted and assessed.

This feels relevant to contemporary folk performance for a number of reasons. Firstly as an everyday practice, folk is frequently associated (although not necessarily accurately) with a rejection of popular consumer culture. Brocken suggests that folk is defined "by the myth of its origins – those that appear to predate the contaminating expansion of the culture industry of multinational capitalism." (Brocken, 1993: 129) Folk is thus employed to bolster the over-simplified dichotomy between "heritage (the natural) and enterprise (the mass-produced)" (Ibid: 130).

At a community level, folk performance can be viewed as a mode of reappropriation, a means by which non-artists and non-performers are empowered to create their own cultural products - which may borrow from existing forms - but do not rely on established structures for their survival and perpetuation. This idea is also cogent with the aims of relational art, which makes use of existing forms and "re-mixes" them (Bishop, 2004: 55)

One way in which the idea of reappropriation can be approached, Certeau suggests, is via a conscious practice of walking. He famously makes the case for

walkers as voyeurs of the city, distinguishing their visibility from the panoramic and privileged view from above. Suggesting that the urban walker “writes an urban text” by filling spaces and inventing places and stories which are both fragmentary and fleeting, his interpretation suggests that space is amorphous, only becoming an articulated place when given meaning by people. As such, the landscape comes to be perceived not as a passive, backdrop for human activity, but something actively created and recreated by individuals.

## Walking in Whalley Range

Decorated trees on Dudley Road, 2012



Heller's artistic ethnography-making in and from Walkley in Sheffield also addresses the subjectivity of the urban space. Beginning with the intention to focus attention on her lived surroundings differently, she made a conscious practice of "exploring new spaces and disorienting myself, testing the familiarity of the streets" (Heller, 2005: 134) in order to re-engage with some of the other lives which took place there. For Heller this led to the desire to make contact with others, through participatory practice. She reflects:

through entering into a dialogue with what I saw, smelt and felt, I became engaged with the city... through collaborating with artists, project workers and participants, I was moving towards an artistic-ethnographic perspective. (Heller, 2005: 136)

In some ways, my involvement in folk performance in the Northwest also functioned as a means of engaging with my new home-place; however I came to question whether this focus was inherently limiting to my experience of place. By seeking community primarily amongst the cloistered leisure-spaces of folk performance, I was unconsciously perpetuating a variation on Biggs' "metropolitan localism" – the insularity of a "highly localized sense of 'at-home-ness' derived from specific professional practices, norms, discourse, and lifestyle choices" (Biggs, 2009: 9). As such, I had been able to feel at home in South Manchester without actually engaging with my lived environment in anything more than an incidental manner.

Seeking to re-engage with the wider social environment in Whalley Range, and also keen to uncover new and non-institutionalised customary practices – the kinds of contemporary folk performance I was increasingly drawn to, outside of the folk movement – I began to think more about my own patterns of interaction in the city. Interested in the intersection between place and folk performance, I followed Heller's attentive example to develop epistemological practices of coming-to-know

my new area, seeking physical and conceptual access to the rhythms and mechanisms of interlocking communities.

Also aware of Lucy Lippard's suggestion that artists begin to explore the relationship between art and place through an examination of their own lived environment, I began to look for evidence of other people's presence and reappropriations in public spaces (Lippard, 1997: 25). Fliers taped to a telegraph pole, or a home-photocopied poster helped provided me with new places of entry, a chance encounter in the library or at a bus stop helped me to understand more about the people who live here and their patterns of interaction and individuation in a shared space. I took photographs as evidence of people's engagement with the lived environment, their celebrations, disapprovals or apathies about the urban landscape.

Near my house, on a blank temporary wall beside a building site, a graffiti artist has scrawled "Consume, conform, OBEY" in large letters. Every few weeks the wall is whitewashed over, but within days the graffiti has come back, blacker than ever. As an artist I wanted to preserve and respond to these small moments of contact and as a researcher I wanted to analyse what they revealed about people's understandings of place, belonging and folk.

Congruent with Michael Taussig's calls for a "representation as continuous with that being represented and not as something suspended above and distant from the represented," (Taussig, 1992: 10) walking offered the potential to interact in the same terms as those interacting, rather than upholding scholarly or artistic distance from it.

Through walking I was made aware not just of the everyday creativities in my lived environment, but also of other makers practising garment making close to my own work-space. I was intrigued by our parallel practices and the varying techniques and aesthetics being employed. Rather than acting in isolation, I wanted to reach out to these other makers, to learn from them and to gain their perspective on the substantive theme of my own work, folk performance.

## **The collaborations**

June 2012

*My ladies, says Shahid, with the crumpled hands and maroon-grey temples, my ladies come in to make a suit. Three pieces. He gestures around the room as if conducting an orchestra. Trousers, tunic, scarf. Trousers, he points, tunic... scarf... This very nice. This very nice. Three pieces.*

I had been roaming around the small shop selecting individual bolts of cloth, mix and match and draped over my arm, making up a design that I had not yet quite envisaged. Now I can see that doing so upsets the system. This place does not operate like the large textile warehouses in town where they cut the fabric directly from the roll to whatever length a customer requires. Nor is it a typical high street fashion store, with rows of ready-made dresses in pre-ordained sizes, six through to sixteen. Shahid's fabrics come already cut, some hung on poles, others neatly packaged in slender polythene sleeves, bought as a set to be turned into a *shalwar kameez*. Many people sew their own clothes, but I know from memory that some of the smart boutique stores on Wilmslow Road, Manchester's "curry mile," have a sewing machine in a corner of the shop floor, and an in-house tailor who can hand-

make a garment to bespoke measurements, finished and embellished while you wait. In places like these it is neither necessary nor possible to buy very much more or less than a pattern requires - although sometimes when I come in to browse Shahid's wife furtively passes me a brown cardboard box of off-cuts from behind the till and lets me buy oddments for a pound.

I relinquish my haul and help him to return the cloths to the large rolls that shroud the walls. We look at each other. I tell him that I want to make a dress.

Shahid speaks in a mixture of English and Urdu, his customers, who fly in and out, announced by the clanking of an ancient bell talk loudly and urgently, selecting bangles and slippers as well as the latest designs from Pakistan. While his wife works in the stock room, he oversees the shop with an absorbed, almost reverential manner, touches the silks carefully, admiringly, holding up a scarf against a lady's cheek to test the tone, and tracing the shapes of brocade curlicues with a long fingernail. The shop window is full of artfully displayed suits and *dupattas* in gleaming jewel tones, enticing with glamour even though the paint on the door is peeling and splintered. I've always been attracted to places like these, unashamed in their bold sweeping colours, the blinking of paste gemstones, the glimmer and tarnish of bright yellow gold.

My everyday clothes are more reserved, I know. Middle-English taste with its sensible greys, creams and beige, Royal Blue and Lincoln Green, and I remember walking through the streets of Jaisalmer a few years earlier, kicking up the pink and orange Rajasthani soil beside women dressed in *bandhani* and *bandhej*-work sarees, shining like birds of paradise.

Fashion rules at home stress the sophistication of complementary shades and timeless classics, investment pieces to 'go with everything' and extreme caution when mixing prints. Un-invigilated colour can be a discomfort, denoting something other, perhaps unknowable. The video artist Rachel Maclean has described her powerful use of colour as hyper-saturation, *both nauseatingly positive and cheerfully grotesque*.<sup>105</sup> David Batchelor calls this "chromaphobia" of Western thought, an attempt "to purge colour from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish its significance and deny its complexity" (Batchelor, 2000: 22). Today we see it in the bargain-bin, the market stall, cheap and cheerful, appealing to the young, the daring and the broke.

[C]olour is made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body - usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological..." writes Batchelor, "relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic...Colour is dangerous, or it is trivial or it is both. (Batchelor, 2000: 23)

Carnival morris has never been afraid to employ strong colours, I remind myself. They would approve of these fabrics.

Together, amidst many interruptions, Shahid and I consider the merits of chiffons and dupions, georgettes and voiles before settling on three pieces of electric turquoise silk. Studded with diamantes and bold silver rings, it is prim polka-dots made brave. I also take the contrasting design in fuschia. He folds them meticulously and tosses the glossy pattern into the bag - a photograph of a happy woman with long dark hair skips from one foot to the other, her long scarf floating elegantly in an unseen breeze. *It's very you*, Shahid says, then with a quizzical look, he leads me by the arm to the front door and points to a small shop down the street

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.rachelmaclean.com/bio.html> Accessed 30. January, 2014

adjacent to the park. There is no sign, but a large bay window reveals a brightly lit studio with two or three old-fashioned sewing machines built into the desks. Inside a man in shirt-sleeves is working with coloured silks.

*Name, Aazar...he will make your suits.*

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Working with the three makers represented three very individual experiences. Both Aazar and Sindie were happy for me to sit in on their making processes and ask questions, while Clare preferred a more solitary approach. Sindie's shop was a lively community hub, at which people stopped by for a cup of tea and a chat, and to work on their own personal projects in her studio at the back. Aazar's shop was equally busy, but represented a more formal business environment. People came in to collect clothing or to be fitted for a suit, but did not tend to remain once the transaction was completed. However, Aazar employed two assistants – speaking seven languages between them – who gave the studio a social atmosphere. Aazar's daughter Asmaan, aged five, was also a regular presence on the studio floor. Clare, on the other hand, took most of her commissions online, and worked in a top floor studio of her grandmother's house. A recent graduate from Manchester Metropolitan University's fashion degree, she said she was finding it difficult to make ends meet.

Sindie too, complained of the financial difficulties of being a professional dress maker in Whalley Range. She attributed this to a lack of interest in bespoke and handmade clothing:

*When I was a child I helped my mother when she made dresses for her friends – the only way of having individual style and dresses that fit was to have your outfits made... English women don't want to pay more than ten pounds for a skirt. I'm in a country where people don't care about clothes, don't go to the tailors, just buy things off the peg. (remembered speech, Sindie, 2012)*

However, Aazar's business appeared to be booming. I asked him how he had become involved in garment making and he explained that he had learned to sew as a child in Afghanistan. *I was always very good at maths*, he said, and had been an engineer before moving to Manchester. His family were forced to leave Kabul when the Taliban came and now they were spread out across the globe. He told me about brothers in Turkey and Pakistan and a sister in America – *all in business*. His father, also an engineer, is still in Afghanistan. Aazar said that he worries for him, and calls home every week.

On another occasion I asked Aazar about his life in Manchester. *It's ok*," he says, but complains that he has found it difficult to fit in as a newcomer. Not everybody has been friendly. His business was burgled a few months ago. The money is good though – and he is learning salsa dancing at the mosque beside his house. I noticed that Aazar rarely seemed to look at his work as he cut and sewed – hands moving all the time, he seemed to know by instinct what needed to be done.

Although neither Aazar, Sindie nor Clare had an established background or interest in "English folk performance" per se, a point of commonality between all three makers was an understanding of the notion of "carnival." In explaining the purpose of my research to the three participants, this proved a useful way to conceptualise the task. During the making of this work, I attended two carnivals in Whalley Range; the Caribbean Carnival at Alexandra Park and the Eid Festival in the grounds of the British Muslim Heritage Centre (BMHC) on College Road –

coincidentally attended by Sindie and Aazar also. Clare explained that much of her regular income from garment making came from designing and making costumes for performance groups, such as cheerleaders, who regularly perform at carnivals. Sindie complained that I had requested the skirt of my first dress to be too long. *You've got to show a lot of flesh at carnivals!* she admonished me.

In this way, the outcomes of the three collaborations – six dresses – thus represent the makers' responses to the brief of re-designing costumes to be worn for different kinds of carnivals.

### **Evaluation of collaborative method**

Collaborating with Aazar, Sindie and Clare helped me to understand more about my own practice-led research. In particular it highlighted areas for me to think about in pursuing future research projects with others – something I wanted to continue as I gained further access into the carnival morris dancing community.

One issue, perhaps particularly pertinent to a project about folk performance, is ownership. Although there was never any question that the work was conceived as three collaborations, I was aware that as co-creators, Aazar, Sindie, Clare and I took on differing roles. While the garment makers were the main producers of the dresses, my work was in selecting fabrics and embellishments and organizing the project overall. I also did some small tasks towards the completion of the costumes, using the opportunity, particularly when working with Sindie, to develop my own dress making skills.

In some ways, my work reminded me of a recent project by the artist, Amy Fung whose six-month residency in Huntly, Scotland went by the title - *The town is the venue*. Reviewing the town as if it were a perpetual art exhibition, Fung summarized:

*What I ultimately took away from this residency was that the town was never consulted about being 'the venue'... The arts organization believed it was hosting events for the town, but in reality, it was the town that was hosting the artists and their visitors. In this sense, community was founded on an ongoing negotiation of hosting along with participating.*<sup>106</sup>

Similarly, when Sindie spoke about the project in terms of *being commissioned...like a Damien Hirst artisan*, (remembered speech, Sindie 2012) I was made aware that, as well as collaborating on the work, the garment makers were also supporting me in my own personal project.

I also realised that in taking such a leading role in choosing the materials used in the work, I have shaped and directed the way the final pieces looked. Although the materials were selected from appropriately congruent sources - and both Aazar and Sindie in particular - as time-pressed business people – expected me to provide all fabrics, this was one way in which my expectations of the outcomes of the work were perhaps dominating and less collaborative than I would have liked. An interesting future project with the same garment makers might involve a more collaborative approach to the preparations (as it did with Clare) as well as the products of the research. What might the costumes have come to look like without my visual initial input?

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<sup>106</sup> <http://www.cdse.org.uk/the-concept-of-community-in-global-fluctuations-and-migratory-networks/> (Accessed 22. November 2013)

The opportunity to work with other local garment makers and gain insight into their practice, both through watching and conversation was a valuable process, helping me to contextualise the kinds of making I do. As Gauntlett writes of his “creative research techniques:

The idea is that going through the thoughtful, physical process of making... an individual is given the opportunity to reflect and to make their own thoughts, feelings or experiences manifest and tangible. This unusual experience gets the brain firing in different ways and can generate insights which would most likely not have emerged through directed conversation. (Gauntlett, 2011: 4)

In addition, the outcomes of the project, are important physical traces of a collaborative process. As the artist Allison Smith explains of her own work:

*I like to use the quilting bee metaphor. Something is being made while something is being discussed and ideas are being exchanged. The object facilitates the occasion; the occasion lends value to the object. The quilt is the witness to and the artefact of the discussion. It is the material trace of manifestation of ideas. It is our responsibility to discover the ideas embedded within it, the occasion or context out of which it was made and the aspirations of its makers. (Smith quoted in Mikulay, 2009: 194)*

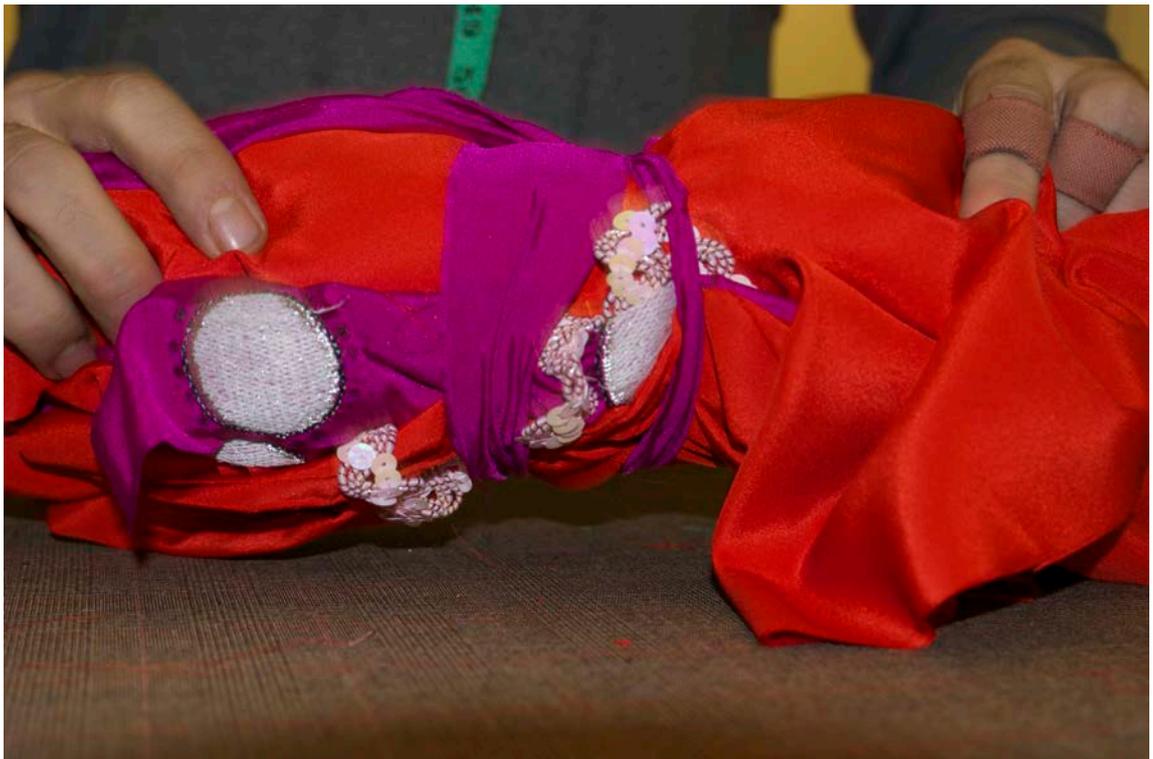
The dresses will go on to have another life when animated through the performance of carnival morris dancers.

**Sewing Difference – the makers**

Aazar Wafa



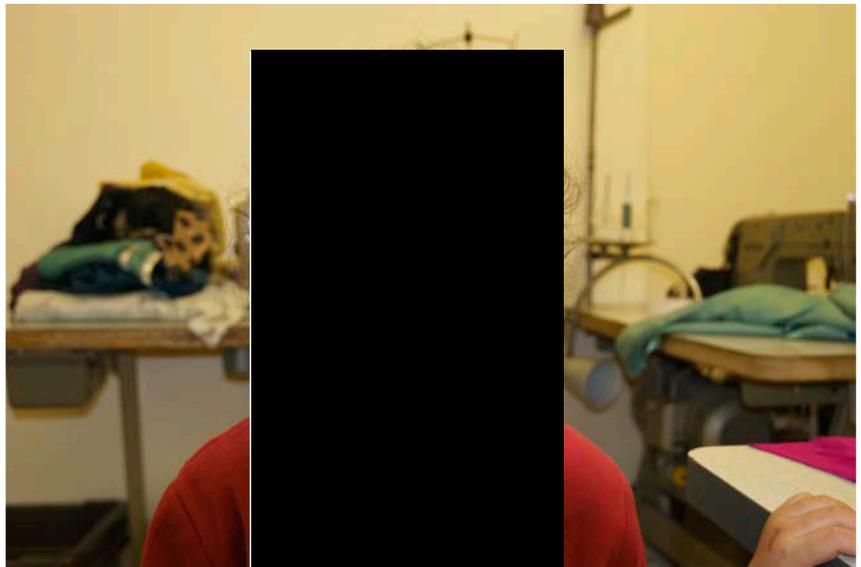
Making detail (2012)



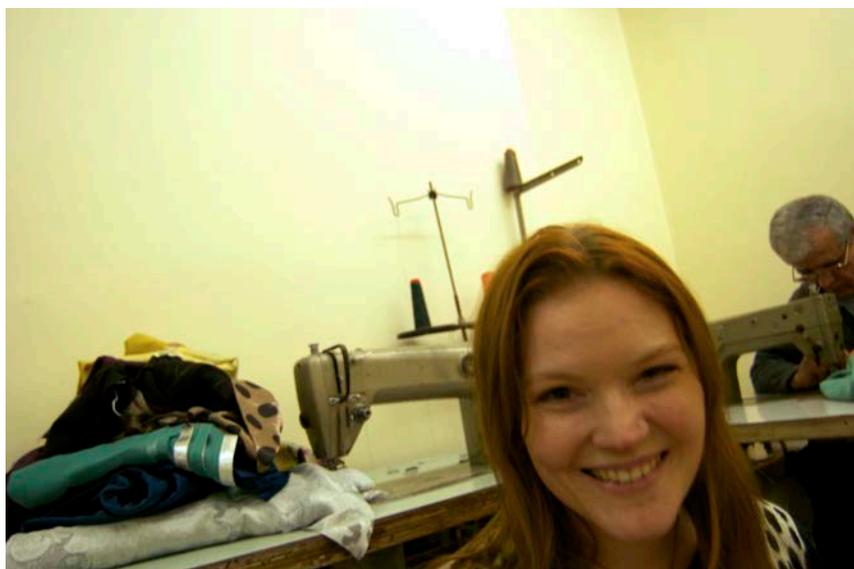
Making detail 2 (2012)



Aazar's shop (2012)



Asmaan (2012)



Me – by Asmaan (2012)

Sindie Peel



Making detail (2012)



In progress (2012)



Making detail 2 (2012)



In progress 2 (2012)



Making details 3 (2012)

Clare Louise Vincent



Making detail (2012)



Making detail 2 (2012)



In progress (2012)



In progress 2 (2012)

### Chapter 3. An artistic ethnomusicology?

We have an artistic practice and we have an inquisitive attitude towards it. Also, we are doing research on the practice. What does all this actually amount to in real life?

(Hannula et al, 2005: 109)

In Chapter 2, collaborative practices of garment making and performance were explored as ways of researching with others. This marked a shift in my approach from the automatic prioritizing of personal making objectives towards more collaborative ways of “thinking-through-making-together.” I sought to integrate my practice and research via participatory and co-created artworks with the “subjects” of my inquiry, and in this way, my work came to engage with the “relational.”

The artist Peter Dunn describes relational practitioners as “context providers,”<sup>107</sup> acknowledging the departure of some contemporary artists from the tradition of object making in favour of a performative approach. Such collaborative encounters frequently take place outside of the conventional institutions of the gallery or museum, and in a similar way, my own experiments with a relational art practice took my work outside of the typical spaces of the academy and the English folk movement - into new and uncharted territories.

In *Sewing Difference*, I identified girls’ carnival morris dancing as a latent transformational site for the study of contemporary folk performance: modern in appearance, geographically confined to the post-industrial Northwest and fundamentally female-led, it unsettles dominant assumptions about what can be understood by the term “folk.” Its comprehensive omission from the canon of morris dancing scholarship and performance events suggests its potential to

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<sup>107</sup> As opposed to “content providers” (Kester, 2004: 1)

reveal something important about attitudes towards the boundaries of folk performance, both from those inside the folk movement, and perhaps outside of it too. But what has led girls' carnival morris dancing to break ties with more widely known interpretations of the dance?<sup>108</sup>

Although I employed girls' carnival morris dancing as a theme for making in *Sewing Difference*, the work did not, in itself, progress my understanding of the girls' morris community. Instead, it capitalised on the glimpses of contact I was able to cultivate from a distance, at a time when access to performers was proving difficult – in itself, undoubtedly telling. However, making morris-style dresses with local garment makers in Whalley Range *did* progress my understanding and sense of purpose as an artistic researcher, expanding and cementing my own practice within this chosen approach.

In September 2012, following a period of networking in the field, undertaken both in person, and increasingly, online,<sup>109</sup> I was able to arrange an informal apprenticeship to Samantha Hamer, a carnival morris dancing dressmaker and designer who trains and choreographs Orcadia Morris Dancers from Skelmersdale in West Lancashire. Conceptualising my research inside the girls' carnival morris dancing community as a maker first and a writer second represents a re-nuancing of my perspective as a researcher - coming to identify more closely with my

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<sup>108</sup> “Girls' carnival morris dancing” is an imperfect name chosen for its descriptive clarity, particularly to distinguish it from the more commonly encountered styles of morris dancing more associated with the English folk movement. It is potentially misleading – carnival morris is something of a misnomer now that very few troupes actually perform at carnivals, while other styles of morris dancing performed by mixed and single-sex groups of men, women and children also featured throughout the history of the town carnival movement. It may also be misrepresentative of community usage – both carnival and revival morris dancers tend to describe their performance as just, “morris dancing”.

<sup>109</sup> Specifically – and crucially – I was able to make contact with Ian McKinnon via his website: <http://ccgi.ianmckinnon.plus.com> (Accessed January 19, 2014). Ian assisted me – on Facebook and in person at ETACCO competitions - to find other participants for my research in the carnival morris dancing community. I also conducted a written interview with Ian in August 2012.

developing artistic practice and enjoying increased confidence in “making together” as a rich and valid form of knowledge production.

At the same time, this work also marks the beginning of a contemplative period, which returns me to my primary questions. Beginning with my apprenticeship to Samantha, this chapter draws the strands of my previous projects together to begin to forge conclusions about the efficacies of artistic practice in ethnomusicology research. In doing so, this final case study with girls’ carnival morris dancing delivers me back to my earliest goals for the project – to experiment with an “artistic turn” for ethnomusicology and to respond to Harker’s manifesto for a more reflexive folk scholarship. It asks how successfully I have achieved these ends, and by how much my goals have shifted and transformed.

This possibility of return looms large in my final case study, offering an opportunity for re-orientation. It reflects upon time spent away from the ethnomusicology discipline, and what has resulted from this time of emerging and becoming without a predetermined end in mind. During the research period, I had consciously set foot into a number of disparate territories, drawing from a range of different practices and approaches, and I had conceptualized this voyage as one of purposeful lostness from the conventional spaces of ethnomusicology. Being lost, I decided early on, can be profoundly informing.

Lostness expands our frames of reference and forces us to confront new things. To use an anthropological metaphor, Malinowski instructed the ethnographer, “imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village while the launch or the dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight” (Malinowski, 1922: 4). The situation is anxious

but exhilarating. When lost, our senses register more acutely and our sense of identity, audited to its fundamental qualities, shifts and morphs to show new forms, ones that might usually be hidden or remote from us when we remain anchored to the familiar bearings we make use of every day. We experience a sense of liberation.

But there is a paradox of lostness: it only has meaning when contrasted with knowing where you are, or where you (feel you) should be. In leaving the well-trodden path into new disciplinary spaces, I have held onto ethnomusicology like a talisman. Like Deleuze and Guattari's little girl lost, singing songs to steady and comfort her "in the heart of chaos"<sup>110</sup> (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 133), I have hummed improvised songs of ethnomusicological emigration and – however far I have strayed – I have permitted myself to long to go home.

In his writing on the "geographies of love" (2009), John Wylie reflects on the presence of absence as an evocative motif for human experience of the landscape. He suggests that, "[t]he gap, fracture or absence...always entails an openness, an originary exposure of the self to externality and alterity," (Wylie, 2009: 284), and longing for return becomes an inevitable condition of change and distance. Biggs uses this to explore how we might be sustained by an absent community – perhaps even a folkloric one (Biggs, 2009). He suggests that certain practices, such as the performance of some vernacular songs, have the ability to bring such a lost sense of community "into a living, breathing present" (Ibid: 7).

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<sup>110</sup> "She walks and halts to her song. Lost, she takes shelter or orients herself with her little song as best she can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm stable centre in the heart of chaos." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 133)

I too have used folk performance as a method for dealing with the everyday trauma of finding myself displaced, personally and professionally, and it has led me to new discoveries about myself and my research. The craft writer, Glenn Adamson, comments on the necessity and value of return as a means of clarifying and consolidating knowledge. Referring here to collaborative artistic research processes, he cautions:

Most artists, when they put their heads together, will learn a lot about themselves. But the real benefit of their experience will hardly ever be immediate. Probably, it will not be clear until they return to their own way of practicing, their own 'discipline'. (Adamson, 2013: 376)

This is a purpose of return, however momentary or enduring.

In this chapter, my collaged research model is put to the test in a new and previously undocumented field site, and the results are considered from the perspective of an ethnomusicologist, as well as an artist. How has my period of lostness from the ethnomusicology discipline informed my work about a specific contemporary performance? And equally importantly, how does this correspond with my goals as an artist-maker? As well as being personally defining, this is perhaps one of the ultimate tests for art as research in the academy: can it be demonstrably generative and rigorous, *on its own terms*, as well as those laid prescribed by other disciplines. This chapter considers how the products of an artistic research project by an ethnomusicologist might be understood and evaluated.

At the same time, my work with girls' carnival morris dancers provokes significant re-assessment of the current conditions of folk performance scholarship. Although the majority of my research with girls' morris was located in the sports halls and

community centres in which it is now most frequently performed, its historical association with the town carnival movement retains prominence in the popular imagination of the Northwest.<sup>111</sup> There is a sense of aptness. As Edensor notes, “the carnival remains an occasion at which normally concealed social tensions are celebrated...” (Edensor, 2002: 84). Perhaps girls’ carnival morris dancing, too, can be a transformational site, for the methodological emancipation of ethnomusicology, and the opening up of a new way of thinking about folk.

### Work undertaken and research questions

This chapter describes an original piece of research undertaken with members of the girls’ carnival morris dancing community, over more than eighteen months during 2012 – 2013. Although it is presented as a single case study, it is better understood as the bringing together of various strands of open-ended exploration, a wholeheartedly non-linear project which combines three “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980)<sup>112</sup>. These are:

1. interviews with former members of a village morris dance troupe, Lower Withington Morris Dancers, undertaken in early 2012. The troupe was selected because they were amongst the last known performers of mixed-gender morris dancing at Northwest carnivals in the 1950s.

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<sup>111</sup> This association is common both to older members of the carnival morris dancing community who served their own apprentices performing and competing at town carnivals, and in the collective memories of many people in the Northwest who remember seeing it performed at carnivals, particularly between the 1950s and 1980s. The connection is also maintained through the organization of girls’ carnival morris dancing into leagues run by carnival committees such as ETACCO (English Town and Country Carnival Organisation) and MANECCO (Manchester and North East Cheshire Carnival Organisation) although it is perhaps important to note that newer organisations such as LMDA (Liverpool Morris Dancing Association) to which Irlam Royalettes belong have chosen to drop the word “carnival” from their name.

<sup>112</sup> Borrowing terminology from Deleuze and Guattari’s model of multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation (1980).

2. a garment making apprenticeship with Samantha Hamer, which resulted in two completed dresses, designed with reference to my research in Lower Withington.
  
3. a performance involving the dresses by members of the Irlam Royalties Morris Dancers from Salford at the Lower Withington Rose Day in 2013 – the first time morris dancing had appeared in the village since the 1960s.

The research also generated the beginnings of a written ethnography of girls' carnival morris.<sup>113</sup>

The chapter deals with the following research questions:

- How can diverse practices (e.g. interview, participation, dressmaking and performance) be combined and integrated in a research project about girls' carnival morris dancing? How does this compare more established methodological approaches?
  
- What can be learned through making as an entrance to the study of girls' carnival morris dancing? How does an apprenticeship to a carnival morris dancing dressmaker shape and direct my research with the community? How does this differ to other modes of approach?
  
- What can be learned through choreographing a performance with girls'

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<sup>113</sup> With Orcadia Morris Dancers and Irlam Royalties Morris Dancers – excerpted in the Appendix.

carnival morris dancers and what does relational art practice offer to an ethnomusicological study?





The concluding case study in my project about folk performance in the Northwest of England draws on a period of research undertaken with members of the girls' carnival morris dancing community. Conducted over more than eighteen months during 2012 and 2013 - and continuing - it brings together three lines of flight, representing three gradually converging phases of my work. These "rhizomatic" flights (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) include formal interviews and informal conversations, garment making and design practices, choreography and participant observation. They culminate in a multi-platform artistic research project which attempts to hold these strands in tension. The outcomes include this chapter, a collaborative performance with carnival morris dancers and the beginnings of a written ethnography. Located in a novel field-site, overlooked in most scholarship about folk performance, this chapter also acts as a test-site through which to consider the efficacies of artistic research as the catalyst for ethnomusicological study.

My case study draws on research with a number of named participants. Perhaps the key relationship is between myself and Samantha Hamer ("Sam"), to whom I was informally apprenticed as a dress-maker between 2012 and 2013. In addition to making troupe dresses, Samantha is a life-long dancer and lead choreographer and trainer for Orcadia Morris Dancers in Skelmersdale, West Lancashire:

*When I met [my ex-partner] I said 'look, you know that morris will always come first' and he said, 'ok.' He thought it was my Granddad, but anyway! He understands that morris has always come first. (Interview between Lucy Wright and Samantha Hamer, August 2013)<sup>115</sup>*

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<sup>115</sup> Quotations drawn from this transcribed interview are attributed as, 'Samantha' from hereonin. Remembered speech is appropriately signaled.

The apprenticeship was conceived as one of mutual benefit. I would learn more about the methods of dressmaking and in return I would assist Samantha with her heavy workload, contributing my basic seamstressing skills to the completion of the following season's troupe dresses.<sup>116</sup> Working alongside Samantha offered me the haptic experience of making for carnival morris performance, as well as privileged access to its varied public and domestic spaces.<sup>117</sup>

Figure 6.1.



Orcadia Juniors' morris dancing practice (2013)

During (and after) my apprenticeship, I was able to observe and participate at Orcadia Morris Dancers practices and at weekly competitions across the region, eventually culminating in attendance at their End of Season Championships at [REDACTED], in October 2013. In addition, I was gradually included in small aspects of the social life of the troupe, visiting members at their homes and

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<sup>116</sup> In reality, the skill-exchange was largely one-sided, Samantha ensuring that in addition to carrying out relatively simple tasks appropriate to my beginner level abilities, I was also able to pursue my own assisted making projects in the studio. I am very grateful for her unfailing patience and encouragement.

<sup>117</sup> "Public" space is a relative quantity with girls' carnival morris, since the movement of competitions indoors. In many ways, as my attempts to access the community during the *Sewing Difference* case study, were complicated by the fact that all current spaces of carnival morris dancing performance are essentially private spaces, open only to participants and insiders.

attending community events. This immersion in the girls' morris community was integral to my developing ethnography, and while this chapter can only scratch the surface of this intriguing and under-represented dance art, my aim in writing for the first time about carnival morris performance is to allow the voices and practices of my participants to speak for themselves, as far as possible.

This aim is also reflected in the performance outcomes of this research. It was my intention from the outset to work collaboratively and to facilitate members of the carnival morris community in contributing towards and even directing the ways in which they were represented in and through this project. Although this is by no means a model of uncomplicated collaborative practice,<sup>118</sup> the use of artistic research offered new and tangible ways to reach and relate to a group otherwise unfamiliar with scholarly attention.

Demonstrating something of the potential for artistic research to augment more established approaches, in addition to garment making and performance, my research also involved a number of semi-formal interviews. Although they were conducted separately from my artistic practices, they were intrinsically linked by my working relationship with Samantha, who provided multiple valuable entrances to the wider morris institution. This included extended conversations with two leading figures in the carnival morris dancing community;<sup>119</sup> Lyn Booth and Ian McKinnon.

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<sup>118</sup> See Conclusion for a more detailed evaluation of the approach.

<sup>119</sup> These interviewees represent three major strands of participation in the carnival morris dancing community; dealing with performance, training and organization. However, in this research the privileging of the voices of senior figures in the carnival movement highlights the need for further research to foreground the experiences of its predominantly young female performers.

Lyn Booth is the general secretary of Manchester and North East Cheshire Carnival Organisation (MANECCO), which has been involved in staging competitions and events across the Northwest since 1951:

*It gets in the blood, this dancing gets in the blood, you just want to do it - it becomes part of you... I've been brought up with it and it's been a good life. It's been a wonderful, wonderful life with the troupes... so much soul they have.* (Interview between Lucy Wright and Lyn Booth, January 2013)

During our interview at Lyn's home in Oldham, her husband Mike Booth occasionally contributed to the discussion. Mike is also a leading figure with MANECCO, involved in adjudication and technical issues, also running the website and social networking pages and chairing the Annual General Meetings.

Figure 6.2.



Lyn and Mike Booth at home in Oldham (2013)

Ian McKinnon is an accredited judge with the English Town and Country Morris Organisation (ETACCO), which covers the whole of the Northwest of England.<sup>120</sup> He also co-trains Silverdale Sapphires Morris Dancers from Silverdale on the Cumbrian border and runs a vast online archive about Northwest carnival performance.

*When your girls pull out all the stops and they stop moaning about headaches, PMS, schoolwork and the judges, it's bloody marvellous. Even when you're judging, as one of my colleagues always says, 'you get a tingle' like electricity and you just clutch your judging board and watch!* (Interview between Lucy Wright and Ian McKinnon, May 2013)<sup>121</sup>

Finally, the project also draws on research and practice undertaken with current members of the Irlam Royalties Morris Dancers from Irlam near Salford, and former members of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers from Lower Withington in Cheshire, via a relational event involving both groups, in July 2013.

The collaborative “conclusion” of this project is inspired by a series of chance meetings early on in my research. This is perhaps a lived example of Cerwonka and Malkki’s improvisatory interpretation of ethnographic research, which “entails constantly adjusting one’s tactics and making judgements based on particular contexts that one can never fully anticipate” (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 20). Perhaps in a similar way to Annie’s materials-led making process in Chapter 1, knowledge and experience may also be revealed in and through the ways in which we identify and respond to these transformational or serendipitous moments when they arrive.

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<sup>120</sup> Some of the smaller organizations are more regionalized, for example Liverpool Morris Dancing Association (LMDA) of which Irlam Royalties are a member troupe. Both MANECCO and ETACCO are large, well-established carnival organizations with member troupes from across the Northwest area as well as North Wales.

<sup>121</sup> Quotations from this interview transcription are attributed to ‘Ian’ from hereon in. Quotations from Ian’s personal website, <http://ccqi.ianmckinnon.plus.com> (Accessed 27. January 2014) are appropriately signaled as such.

Figure 6.3.



Team photograph of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers, 1955 (2012)

In Spring 2012, I attended some informal interviews with former members of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers, in private homes across the village of Lower Withington near Macclesfield. My friend Duncan Broomhead, who had previously participated in my *Conversation Hats* project, was researching morris dancing in Cheshire and had identified Lower Withington as significant to his study because the troupe were amongst the last mixed-gender morris sides to perform in the area, during the 1950s. I had already decided to pursue girls' carnival morris dancing in its contemporary manifestation and was interested to learn more about this transition period in the history of Northwest carnivals. The Lower Withington Morris Dancers spoke fondly of their time with the troupe as teenagers, travelling widely to carnivals and community events across Cheshire and Lancashire and competing for prizes. They had disbanded in the early 1960s when several of the original members married or found employment, and some of the female members had gone to join all-girls' troupes.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Shamefully little remains of my conversations with John Bailey, Bob Garbutt, Shirley Rogers and John Ryder. This was before I had thoroughly learned my lesson about recording *all* meetings, and I had turned up carrying just a notebook and pen which I then proceeded to mostly ignore as I

Figure 6.4



Medals belonging to Samantha Hamer, her mother and aunt (2013)

A few months later, part-way through my apprenticeship to Samantha, she suggested that I should start working on two dresses which would become my final pieces. These model dresses would provide an opportunity to develop my making skills and try out new techniques. They would also give me something tangible to put in my exhibition.<sup>123</sup> For a while I struggled to think of a suitable design. Then one morning I chanced upon a team photograph of Lower Withington Morris Dancers in 1955. Struck once again by how much the girls' carnival morris dancing I was researching had changed since this earlier prototype (in contrast to the more static representations of men's morris dancing throughout my growing personal archive) I started to imagine what Lower Withington Morris Dancers would look like today if the troupe had persisted into the twenty-first century. I dug out my notes and made a few telephone calls. I decided to design new dresses for Lower Withington.

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became caught up in the talking and the moment. I gained retrospective consent to be included in the research from the interviewees in July 2013.

<sup>123</sup> I was concerned at the time that the shift in my making towards relational practice had led much of my work to become "intangible" – predominantly performative and with little in the way of physical / material traces left behind.

Samantha was enthusiastic about the idea. Her mother and aunt had been involved in morris dancing at carnivals in the 1950s and she showed me their collection of medals and photographs. Once completed, we “returned” the dresses to Lower Withington at the village Rose Day in July 2013. There they were worn by two young members of the Irlam Royalettes, who walked in the carnival parade and exchanged stories and dance steps with the Lower Withington dancers. This represented both the first time that morris dancers had performed at Lower Withington since the old troupe had disbanded, and the first time that the Royalettes had attended a carnival since competitions had moved indoors – the first time that the two girls in question had ever witnessed one.

In these ways, although this research was not conceived from the outset as a coherent or linear project, its divergent vectors are offered resolution through engagement at the intersections of practice-led research as a relational or dialogical practice. As Cerwonka and Malkki suggest of ethnographic fieldwork, “engaging with it as a whole project of knowledge production...not content simply to provide unconnected shards of ‘data’ or ‘raw materials’” (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 57), the work thus offers support for the integration of artistic research to generate new insights inside and outside of the field, as well as a potential way to offer something in return to the participants of research.

## Girls' carnival morris dancing and material practice

Figure 6.5.



Orcadia Tinies at ETACCO End of Season Championships (2013)

### Costume

Appearance is paramount in girls' morris dancing. It is formalised in the uniform perfection of troupes on the arena; their pristine costumes of spotless white socks and matching dresses, and "informalised" in troupe-branded team-wear worn on the sidelines at competitions; T shirts, hoodies and gym-knickers in troupe colours and logos.<sup>124</sup> Team-wear is often emblazoned with motivational slogans, marrying

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<sup>124</sup> Troupe colours may vary season by season, or stay constant with a particular troupe over a period of many years. While Orcadia have worn a wide range of colours since the troupe's inception – including lilac, black, cream and turquoise - members of the Speke Balmoral morris dancing troupe from Merseyside explain their decision to uphold a specific historical colour palette: "I suppose you all know Speke Balmoral in yellow and black uniforms, with pleated skirts. In 2006 the troupe changed its colours, after fifty four years in yellow and black, we had no choice as the girls travelled all over Manchester looking for new yellow material, but could not find a nice suitable one... The first thing everyone said was Sally would be turning in her grave, but saying that she would still be smiling knowing that her troupe is still going and very strong. It shocked the Morris world as news got around after the first competition. Our dresses were made by one of our own dancers, Angela, who did a really good job making them all on her own (with a little help from Sarah). In 2009 we had decided to go back to yellow and black."

troupe togetherness with a competitive braggadocio:

*Simply the Best*

*Believe 2 Achieve*

*Less me, more us*<sup>125</sup>

Troupes communicate a common identity, divergently as loyal teammates and fierce adversaries, through subtle differences in their style of dress. While an outsider can easily come to recognize a carnival morris dancer by her short dress and matching headband, her white lace socks, white pumps, bells and shakers, hierarchical differences between members of different lines or divisions (Seniors, Juniors, Tinies and Babies) are less immediately obvious but remain meaningful markers within the performance arena. Troupes are also judged on their visual appearance, with marks awarded both for costume and conduct, as well as a detailed scoring based on observation of dancing formations, stepping and the overall spectacle of the performance.

From my first encounter, I viewed appearance as a way to conceptualise difference and the carnival morris dancing community. The way it looked marked its dissociation from other forms of morris dancing with which I was more familiar. Beginning with *Sewing Difference*, my own engagement with the dance was shaped from the outset by visual concerns. For this reason, an artistic practice around dressmaking and performance seemed a highly apposite entrance to my research. Costumes highlighted the performance's femininity and modernity – as

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(<http://spekebalmoralmorrisdancing.piczo.com/troupecolours?cr=5&linkvar=000044>, Accessed. 4. November 2013)

<sup>125</sup> Although this chapter briefly deals with the implications of carnival morris dancing and team identity, this needs to be developed further in future study.

well as its competitive underpinning, a historical element now absent from contemporary “folk movement morris”. Saturated with colour and glitteringly seductive, girls’ morris felt almost dangerous - what did it mean for my understanding of folk?

Figure 6.6.



Orcadia Morris Dancers (2012) Photograph used with permission from Champ News online. [http://www.champnews.com/picture\\_library/viewthumbs.asp?event=2&e=0&Page=1674](http://www.champnews.com/picture_library/viewthumbs.asp?event=2&e=0&Page=1674)

*- Femininity*

At first glance, carnival morris dancing appears almost exaggeratedly feminine. The short, puff-sleeved dresses and white lace socks are worn by children and adults alike, but the doll-like, embellished costumes on hangers give little indication of the hard work and grit of the dancers who wear them. Carnival morris is fiercely, extravagantly competitive:

*Oh God, yeah...it's heartbreaking... Oh God they always want to win, they all want to win. (Samantha)*

Carnival morris performers train, sometimes twice or even three times per week, to develop stamina like athletes. Dances last upwards of eight minutes, and the exertion involved is more akin to a sprint than a steady jog. The goal of the performance is to maintain perfect synchronicity between the members of the troupe, who swarm and throng like a flock of starlings, while concealing any traces of the effort it takes to produce this, the unrelenting and frenetic pounding of feet. It is common for girls to faint from exhaustion. You can see them lying on the sidelines clutching bottles of water and inhalers after their stint on the arena is completed. Younger members of the troupe stand poised to unzip the backs of the restrictive dresses, the moment the dancers leave the floor.

Jess from Irlam Royalties tells me, *I did tap and ballet and jazz for nine and a half years. I was so fit, I even had a six-pack, but I gave it up when I moved here. I started doing morris and I couldn't do it [because] I didn't have the stamina. At the comps I would always come off crying and shaking, sometimes I would actually collapse after. I could never dance a whole practice, but I'd get through it on a Sunday because there's so many people watching and you just have to*

Figure 6.7.



(remembered speech, May 2013).

Unlike most sportive pastimes, the costuming for girls' morris dancing makes few concessions for the body in motion. Should the action be uncoupled from its performance aspect, it would be fair to say that the dresses are impractical. Their close fit and heavy fabric often cause discomfort, and as such they tend to be worn for limited periods only, immediately prior to, and during the performance, and are removed shortly afterwards. Troupe trainers quickly sweep up discarded dresses and re-hang them, wrapped in plastic bin bags, to store until the next competition. This practice also guards against wear and tear which might affect the judge's scores.<sup>126</sup>

Despite this, morris dresses are usually very popular with the performers, and the more widespread availability and affordability of heavily sequined fabrics has resulted in a palpable trend for increasingly highly decorated designs.<sup>127</sup> However, Ian attributes external perceptions of the morris dress as a contributing factor to what he perceives as the performance's reduced popularity in recent years:

*Girls [are] maturing and getting more sophisticated younger and not wanting to 'put on a silly dress, wear white socks, hold plastic shakers and prance about on a Sunday.' That's what one of our dads told his daughter. She was*

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<sup>126</sup> Greenhill's account of Cotswold morris dancing and "whiteness" in Canada, may not have rung true as an example of "academic racism" in my experience of the performance in this country, but it may have more resonance as a description of girls' carnival morris. "Symbolically clean and pure, the quintessential dancers wear white clothing [or white socks and pumps]...that must never be soiled. If dancing results in dirt it must be removed behind the scenes..." (Greenhill, 2002: 231) At my first carnival morris competition at Tyldesley, near Wigan, written notices were passed amongst the competitors: "*Can we please ask everyone to refrain from whitening pumps in the sports hall and please do not smoke in the doorways...Many thanks.*" It seems doubtful to me that there is a direct correlation here, but I have as yet encountered very few carnival morris dancers of non-white backgrounds. Could it be, as Greenhill continues, "the centrality of the trope of whiteness" might deter people of colour from participating? (Ibid.)

<sup>127</sup> Samantha's daughter Michaela tells me, "*we tried to get my little sister into morris dancing, and she did it for a while but she had on one of our old dresses and then she saw Arriva Premiere and all their sparkle and she was like, 'I want that!'*"

*fourteen!* (lan)

- *Modernity*

In contrast to most men's morris dancing sides, such as Lymm Morris<sup>128</sup>, girls' carnival morris dancing costumes suggest a significantly more contemporary origin in their visual display. This is communicated via both the style and shape of the dresses and the choice of fabrics, colours and embellishments.

In recent years, carnival morris costumes across the diversity of organisations have followed a very similar model. However, photographs and personal testimonies indicate that this manifestation is just the most recent stage in an evolution of dress styles, through which a timeline of fashions and available materials can be traced. Lesley Edwards and Janet Chart suggest that historically, "the female [morris] costumes correspond closely to the era in which they danced" (Edwards and Chart, 1981: 8). Mike and Lyn discuss the comparative simplicity, and durability, of costumes in the past, in contrast with the more complex, embellished dresses favoured today:

[Mike]     *You mention crimpolene to some of the trainers now and oh dear...*  
[Lyn]       *They laugh... [but] it was serviceable, more serviceable than all those sequins!*

Similarly, Samantha reflects on her own time as a performer:

*I've got a picture on my Facebook from the Isle of Man when we won in '86 and there's loads of comments and... the comment I've put on was 'those were the days when you didn't need sequins to sparkle; because... you know what I mean, you didn't... The sparkle was your dancing, but now it's all let's sparkle as much as we can. (Samantha)*

The shift from a predominantly utilitarian priority towards a more aesthetic orientation is perhaps correspondent with (relatively) increased cash flow into the

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<sup>128</sup> Cited here as representative of the wider folk movement-based morris dancing community.

carnival morris dancing community coupled with a reduction in the cost of materials.<sup>129</sup>

The greater emphasis on durability of costumes is reflected in my conversations with Lower Withington Morris Dancers. Shirley explained that their costumes were modelled on Goostrey Morris, another mixed dancing troupe who had begun performing a few years previously.<sup>130</sup> Comprising a white shirt and a white skirt or trousers, with a red band or strapping, finished by Shirley's mother, the kit, once established *didn't change at all*. (Shirley). Although this is not unusual for morris troupes at this time, it is perhaps telling that the members recall:

*As Lower Withington were finishing, other sides were changing and becoming more cheerleader type, more carnival. They started to dance to modern pop whereas we danced to traditional tunes. Lower Withington was in the transitional period in Northwest dancing.* (John Ryder)

*We were a bit of a novelty... We liked to be different. We didn't want to change.* (Shirley)

The decision to eschew further evolution of their performance may have been a contributing factor to the eventual dissolution of the group, although John Ryder broadly stands by their decision:

*If I had a criticism of 'fluffy'<sup>131</sup> morris, it's that there's not a lot of dance in it.*

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<sup>129</sup> Lyn continues: "you could do anything you wanted in crimpolene and it would never ever wear out ever...it'd all be decorated in...little daisies, just a line on a strip, yards and yards and yards and you'd have to sew them all the way around and round your collars...and now, well you've seen the trimmings they have now - goodness me it's just sequins and glitter - and they are lovely, really, really lovely...so there's a lot of expense, they do go to town, they really go to town - it can cost up to £5000 - but the costumes I'd say, are definitely progression." (Lyn)

<sup>130</sup> "Although superficially, some of the Cheshire teams had similar costumes, very rarely were two teams identical...some teams did not own their own costumes but they were loaned to the dancers by their village or town each year. The same costumes might endure for a decade or more." (Edwards and Chart, 1981: 8)

<sup>131</sup> Carnival morris is also sometimes known by the colloquial term, "fluffy" and for sometime I used this name unthinkingly, but an email dialogue with Georgina Boyes led me to reassess this

*It's more like formation movement rather than dancing. It's gone to the Madonna age. It's moved with the times and fashion. (John Ryder)*

However, similarities can be observed between Lower Withington Morris Dancers and the girls' carnival morris troupes encountered during this research. Specifically in terms of material practices, both past and present performance involved a material practice around costume-making:

John Ryder recalls, *our shirts were made specially - they needed to have great big sleeves so they weren't made too short when raising your arms above your head,* and Shirley concurs, *they were a lovely, heavy pleated material, handmade... The shirt sleeves and dress sleeves were very long and billowy... it didn't show the skin.*

As such, girls' carnival morris dancing might be seen to address, like other forms of folk and cultural performance generally, both continuity and change. Its modern appearance, in itself, is a form of carnival "tradition."

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situation, "[I] am less sure about your decision to refer to the dance performed by teams of girls and young women as 'Fluffy' - don't you think it's rather belittling?" I later found out that coinage of the term is generally attributed to men's morris sides – "a quasi-affectionate dig" as Ian McKinnon called it – and although many contemporary girls' morris troupes use it, I have selected to use the more formal descriptive title.

Figure 6.8.



Samantha wearing her old troupe waistcoat (2012)

### - Competition

We have already noted the fundamental competitive element to carnival morris performance.<sup>132</sup> Samantha reflected on her own sense of loss, when she was no longer able to dance competitively:

*I don't want to do it if I'm no good at it any more - it's only worth doing if you can do it good... The other week, one of the Juniors said, 'Sam, Sam...why don't you dance? I'm like 'I've done 45 years of it, I think I've had enough!' (Samantha)*

While the English folk movement has historically foregrounded preservation,

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<sup>132</sup> One exception is the John Gasson solo jig competition at Sidmouth Folk Festival.

authenticity and tradition, girls' carnival morris upholds its static elements in organization rules, which vary from organization to organization. Long lists of regulations cover troupe requirements for competitions, while dress rules stipulate the way the narrow parameter within which dancers must present on the arena.<sup>133</sup>

In his dissertation on carnival morris adjudication, Ian writes:

Judges should keep a reasonable critical check throughout the dance, of course - socks and zips come down, head-bands come adrift etc. - but while girls are neatly packaged in lines, it is a lot easier to get a general impression of costume.<sup>134</sup>

However, he appeals for moderation:

Counting hair grips in bows, noting slight colour-variations in hair ties/bobbles, or counting the numbers of stitches in dresses is both time-wasting and meaningless; in the process one might be missing arm or foot mistakes - surely far more serious faults! ... Very often, an adjudicator's over-enthusiastic appraisal of costume hides an inability to discover other problems with a troupe's display, the more so when a stylish, well-performed display is deliberately penalised (sabotaged) for what might be a quite trivial costume defect. (Ibid.)

Organisation rules dictate appearance at competitions, but its importance extends to the non-performance spaces too. When I first began my research with girls' carnival morris, I was acutely aware of my bare face and my old scuffed trainers as I sat on the sidelines at the community centre, and I often felt under- (or inadequately-) dressed when invited to people's homes or to social events.

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<sup>133</sup> For example MANECCO instruct that costume must be uniform throughout the team, with appropriate matching footwear and bells ("the same number of bells on each foot") and shakers. The Leader and the mascot dresses must be identical and "one point each adjudicator will be deducted from costume for any dropped article or item of clothing including bells or badly misplaced headdress an adjudicator may pass the lost item back but a further 2 points will be deducted if a troupe member picks up or replaces the lost item themselves." Dress lengths are dictated, "If a girl cannot raise both arms above her head and still remain decent, then her dress is too short and this should be remarked upon and points deducted."

<sup>134</sup> <http://ccgi.ianmckinnon.plus.com/fluffyX2.html#Costumetitle> (Accessed. 4. November 2013)

Although not everyone was so image-conscious, I came to agonise over my fieldwork clothes. In spaces where a visual sense of team identity is highly prized, I knew that if I wanted to move around freely and unobtrusively in the morris dancing world, I needed to learn quickly about the tacit aesthetics of belonging. The first time that someone complimented me on my outfit, I felt that I had reached an important landmark of acceptance within the group: *I was going to get that dress last night from Topshop but they didn't have it in my size.* And at [REDACTED], on the night before World Championships, I was included in the beauty preparations for the following day, my pale hands enlivened with turquoise nail lacquer, matching those of my adopted teammates. As we have spent more time together, I have become aware of differences in personal styles, the individuality that now seems so obvious, even within a performance space that promotes visual conformity.

## Making

Figure 6.9



Samantha in her studio (2013)

Samantha's making process begins with pencil sketches of her design. First she draws the dress as a whole, considering colour and embellishment. Then she expands the appliqué designs to their required size, tracing them with paper held up against the bedroom window. Finally, she cuts them out.

The studio walls are covered with papers and scraps of cloth. There are half-begun projects, photographs torn from magazines and motifs printed from the computer. There are also newspaper cuttings and end-of-season portraits showcasing her designs in action. Her earliest dresses borrowed from Irish dancing costumes, but now high street fashion motifs and tattoos are equally common inspirations.

She hands me a sheet of A3 paper and tells me to finalise my pattern.

*I've always been able to draw. I've always found it easy. I can copy anything. It's strange, I couldn't draw you as you're sitting here now, but if I had a drawing to copy I could scale it up to any size. (remembered speech)*

I have developed two appliqué designs for my final pieces. Samantha's dresses typically have a panel of appliqué embellishment on the front of the bodice and corresponding panels on the voluminous sleeves. These are cut from a coordinating fabric, usually sequined, to stand out against the satin backed dupion and to catch the arena lights. Observing at competitions over nearly two years, I have seen troupe dresses becoming increasingly detailed, with laser cut-outs and holographic prints, but Samantha has come to prefer a simple design.

*It's different if you only have to make one dress,* she says of my small project, then recounts how her first experience as a dressmaker involved the urgent completion

of more than thirty costumes of the same ambitious design<sup>135</sup>. *They were absolutely beautiful... but I was crying at the end of it, I was absolutely crying my eyes out* (Samantha).

My dresses are red with white accents for the leader and white with red accents for the line dancer, and my appliqué panels are in a range of silver and pale pink toned sequins. The first design depicts a stylized Jodrell Bank telescope, because the Jodrell Bank Centre for Astrophysics is situated mostly within the Lower Withington Parish and several of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers went on to have a career there. There are constellations of stars on the sleeves and skirt and a crescent moon. The second dress was inspired by my conversation with John Ryder, who led the Lower Withington Morris Dancers from 1953 - 1957. I interviewed him at his home at the Smithy where he has lived all his life, recalling tales from his childhood when his grandfather was the village blacksmith. The bodice designs are an anvil and horseshoes. On the sleeves I have adapted the Cheshire Council logo with its sheaves of corn, while on the skirt I have cut out cogs of varying sizes to represent the industrial works which still go on in Cheshire. John had been quick to stress Cheshire's continued role in the manufacture of chemicals and salt, for example.

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<sup>135</sup> Carnival morris dancing dresses not only have to be uniform within a performance line, but they also have to be scaled up and down proportionally. Marks are lost for dresses which do not follow length order.

Figure 6.10.



Lower Withington dress in progress (2013)

At this stage, my skills as a dressmaker remained limited. Samantha had set me informal exercises at different stages of my apprenticeship – unpicking an old dress as a way to literally deconstruct its meaning – and practising appliqué using an old industrial sewing machine - however, I was most useful to her doing basic hemming and ironing jobs. For this reason, the two dresses completed for this project are rightfully attributed to both myself and Samantha, and I received substantial help in realizing my creative visions for the pieces.

### **Girls' carnival morris dancing and place-making**

How do the material practices associated with girls' carnival morris dancing relate to issues around place and community?

#### Performing places

The performance spaces of carnival morris dancing have changed significantly in recent decades. Previously an integral part of the outdoor town carnivals from which the performance derives its name, girls' carnival morris has now almost completely transferred its practice to indoor events at sports halls and community centres, away from the public eye.

Several theories have been posited by members of the community to explain the withdrawal of girls' morris dancing from the public carnival circuit. Some suggested that health and safety doctrines prohibited competitions from taking place on the grass, while others felt that the performance simply became too popular and carnivals no longer wanted to take on the organizational feat of negotiating so many dancers. Lyn cited bad weather and a lack of interest by performers in participating in lengthy outdoor parades:

*The new generation now... they don't want to dance outdoors now. And they don't want to do the long street parades now. They want to just go and dance in competition with each other without the hard work of the road parades... I mean when I was a little girl you could rely on summer being summer but it doesn't happen now, so the outdoor carnivals can be very, very cold and can be very, very wet and it's kind of like forced the dancing world, as I know it, indoors. (Lyn)*

This situation is lamented by a number of the older generation who remember the carnivals fondly:

*The town carnivals are wonderful for bringing the communities to life. There's certainly still some but they are now becoming less and less because with...this very fast paced life that I talk about, people are...they don't have the time or the interest to work for small local communities. (Lyn)*

Samantha agrees, highlighting the fundamental change in experience and motivation as carnival morris changed from a public performance into a

private competition:

*Our little ones and even our juniors... in fact most of our seniors have never been to carnivals. (Samantha)*

How has this shift affected the performance? Samantha suggests that formations in the dance have become smaller, *going back* [to previous choreographies] *we are filling the whole field.*

Lyn agrees that spacing has become smaller but views this as part of an increased preoccupation with competition:

*It weren't really because of going inside, it was a case of what's on them cards, if you were being booked and losing pints for spacing, spacing, spacing and lines...it's so much easier to all close knit. (Lyn)*

In addition, town carnivals have also changed. Modern carnivals are now characterised less by community performance groups (although many continue to include this) and more by imported fairground rides, attractions and stalls.<sup>136</sup>

### Self-organisation

In common with many of the contemporary folk performances approached in this project, girls' carnival morris dancing represents a strongly self-organised and self-determined community practice. In addition to conducting the majority of its material culture within the carnival community, girls' carnival morris dancing also

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<sup>136</sup> A question unaddressed in this research is the relationship between the carnival morris dancing aesthetic and today's funfair aesthetic? Both look a little faded now. I wonder if people get so excited about a funfair and a procession now, especially since you can go to theme parks all year round now. If so, does this mean we have outgrown home-spun community events, perhaps even outgrown place-based "community" itself? So much of our culture is slick and easily consumable, and small-scale community events struggle to compete with the superabundance all around us.

prioritises accessibility and inclusivity for all committed performers. I asked Samantha if girls' carnival morris dancers regularly travelled outside of their geographical place location in order to participate in a troupe<sup>137</sup>:

*Generally no... It never used to happen because nobody had any transport years ago...but more or less because it's a child's thing it's not really like that.*  
(Samantha)

Instead, girls' carnival morris dancing is more commonly associated with a more rooted, place-based identity. *It's just what you do if you come from Wigan*, one girl told me at one of the weekly ETACCO competitions. Carnival morris dancing is also highly popular, but geographically limited. Out of 764 troupes listed on Ian McKinnon's current troupe database, eight are based in Staffordshire, six from Shropshire, and two others in Derbyshire and Warwickshire respectively. The rest, almost 750, are located in Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales.

With a majority of troupes being based in economically deprived areas, trainers and organizers strive to keep costs to a minimum, often engaging in small-scale community fundraising projects in order to support the continuation of the troupes. Raffles, tombolas and other money-making stalls are a regular feature of weekly competitions, and occasional activities, such as bag packing at supermarkets, or performing at care homes and hospitals help to bring in extra revenue to support the troupes.

*It takes care of all the under-privileged children, because it's very cheap really.* (Lyn)

*It still is a cheap hobby compared to everything else like horse riding and ballet dancing...you can get away with paying very little to do morris dancing.*  
(Samantha)

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<sup>137</sup> Travelling to participate in morris dancing is a fairly common experience for performances more associated with the folk movement for the simple reason that sides today are few and far between

However, Ian suggests that the current nationwide economic downturn may have impacted on current numbers at carnival events:

*Given the current pressure on family disposable incomes, kids - especially girls - are often coerced by parents into leaving the troupe to get a Saturday or Sunday job in 'Maccies' or KFC or wherever, and actually pay for their own makeup and clothes. (Ian)*

Girls' carnival morris dancing very rarely receives support from institutionalized funding bodies. Lyn suggests that the self-reliance of morris troupes is born from necessity, due to the lack of status received by the performance:

*some of the big marching bands - they've had government backing, even - but we can't get it for the morris teams... Its' not yet a recognised art and I suppose if it's not yet it never will be, you know... It's not all dished out fair. I think they could throw a bit their [carnival morris dancing's] way when they're doing such a wonderful job for each community... They're doing a service. (Lyn)*

Perhaps for this reason, the overwhelming majority of material practices associated with girls' morris have been undertaken "at home," conducted and perpetuated by those within the community. However, there are some signs that the performance is beginning to reach outwards into local and national arenas. In recent years, the growth in popularity of team-wear has led to many troupes eschewing former hand-making practices in favour of the more convenient exporting of such productions to external businesses and suppliers.<sup>138</sup> Most

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<sup>138</sup> A similar process can be observed with the troupes' pom-poms or "shakers." Evolving over the decades from home-made constructions of crepe paper and later plastic carrier bags, to "professional" cheerleader's poms purchased online, Samantha claims that Orcadia were the first to transition to shop-bought shakers: "My grandad used to make them... It was like broom handles...you'd just get your crepe paper and fold it up and cut it into sections, wrap it round and nailed on - they weighed a ton... The first people to have different kind of shakers was a troupe from Maghull... They went to the Isle of Man and they had these plastic bin bag shakers... It just went from there everyone started trying to get coloured bags and plastic ones. And then it was me who got the ones from America... went metallic, I was the first person to get them. I'd seen them on a film to do with cheerleading that was on Channel 4... so I googled it. We got the gold ones first

commonly commissioned at local T-shirt printing services (unconnected to the troupes), this may mark the beginning of a partial shift from hand-making to consumer-sourcing, from a self-organised community to one which chooses also to draw upon the expertise of outside.

### Gendered place

Girls' carnival morris dancing is a strongly gendered performance: it is a community almost completely organised by women. This is unusual in the history of folk. As Boyes writes of performances associated with the English folk movement, "[t]he role of women is almost entirely unrepresented – as individuals and as a constituent part of the Revival, women are at best marginalized, at worst trivialized or ignored" (Boyes, 1993: xii). By contrast, carnival morris dancing represents a space in which it is the role of men that might be more readily overlooked. Shirley remembers of performing with Lower Withington Morris Dancers in the 1950s:

*The lads used to take some stick walking around at carnivals wearing the strapping and doing a 'girl's dance,'" and, "Bob Carbutt's sister dressed as a boy to make up a number when we were a boy short! (Shirley)*

In almost two years of fieldwork in the carnival morris dancing community I encountered only a handful of men. Overwhelmingly, these male protagonists played supporting roles while partnered to prominent women in the community. Even Ian, who has become a key figure in his own right, decided to become a judge in the 1970s after attending competitions with his wife who danced. They

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*and everybody was saying 'where've you got them from?' and I was saying 'somebody's grandad made them for us'. I just told them all that, so we had them about two seasons before everybody cottoned on to it..." (Samantha)* This may be revealing about the future trajectory of hand-making in girls' carnival morris dancing. As it becomes cheaper and easier to source different elements of the costume online, girls' carnival morris may go on to produce less of its material culture "in house."

later went on to co-run the Silverdale Sapphires troupe together. Lyn met her husband Mike when he drove the bus for the Buckley Belles Morris Dancers of which she was a member, and he is now a leading figure at MANECCO events.

At practices and competitions, girls' carnival morris dancing is an almost exclusively female space. Ian describes, *the initial shock of so many girls on one bus*, while one of the Orcadia dancers recounted the reaction of her husband, *he'd be like, 'it's another world! And there's so many people!' There'd be all these girls walking around in just their bras, and getting changed, and he'd be hiding behind his newspaper, going, 'I don't feel comfortable!'* (remembered speech, ██████ - October 2013).

It is perhaps unsurprising then that there are very few male dancers:

*we do have one or two young boys, very few and far between but we do have one or two...I think in all my time I couldn't have seen more than, maybe thirty boys dancing.* (Lyn)

However, there are a number of male troupe trainers. Ian suggests that men involved in carnival morris dancing tend to take on a role involving "drill" and troupe discipline:

*I don't think there's much difference between female-male training styles except that blokes seem to be more accuracy-oriented - lines, spacing, foot-position etcetera - whilst women tend to focus on the creative side - designing dances, dresses, arm-works... My missus could do dances straight out of her head and get the girls to do them at practice. I had to plan them out on the coffee table with counters or two pence pieces and then write them down so I could show the girls at practice.* (Ian)

As former dancers, Samantha and Lyn stressed the importance of embodied knowledge in teaching carnival morris - the tacit understanding of the performance

developed over many years of personal training and involvement with a troupe. For both Lyn and Samantha, it was this experience which motivated the movement from “line girl” to troupe trainer and organizer.

*When I personally got too old to want to - or to be able to dance this energetic dance... anymore, I didn't want to leave the carnival world, so I stayed in it on the organisation side (Lyn)*

Lyn also highlights the role of carnival morris dancing as representing, for some, an emancipatory space for female participation outside of a domestic setting:

*It is a family thing because the mums use it to get away from the housework and the washing up and the monotony of the school day, I suppose, and they bring their daughters. (Lyn)*

This might be beneficially viewed from the perspective of contemporary dance scholarship, which identifies the role of performance in potentially challenging social and cultural norms:

[Dancing] has the potential to disrupt or transgress the dominant social order...this leads to a discussion of the often unquestioned linking of dance with liberation or resistance and by extension, the feminine, in certain dance studies approaches and contemporary cultural criticism. (Thomas, 2003: 5)

Lyn goes on to stress the importance of male support:

*I think a difficult area...if you get to be a young woman and you're still very much interested and you don't have the backing of your husband and that...then it can become a problem. (Lyn)*

As such, MANECCO aim to involve the whole family as much as possible:

*It's great because their husbands will come to the big events like [REDACTED] 'End of Season' and so forth and he's probably glad to get 'em - the wife and kids - out of his hair for the weekend. You know, 'get on with 'yis, here's ten*

*pound, go off to carnival, have a good time, let me watch footie get me feet up here and a couple of cans,' you know... Then it's your excuse to carry on doing something for yourself, rather than just be a stay-at-home mum I suppose and a lot of them use it like that. You know, I've heard them many, many times say, 'well what would I be doing if I weren't... in a dancing troupe? (Lyn)*

Girls' carnival morris dancing emphasizes teamwork and discipline. Lyn says:

*It is a great hobby that does teach them discipline, that does teach them how to interact with other children, to be part of a group, teaches them sportsmanship, not everybody's got that yet like [laughs] but should do, that's what we aim for. (Lyn)*

However, Theresa Buckland provides a historical reading of carnival morris based on systems of movement and control in physical education programmes at school. Highlighting differences in the forms of exercise considered appropriate for children of different educational backgrounds during the late Victorian period, she equates the teaching of morris dancing to working class children, and particularly girls, with a broader ideology of bodily behaviour coding: the emphasis of girls' morris on discipline and repetitiveness, she suggests, preparing them to be "obedient and useful within a hierarchical capitalist structure" (Buckland, 1991: 63).

Whether or not such a correlation can be proven<sup>139</sup>, highly disciplined formation performance is frequently posited in contrast to more individualistic participation and ethos. Tim Edensor analyses the "conformity" of mass dances at "an increasingly controlled carnival, which is organized as a spectacle for visual consumption as opposed to an occasion for physical experimentation and immersion" (Edensor, 2002: 84). However, girls' carnival morris dancing suggests, to me, that this reading may be too simple. While carnival morris dancing

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<sup>139</sup> Limited space and reduced access to facilities, such as a school field or sporting equipment, may also be contributing factors in the popularity of drill exercise programmes.

represents a highly disciplined and formalised performance, it is also fundamentally a self-organisational community which provides manifold opportunities for individual responsibility as well as team-making. A presumed dichotomy between individuality and unified team behaviour thus appears unhelpful.

### Community

Contrary to the perception of discipline fostering the suppression of individuality, Lyn's description of the carnival morris community emphasises the fostering of the individual within the integrality of the team. She describes how friendships are formed which extend beyond the spaces of morris dancing participation:

*You make a lot of friends...and you see the girls go out together and that."*  
(Lyn)

Perhaps in common with other forms of folk performance, she also believes that carnival morris is a very inclusive practice:

*I know a lot of youngsters who have been extremely shy or [have] mild disabilities... it's really brought them out... I think it's a good thing, I believe in it.* (Lyn)

The carnival movement has also historically enshrined responsibilities to the wider place-based community. Despite no longer performing at public carnivals, many carnival troupes continue to perform locally at private functions and charity events:

*Come Christmas time they'll do little shows, they'll go into the Oldham hospitals and they'll put little acts together, nothing much, a few steps... They take the Babies usually because if they're going into the... elderly homes...they love seeing the little ones.* (Lyn)

In this way, girls' carnival morris dancing remains an embedded part of the lived community. This role is reminiscent of the experiences of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers. *It was the social life of the village in some ways*, said Shirley, *There was one car on the street. If you didn't have a bike you couldn't get anywhere... [It was] a way of getting out to all these places.* John Ryder said, *there wasn't a youth club. It was the main thing to do as a kid in Lower Withington... I grew up with everyone in the troupe.*

The dancers also emphasized the socially cohesive role of the troupe within the village. *We were part of the wider community*, said John Ryder, *when we left on the coach on a Saturday everyone knew you were going and people were waiting for you when you got back to see how you did.* Costume, in particular, represented an intersection between the troupe and the community:

*The kit was washed by one of the ladies. You didn't wash your own. Shirts were washed every week, but dresses and trousers weren't washed. There was quite a big 'behind-the-scenes' - lots of people helped.* (John Ryder)

However, John views this position in contrast to his perception of village life now:

*People have moved into the area, housing has been extended. I don't know who lives here anymore.* (John Ryder)

This is an interesting point which requires further attention. As a settlement, Lower Withington has become more gentrified in recent decades, with an increasingly fluid and prosperous community. However, in places where girls' carnival morris dancing retains its popularity, communities are generally more place-based, and of lower economic status. Survival in one place and death in another is driven by a range of geographical, economic and cultural factors: younger people have left

Lower Withington for work, but perhaps in Irlam and Skelmersdale, for example, they are more likely to stay.

### My collaborative performance

*I don't like the anvil, but I like the horseshoes, says [REDACTED], you should design us some dresses for next season!* (remembered speech)

The opportunity to collaborate on a performance with Irlam Royallettes happened as a direct consequence of my developing role within the wider carnival morris dancing community. While access to girls' carnival morris dancing had initially proved difficult, the contacts and familiarity provided by my apprenticeship to Samantha made an introduction to my local troupe in Salford much less fraught. For a number of weeks before advancing my performance idea, I attended Irlam Royallettes practices, participating in the stamina building exercises and dancing the "pas-de-bas" step on the back line. I showed the girls the dresses made during the *Sewing Difference* project and observed the development of troupe choreographies.

Working with Irlam represented an important point of comparison for my developing ethnography. Based in different centres of morris dance performance, Orcadia are understood to be a "Liverpool troupe", while Irlam Royallettes are a "Manchester troupe." Although girls' morris dancing takes place across the Northwest, there appears to be a degree of insularity between different organizations and even different regions. *Morris dancing only happens in Liverpool*, one girl tells me earnestly at an Orcadia practice.

Irlam Royallettes also differ from Orcadia in terms of status held by the troupes in the wider carnival morris dancing community. Due to the long history of girls' carnival morris dancing as an aspect of the town carnival movement, and more recently, its growing popularity outside of it - there are a number of covertly recognized divisions or leagues amongst the troupes. Skill levels vary between high status – usually quite long-established - troupes and newer developing ones. Lyn describes Orcadia as one of the *big teams*, competing at the highest level for more than thirty years across a number of carnival organizations.

*When you get them all there it's really frightening to judge them because they're so good you know and you're praying for them not to go wrong, but there's a little bit of you praying for them, if you're judging them, for something to happen so that you can find a winner. (Lyn)*

By contrast, Irlam Royallettes are a new troupe, established around seven years ago, currently competing as members of the smaller Liverpool Morris Dancing Association (LMDA).<sup>140</sup> The troupe is run by a husband and wife team, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who live in Salford. [REDACTED] is a former dancer with the renowned Salfordettes, who decided to form the troupe to provide opportunities for local youngsters, at a time when her daughter [REDACTED] wanted to learn to dance.

Irlam Royallettes practice at the Steel Club on Liverpool Road. Originally formed in the 1920s for the steelworkers of Irlam and their families, it remains a central hub for social and leisure groups in the area. You have to be a member to drink in the Members Bar, but anyone can take part in the community events and activities which take place on their premises; Weight Watchers, Zumba, Macmillan coffee mornings, indoor and outdoor sports leagues.

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<sup>140</sup> My research has not yet revealed the why LMDA is the preferred affiliation for a “Manchester troupe,” but the participation of Irlam Royallettes in a Liverpool-based organisation suggests that these categories are relatively fluid.



gym: something to entertain and distract from the exertion, a basic rhythm to move your feet to, only really noticeable if it is played too fast, or too often.

*Are we getting new dresses?* someone asks as I bring in the two Lower Withington designs to show to [REDACTED]. The girls coo over them, twirling them around, and examining the details. *I like this material! I like the sequins!* We discuss details of the performance at the Lower Withington Rose Day and [REDACTED] volunteers two of her dancers, [REDACTED]ged twelve and ten. They hurry into the bathrooms to try on the dresses over their school uniforms.

A week later and I'm back at the Steel Club to pick up [REDACTED]. The Rose Day procession starts at 2pm but the organizer, [REDACTED], tells me to arrive at 1 to receive our position in the parade. When I speak to her on the phone I am surprised by her New Zealand accent. She is married to a village man, organising the event since her daughter was named Rose Queen but was told there wouldn't be an event because nobody was available to run it. Getting a street parade put on is difficult because the police can no longer close the roads free of charge, she tells me. It now costs several thousands of pounds to employ them to do it - which a small village fete just can't manage - or you have to get your own private police force in and notices of road closure have to go up at least two weeks in advance. In Lower Withington an informal solution has been found - stewards will blockade the road between the Methodist Church and the parish field with their cars parked horizonall across the road, [REDACTED] although in previous years other drivers have not always chosen to respect this.

I explain my intentions for the project [REDACTED] that it is important to observe the traditions of the past, but it's also important to embrace new things, when

people come in from outside and bring in something that will benefit and interest everybody. I call for the four former members of the Lower Withington Morris Dancers to invite them to meet the Irlam Royalties after the performance. Although only two are available, they introduce me to a couple of other members who are attending the Rose Day by chance.

██████ and ██████ walk in the parade at the Lower Withington Rose Day, the first time that carnival morris dancers have performed in Lower Withington for fifty years. After the performance the girls meet with John Ryder and Shirley and share stories and experiences. They each demonstrate their steps and swap photographs. *Lower Withington Royalties* thus represents a two-way exchange. The Lower Withington dancers have never met contemporary carnival morris dancers, and the young carnival morris dancers have never attended a carnival before. After the event ██████ says that she would like to bring the full troupe next year.

**Lower Withington Royalties at Lower Withington Rose Day, July 2013**



█ and █ in the Rose Day parade (2013)



█ in the Rose Day parade (2013)



██████████, ██████████ and ██████████ meeting John Ryder and other former Lower Withington Morris Dancers (2013)



██████████, John Ryder and ██████████ (2013)



Resting after the parade - Lower Withington Rose Queen in the background (2013)



and (2013)

## “The way we work”

### Folk performance?

So how does girls' carnival morris dancing relate to a study of contemporary folk performance? Do carnival morris dancers perceive themselves within a wider tradition? Few in the girls' carnival morris community that I spoke to related straightforwardly to the name “folk”, but Samantha talks about her own awareness of the performance within a historical context,

*I do try and tell my girls... I don't think a lot of them understand it..[laughs] but I do try and...you know, talk about morris and that and tell them what it is that they do. (Samantha)*

Ian agrees:

*I don't think that your average 'line-girl' sees herself as 'part of the picture.' For most of them it's just 'being in a troupe'. (Ian)*

I was also aware of girls' carnival morris dancing's removal from what Ingold and Hallam have called, “the traditional view of tradition” (Ingold and Hallam, 2007: 9) or perhaps just with the pre-existing codes or structure of the folk movement. When I spoke with Lyn about my research with Lower Withington Morris Dancers, she was uncertain:

*this'd be the old traditional morris wouldn't it? It wouldn't be the morris of today... (Lyn)*

The implication here is that for Lyn, girls' carnival morris dancing is not only conceptually distinct from “traditional morris” today but perhaps also that carnival morris is in some way an imitation or progression from it: *ours originated from the*

*traditional morris* (Lyn).

In a previous project Duncan Broomhead had described this process as a form of Chinese whispers, which plays on the presumed authority of "expert" outsiders - *Oh well that's a teacher - he must know best, we can't be as good him...our [understanding] can't be correct*<sup>141</sup> (Duncan). The carnival morris dancing community have internalised the suggestion from scholarship that morris dancing is inherently ancient - and probably male and rural too - so their own practice can't possibly be "authentic."

Similarly most of my contacts in the folk movement are baffled by carnival performance. Ian suggests that the shared name - suggesting synonymity - has led to some conflicted encounters between the two different camps:

*we [Silverdale Sapphires] were around for 15 years and were still encountering strange reactions when we turned up on displays in our last year... They're [the folk movement] still sniffy about what the girls do and can't understand why they only do one dance whereas they probably have about ten in their repertoire. Even some of the women's Northwest teams point out that they're not 'fluffy' but 'authentic' Northwest Morris! (Ian)*

However, Samantha expresses great fondness for other styles of morris dancing:

*I do love it. I love anything like that. I love anything to do with anything traditional... I might join a 'trad' morris [sic] when I'm older! (Samantha)*

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<sup>141</sup> Duncan is referring to the ornithologist and naturalist A. W Boyd's influential relationship with Antrobus Mummers' during the 1930s - *"In the 1950s they were one of only half a dozen traditional mumming sides left in the country... they always go out October 31st... [Today, they say] 'October 31st that's when the Souling season starts, it always started on October 31st.' It was only after sort of years of collecting and I was going round collecting, and I'd say 'when did you go out?' and they'd say 'Oh, Souling time', but others would say, '1st and 2nd of November'... then you dig back and it was A.W Boyd... local folklorist, and JP...well he was the local authority and he tells them, he published in 1926 that the soulers only go out on Nov 1st and 2nd - by 1934 he'd got them going out at All Souls... and it's still that now... The man was hugely influential and they're still quoting it today because it's just been handed down orally within the group."* (Interview between Lucy Wright and Duncan Broomhead, December 2011)

My research revealed a mutual lack of awareness between carnival morris dancing and other morris dance performances. At an Orcadia practice one evening Samantha tells the group that I will be going to meet some male morris dancers later on. The girls giggle: *men?! Many have never heard of men's morris dancing and find the idea ridiculous. Do they do this step?* somebody puzzles, demonstrating. *No. They do the same kind of thing as us, just less...refined.* Samantha says.

### Integrated research methods

The original research presented in this chapter is the direct product of an integrated research approach. Although the writing is organised into sections which imply a degree of separation between methodologically established practices, such as interview and observation, and artistic research practices, such as making and relational performance, these were, in my experience, far more interwoven than such a description suggests.

It is true that much of the factual information I have gathered about girls' carnival morris dancing came from conversations, interviews and observation at performances and events. However, these processes were framed, facilitated and strengthened by my simultaneous practices of making and performance. While we worked together, making dresses with Samantha and planning a performance with the Irlam Royalettes, we talked. I was able to ask questions and made sure to note down and reflect later on the answers. I made no secret of the relationship of the making to my PhD research, but my acceptance and integration within the group was primarily as a dressmaker and performer.

However, the kind of knowledge engendered by the project was not purely factual. Another form of knowledge was generated in and through the costumes and their use in performance in Lower Withington. By engaging in material practices which were less formalized and more embedded in the community itself, I was able in some small ways to get inside the experience of girls' carnival morris dancing, and work with it on its own terms, rather than terms developed from outside in academia. Undertaking projects which were conceived as far as possible to be of mutual benefit,<sup>142</sup> not only reduced the difficulties of perceived hierarchism but also expanded the possibilities for my research to develop and progress outside of my initial expectations. The girls in particular loved being involved in dress design processes and were enthusiastic models. Trainers and parents were pleased to show me their back catalogue of troupe photographs and to bring out old dresses stored in bin bags and suit bags in cupboards at home, an opportunity to reflect on happy memories, both personal and communal. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s participation at the Lower Withington Rose Day stimulated animated conversations both with the Lower Withington Morris Dancers and with each other, about the historical position of girls' carnival morris dancing today. I felt that I was able to offer the dancers a space in which to explore their own heritage, to celebrate the history of their performance and to reflect on its present and future.

This project is only a beginning to an ethnographic study of girls' carnival morris dancing. In it, I hope to have pushed at the boundaries of what might constitute ethnomusicological research, while simultaneously providing an original and academically rigorous report. It is my belief that the use of artistic research practices not only augments my efforts towards this end, but fundamentally constitute it too.

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<sup>142</sup> An evaluation of my practice is provided in the Conclusion.

## **Conclusion: “The Voyage Home”**

As this project draws to a close with the beginnings of a long-overdue ethnography of carnival morris dancing, it is perhaps time to reflect on the extent to which my approach - developed through six case studies – can be felt to have worked? Do my observations across the differing sites of contemporary English folk performance assist in countering Harker’s issues with mediation and Ingold and Hallam’s backwards reading of the inertia of tradition? What does this project viewed in its entirety have to tell us about folk, and about the potential of an artistic turn for ethnomusicology?

### **Summary of work undertaken**

To recap, the original aims of this project were:

1. to explore the possibilities of an “artistic turn” for ethnomusicology
2. to develop new ways to approach research with folk performance, and thus;
3. to provide a commentary on pre-existing assumptions about folk, drawn from a variety of sources

In Chapter 1, two case studies explored a relationship between folk performance and making in the Northwest and charted the early development of my personal practice as a maker. Drawing on preliminary qualitative research with ‘The Long Company Mummers’ and Lymm Morris (involving interview and participant-observation), this phase identified two kinds of making, present in both. These were material practice (e.g. costume-making and choreography) and place-making (e.g. community self-organisation and ownership). Approaching folk performance

via these kinds of making helped to interrogate and eventually dissolve the constructed boundaries between a self-consciously invented tradition; *The Long Company*, and a revival; Lymm Morris.

Chapter 1 established the beginnings of a novel, personal practice as a costume-maker, employing techniques of thinking-through-making as a means of processing and disseminating work from the field. However in evaluating this practice, it appeared to reinforce an approach to artistic research which segregates, rather than integrates practice and research. While this work revealed the importance of relaxing the conceptual boundaries between invention and repetition – of reading folk forwards rather than backwards - it also directed me to look for performances outside of the folk movement which might share similar making processes. As such, Chapter 1 prompted a departure from my initial expectations for the project, namely that it would be concerned with self-identifying folk performers.

In Chapter 2, a series of artworks were developed, both independently and in collaboration with others, on the theme of Boyes' "imagined village" (1993). In this phase, a trajectory from thinking-through-making to "thinking-through-making-together" was followed, through the design and performance of a consciously contemporary folk dance (*Bear Dance*), a collaborative project with members of a local Girl Guides group to revive and re-imagine a South Manchester Rose Queen celebration, and in the final phase, the co-creation of costumes with local garment makers as a means of thinking more about experiences of making and identity. Thinking-through-making-together involved a shift in perspective from personal art practice to collaborative making, in order to simultaneously effect the change from making as illustration, to making as embedded and collaborative. I began to

perceive my role as a facilitator of other people's making as research, creating frameworks and events in which others might be able to represent themselves. In doing so, I also came to understand more about processes of place-making which drew my identification away from non-places and towards my own lived community.

In this phase of work, folk performance was considered through the lens of "customary practice", which borrows from Warshaver's Level 1 of folkloric activity, to describe folk practices which are not consciously understood as such (in contrast to The Long Company and Lymm Morris which fall into Level 2). In asking myself what kinds of activity a contemporary folklorist might be interested in today, the scope of my research interest was rapidly expanded to include the significant personal discovery of girls' carnival morris dancing, a performance tradition unique to the Northwest of England (and parts of North Wales) which has evolved outside of and away from other forms of morris dancing. Although I was not able to access girls' carnival morris dancers immediately, in the final case study of this chapter *Sewing Difference* I was able to consider the visual differences between carnival and other forms of morris dancing to provide the foundations for further comparison in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, we saw how the various strands of making and research could be brought together to study with members of the girls' carnival morris dancing community. In this phase of the research I employed methodologically established techniques such as interview and participant observation in combination with practices developed in costume and collaboration. The final piece from this section incorporated all of these practices towards a creative ethnography of girls' carnival

morris dancing which seeks new ways to facilitate the participants in representing themselves.

### **What are the original contributions to knowledge?**

The main contributions to knowledge, related to my introductory aims, are located in and through:

- the generative use of art practice by a researcher with an ethnomusicological training and sensitivity, making a personal case for the broader efficaciousness of an artistic turn for ethnomusicology.
- a new approach to folk as a material practice that is forwards-facing and trans-disciplinary.
- a critique of extant scholarship in the field of folk performance, supported by theory from a broad range of related disciplines

Other important contributions include:

- the assertion that current understandings of “folk” and “tradition” are more concerned with visual appearance than was previously acknowledged. This visuality may, as in the case of girls’ carnival morris dancing, exceed in significance all other qualities associated with the term, including historical depth and social function.

- a range of insights into the diverse manifestations of folk performance in the Northwest of England, a region historically neglected in scholarship, but perhaps offering a highly appropriate place to begin re-thinking academic approaches to folk.
- a preliminary ethnography of girls' carnival morris dancing, a strand of performance as yet overlooked in scholarship, but potentially transformational for contemporary definitions of folk performance. Earlier case studies are also a rich source of materials towards future ethnographies of the Long Company Mummers and Lymm Morris Men, also offering valuable insights into self-identifying folk practice.

In the following section, a non-linear approach to discussing each of these contributions to knowledge will consider how my practice-led research and its outcomes intersect.

## **Discussion**

### The generative use of art practice in ethnomusicology – my multiple roles

This project is perhaps most accurately understood as a personal artistic turn, experienced and documented by a researcher who has her roots in ethnomusicology, as opposed to an artistic turn for ethnomusicology itself. It makes a series of contributions to knowledge which might be useful to scholars in a range of fields including ethnomusicology, but it is no longer necessarily limited by assumptions about what ethnomusicology is, does or (typically) looks like. Only time will tell whether ethnomusicologists will come to explore the artistic research potential of the field, as visual anthropology has begun to do, but as this thesis

concludes, I want to affirm and clarify the benefits of maintaining a fluid role in relation to the aims of my research.

Being someone who can move between disciplines, despite the difficulties inherent in bringing such diverse sides together offers new and valuable insights. In “getting lost” from the conventions of established disciplines, I found myself liberated to pursue knowledge outside of what has traditionally constituted ethnomusicology or art or folk and this resides at the heart of my original contributions to knowledge. Such a position assists in negotiating the gap between embodied and discursive knowledge - traditionally over-invested in by the academy - but leaving productive tensions between different practices. My project has attempted to capitalise on this by developing a flexible, pluralistic approach that allows both elements to co-exist, continually challenging and renewing each other as the research progresses.

My approach, most comprehensively tested with girls’ carnival morris dancing but developed throughout this work, is two-fold. Firstly, it stresses a forwards-reading of folk performance, seeking contemporary manifestations of “folk” as a material practice of place-making. Scholarship has tended to calcify knowledge about folk, I argue, and my contribution is in attempting to deal with it differently. Secondly, it advocates an artistic research approach as an integral and embedded part of the research process; and these two aspects are combined. While the term “approach” perhaps implies something concrete, in reality it is more the lack of a formalized method which characterizes my study of folk in the Northwest, but this is not to suggest haphazardness, or lack of rigour. Conceived as a kind of improvisation, it manifests as a firm commitment to carving out - and constantly interrogating - the best, and most appropriate tools for each research task, in

contrast to an unquestioning reliance on established models. This is research without a safety net, research that is reliant on accepting the complexity of an integrated scholarly identity, which privileges the quest for knowledge above adherence to a previously trodden route.

In embracing this stance, I found myself adapting to the role of catalyst, a context-provider for the (guided) self-exploration of others and a documenter of that process. Instead of trying to force my research into a particular shape, exerting my will (or that of my academic forebears) onto a fluid and unwieldy subject, I permitted my research to voyage out alongside and as a part of me, while I observed and reflected on where it took me, considered new areas forged, new relationships developed.

This is perhaps most readily observable in *Bear Dance*, in which I provided little more than the raw materials for a performance which was choreographed and performed by others, coming to take on agency of its own beyond my expectations for the project. Although this raises difficult questions about the ownership of the work, the permission to collaborate with those (formerly known as) “subjects” of research towards new and mutually satisfying ways of working was particularly advantageous in spaces less regularly tapped by scholars. It also made constructive use of my unique multiple roles as a performer, maker and scholar. At first, I had thought that my position as a classically trained scholar-turned-artist was very different from my MIRIAD colleagues, most of whom had begun their projects with an established practice. However, I later realized that in overlooking folk performance as a practice – one I had exercised to some extent all along - I was unwittingly falling into the trap of conflating the term *practice* with a rigid and fundamentally “ocularcentric” conception of art (Jay, 1988, 1991). Coming to view

folk as an artistic practice in its own right helped me to re-evaluate both my own performances and the performances of others. Being a catalyst enabled me to observe social and cultural processes in action.

#### A new “forwards-facing” approach to folk and place

In contrast to dominant understandings of an archaic folkloric tradition, my forwards reading emphasizes folk as a fundamentally contemporary phenomenon, a material practice of place-making which only has meaning in the lived present. This re-orientation of the creativity of folk performance has a number of implications. The first is that the scope of the field addressed through the lens of folk performance can be broadened to include a more diverse, more representative and more contemporary range of activities. The second has to do with researching with others. Thinking-through-making-together was developed towards a way of researching which, to use Ingold’s metaphor again, does not “turn away” (Ingold, 2007: 28). Ingold recently described such a position (turning away) as *fundamentally unethical*, suggesting that it is to *turn our backs upon the world in which we live and to which we owe our formation* (Ingold, 2013: 6). Instead, he suggests that scholars should engage in the study with, not the study of.

At around the time that I was first considering this, a relevant metaphor emerged during a discussion with a MIRIAD colleague working in the field of ecology. David Haley explained to me how a popular misunderstanding sees the work of conservation as the returning of a landscape to its “original” state, but that this does not account for the centuries of human intervention which have continually shaped our “natural” places. In a similar way, I suggested, folk performance has historically been understood as ancient and unchanging, but what we see today is

more often than not a fairly modern invention. Seeking to preserve tradition – in the way of a monoculture - is liable to breed its swifter demise. “Eco-systems don’t have morals,” David wrote to me in a follow up email, “the only ethical imperative is diversity,” and pointed me towards the writing of Fritjof Capra who suggests that such polyculture can be understood as a form of living creativity:

Creativity – the generation of new forms is a key property of all living systems. And since emergence is an integral part of the dynamics of open systems, we reach the important conclusion that open systems develop and evolve. Life constantly reaches out to novelty (Capra, 2002: 12).

Haley’s research makes the bold and exciting claim that new insights provided by artistic research practice might be instrumental in re-envisaging human relationships with the world, filling gaps he perceives are left vacant by current (scientific?) approaches (Haley, 2002, 2008). In a similar way, my own work highlights the duty of care required of scholars (perhaps particularly social scientists) towards their own lived environments, what Biggs has called “critical solicitude” (Biggs, 2009: 12). In the day-to-day this might simply mean opening our ethnomusicologists’ eyes to the people, performances and places close at hand, but at a grander scale might come to counter the *lack of concern for the specifics of environmental problems...that can only exacerbate the problem of community at a time of growing social instability linked to environmental change* (Ibid: 9).

This seems particularly pertinent when considering performance and change in the Northwest. One of the contradictions of contemporary life sees Britain - particularly Lancashire - as one of the early pioneers of industry and urbanisation, while theorists have identified a discomfort with modernity and the curiously ambiguous emotive power of the notion of “progress”. As Martin Wiener suggests, *it is a historic irony that the nation that gave birth to the industrial revolution and*

*exported it throughout the world, should have become embarrassed at the measure of its success...adopting a conception of Englishness that virtually excluded industrialism* (Wiener, 1981: 5). We can perhaps see this at play in the comparative neglect of the Northwest's so-called "industrial traditions" in folk scholarship.

But by approaching folk, not as the limited expression of a bygone era, but as something potentially practiced by any and all members of a given community, we are also freeing folk from its paradoxical site- and time-specificity. Research into contemporary folk performance suggests that value can and should be placed upon materials that fall outside of the unattainable orthodoxies of authenticity and this in turn, perhaps leads to the re-evaluation of the cultural productions of all lived environments, not just those which fit a suitably romantic notion of "home" or "community"<sup>143</sup>. By using folk as a way of thinking about the inherent creativity and value on our doorsteps, we may also be able to rethink our relationship with the lived environment. This re-imagining of Boyes' imagined village might thus be a vitalizing force. As the farmer and poet Wendell Berry wrote in 1976:

If what we see and experience, if our country, does not become real in imagination, then it never can become real to us, and we are forever divided from it... Imagination is a particularizing and a local force, native to the ground underfoot (Berry, 2011: 32).

In a similar vein, Terry Gifford writes that *against necessary notions of roots, neighbourhood and community there is another necessary impulse towards retreat, renewal and return... the paradox with which the pastoral engages is the*

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<sup>143</sup> It also suggests a way in which we might invest even Augé's "non-places" with meaning and significance.

*fact that retreat informs our sense of community and, at a time when we are conscious of the need to improve our relationship with our neighbours on this planet, no literature [but pastoral literature] could be more important to our imagining our very survival* (Gifford, 1999: 174). This way of thinking about folk puts at its heart the immediate lived environment and our perpetual need to experience community with others.

Folk is, Biggs suggests, *an embodied potential point of resistance – activated through the shared community of singing and listening [also acting and dancing] – to a social and cultural reductivism inseparable from the ‘monotheistic individualism’ presupposed by the forces that drive neo-liberal western market democracies* (Biggs, 2009: 12). This is like an idea explored early on in my project when I began to think about folk using a metaphor borrowed from the social theorist, Colin Ward, the seed beneath the snow (adopted from Ignazio Silone’s image) which suggested to him that anarchist principles were ever alive and prescient. Ward considered that it was a human need to work at a small scale and to feel in control of one’s immediate environment – to self-organise and self-determine. It seemed to me that folk performance might also be viewed as an aspect of this, frequently hidden by structures which seek to institutionalize and universalize experience.

Although my approach stresses the inevitable potentiality of folk performance to adapt and evolve, I am simultaneously aware of the clear importance of the ways in which folk performances *stay the same*. Research suggests that some sense of ritual is an inherent human need, in a variety of different contexts. For example, Michael Norton et al (2013) suggest that engaging in “ritual” – a habitual action associated with a particular process or result – actually enhances consumption.

Looking at the effect of rituals on the taste of food, the research provides evidence to suggest that things are more potent if there is a ritual attached – and the engagement of rituals over time makes the effects stronger. Even if the ritual is otherwise meaningless, it is still shown to work. The research makes the case that when we get involved with rituals the rest of the world “recedes a little bit” – and it is this sense of involvement which is beneficial to people’s sense of self and wellbeing. As such, folk performances, of whatever kind, may function in much the same way as other rituals, providing a means of ameliorating the everyday, making external things recede a little bit, while we get involved and take control of something small scale and accessible.

The dislocation of girls’ carnival morris dancing from the canon of English folk performance scholarship suggests that the presumed conditions that foster identification as folk (for example, beliefs that it should be old, or should fulfil a particular function), do not fully correspond with the ways in which designations are actually made. That is to say, if as I argue, girls’ carnival morris dancing is otherwise comparable with other forms of morris dancing performed in the Northwest (forms more readily accepted as folk), possessing a shared history and analogous social role, then it must be something else which sets it apart in the public and scholarly imagination.

### Visual appearance

As my research attests, the most striking difference between girls’ carnival morris and Lymm Morris, for example, is its visual appearance. Modern and female, girls’ carnival morris dancing does not look like folk – and as we have already seen in The Long Company, the evolution of materials and aesthetic attributes is not necessarily an expected part of revival or the continuation of tradition. By this

flawed backwards reading, folk performances can be re-enacted by modern performers, but not made, or at least, cannot be made not in such a way that the invention of contemporary protagonists remains visible in the end result. In this way, the processes of making which are so integral to the performance of tradition are overlooked and concealed, while unattainable standards of authenticity, judged on historical depth and resistance to change, continue to be privileged.

Girls' carnival morris dancing, however, has functioned "under the radar" of the English folk movement for many decades. As a continuous, living tradition, not subject to the recurrent cycle of extinction and revival more associated with folk performance scholarship, it has avoided most dominant "folkloric" expectations, instead evolving as the vehicle for self-organisation, community-making and belonging, perhaps more akin to pre-revival performances. While breaks in tradition appear to foreground the perceived importance of reproduction and faithfulness to the past, living traditions like carnival morris dancing seem to change and develop without stopping to think too hard about what those changes mean.

This is a potentially dangerous romanticising statement. It is perhaps worth noting that as my research with the girls' carnival morris dance community progresses, I have become more anecdotally aware of fears about the decline and extinction of the performance, as well as a tendency to sentimentalise the "golden era" of the carnival movement. Dress designs, as well as musical selections at this year's ETACCO World Championship felt to me more consciously nostalgic than last year. While I initially saw girls' carnival morris dancing as straightforwardly forwards-looking, I now see that it too narrates itself towards return. This may be because it can sense the threats from outside, the popularity of cheerleading and

street dance, the difficulty of keeping up with an increasingly kinetic world. Only time will tell what this means for the future of the performance and whether it will continue to change enough to keep up.

For folk performance and research, the case of girls' carnival morris dancing constitutes a call to action. In many regards, girls' carnival morris is actually a relatively unproblematic addition to the canon of morris dancing history in England. Despite its modern appearance and use of recorded rather than live music, it shares a clear and traceable history with other forms of morris dancing in the Northwest.<sup>144</sup> As Mike Heaney asserts, *'purists' have often tried to deny its place in descriptions of traditional ceremonial dance forms; but it is difficult to formulate a defensible definition of morris which excludes it* (Heaney, 2006: 39).

However, girls' carnival morris dancing is perhaps most significant not so much for its end as for its means. Lessons learned through the inclusion of girls' carnival morris dancing in an exploration of folk performance in the Northwest must also stimulate re-assessment of other forms of customary practice taking place in our contemporary society with something to offer current understandings of "folk" and community – even if they don't *look* like folk.

#### A critique of extant scholarship

In his much underestimated monograph on the future as well as the present of folk scholarship in Britain, Bob Trubshaw suggests a number of contemporary practices he feels may be relevant to a contemporary folklorist; *funerals, weddings, stag nights, hen nights, Tupperware / lingerie / Ann Summers parties*

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<sup>144</sup> Although much more needs to be done to clarify and document this, see 'Recommendations for future research'

(Trubshaw, 2002: 3) as well as wayside memorials and children's playground games<sup>145</sup> (Ibid: 136 – 139). Drawing attention to the relativity of tradition, via what he describes as an American model of folklore, Trubshaw's message is that folk should be viewed as something integral to every person's life, not the privileged or sequestered domain of the self-conscious "folkie".<sup>146</sup>

It is of course, nothing new to suggest that traditions need not be old to fulfill an important social function, or that the term "folk" does not describe a strict demographic category. In my introduction I quote two scholars, separated by more than one hundred years, arguing the very same things. In addition, my own research with members of The Long Company and Lymm Morris attests that many current folk performers, too, are well versed in the traditional problems of tradition.

As Winter and Keegan-Phipps have also observed"

this destabilisation of the concept has not gone unnoticed by those who perform and otherwise identify with folk music and dance... Many in folk music and dance communities are aware...that most definitions of those labels are wide open to challenge and that the term 'folk' is problematised yet further by the conditions of modernity within which their own contemporary experiences of tradition are set (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 7).

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<sup>145</sup> Of folk as a material practice, he writes, "Perhaps the most widely-practiced ephemeral folk art in Britain currently is children's face painting. Contentiously, may I suggest that the newest form of ephemeral folk art is crop circles...Ephemeral forms of folk art are mostly peripheral to folk crafts, largely because ideas about what constitutes 'folk crafts' are shaped by the type of object in museum collections where needlework, kitchen equipment, farm implements and home-made toys predominate." (Trubshaw, 2002: 161)

<sup>146</sup> This is generally a fond self-designated term for a folk performance enthusiast. However, Neil Rosenberg suggests it is a "diminutive form to convey an image of immaturity and...phoniness." (Rosenberg, 1993: 10) Gershon Legman too, wrote caustically of, "the professional folkie" who "has learned all his songs 'from his old grandma', or from an 'eighty-three-year-old shepherd in Hipboot County Montana... They also tend to wear woollen shirts and to shave off their hair and grow beards. This proves they are just folks, real authentic." (Legman, 1964: 495) Legman also said that a folksong specialist was "any member of the English or anthropology faculties of a state college who is not specialising in Shakespeare." (Legman, 1964: 494)

However, what is new, perhaps, is to act on it: this is the challenge.<sup>147</sup> Folk remains a loaded and contested term - whose meaning varies wildly with a change in context – slippery, pedantic and saturated with evocation and imagery. Returning to Joseph Jacobs, *it is a fraud, a delusion and a myth...simply a name for our ignorance* (Jacobs, 1893: 234, 236), and perhaps that is why it has been such a fertile site for artistic research, a space of potential through which to consider creativity and change across a range of different disciplines and fields.

However, to suggest that the problematic nature of the term folk constitutes a convincing reason to reject it altogether, as proposed by Harker and by Boyes, is as illogical as arguing that the terms “art” and “science” should also be scrapped in light of assertions by Galison and Jones (1998), among others, that they are widely misinterpreted as binaries. Folk can be rehabilitated, I feel: in fact this is probably a necessity, and indeed this process has already begun, but folk scholars and performers need to be alerted to the changes already taking place in other fields, and theoretical statements about the creativity of tradition need to be supported with corresponding applications and action. This may be a gradual process, but it is also rewarding and valuable.

While performance has been thoroughly re-assessed in recent decades for its value both inside and outside of the immediate field, it remains a historic irony that although much contemporary ethnomusicology practice is mediated by, and to

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<sup>147</sup> Just before the completion of this project I received an email from Simon Costin of the Museum for British Folklore outlining a new online exhibition venture, which suggests that folk scholarship may already be progressing along similar lines. Posted along with a photograph of a hand-decorated bicycle, the advertisement said, “*Featuring contributions from photographers, cultural commentators and artists, as well as participants themselves, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Folk Culture will examine different facets of folk practice existing in Britain today. The Museum of British Folklore recognises the internet is itself a conduit for folk expression – a space where urban myths can flourish and culture is shared through the unmediated channels of social media and websites. It is hoped that the exhibition series will encourage responses and stimulate discussion as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the definition of folk culture.*” (personal email, Museum of British Folklore, January 2014)

some extent has been intrinsically dependent upon, the use of recording technologies, audio-visual practice by ethnomusicologists is frequently underdeveloped. My own practice-led trajectory from video-making to costume making and relational performance does not reflect a lack of potential in the sub-field of ethnographic documentary in ethnomusicology<sup>148</sup> but instead a willingness to embrace and select practices for their particular qualities of appropriateness given the context and purpose of my research.

The use of collaborative research strategies has already been posited by some ethnomusicologists:

We must engage in collaborative processes. Collaboration in turn helps to reduce power asymmetries and assures greater congruency between ethnographic goals and the sensitivities of individuals and communities. (Shelemay, 1997: 201).

The goal for Michelle Kisliuk is to find ways to represent a dialogical process conceived as shared experience:

Rather than seeing experience as two-sided (either "my" story or "theirs"), it is more helpful to see the ethnography of experience as a conversation within which learning is located, both during research and while writing (Kisliuk, 1997: 33).

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<sup>148</sup> The assertion that video-making is a potential growth area for ethnomusicology has been made since at least the 1970s when Steven Feld suggested, "the use of film as a medium of presentation and research in ethnomusicology is an area marked by considerable recent interest, though hardly without some confusion. The interest seems due to the explosive fascination with audio-visual media in both the humanities and the social sciences. The confusion seems due to several forms of inability to disentangle the manner in which one deals with audio-visual media in a humanistic or social context from the popular roles these media play in our larger cultural milieu." (Feld, 1976: 293) The "explosive fascination" described can only have increased with the ever-quickening development of accessible and high quality video-making and editing facilities, both inside and outside of the ethnomusicologist's field. However, a corresponding movement towards the harnessing of such technologies remains either marginalized or undocumented in the primary exposition spaces of the ethnomusicology discipline. Gary Lintern notes, most published work on visual methodology as it applies to ethnomusicology was written in the 1970s and 1980s by John Baily, Hugo Zemp and Steven Feld (Lintern, 2007: 4). Although a minority of ethnomusicologists have continued to make videos, such products frequently hold a curious status within the discipline and the new ethnomusicologist has few contemporary models on which to base their explorations with video.

Relational art practice may be another way in which the ethnomusicologist, in future, might consider seeking to represent this conversation.

Although I have highlighted the differing ways in which the results of my research can be perceived in the context of the varied disciplines I encountered, my approach might actually be more usefully conceptualized via Basarab Nicolescu's notion of research "beyond disciplines" (Nicolescu, 1985). Nicolescu describes this state as "trans-disciplinarity" (Nicolescu, 2002). However, it was my experience of working in and from the "broken middle" (Rose, 1992) that disciplinary boundedness or otherwise became an increasingly unimportant aspect of my self-conception as a researcher. As Ingold notes of his own institutional experience of disciplinary collapse across four different fields:

although planned as an explicitly interdisciplinary inquiry, in practice the boundaries of the disciplines simply vanished, if indeed they ever existed. Students did not have the experience of having to create four distinct fields, but rather found themselves following a series of pathways in which the concerns of anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture seemed naturally and effortlessly to converge (Ingold, 2013: 12).

In some ways, my embrace of the possibilities of artistic research felt more natural and came easier than my evolving approach to "folk". As a doctoral researcher who had begun to be interested in pursuing art as knowledge during Masters study in an ethnomusicology department, I began this project in an art and design research centre with some confidence that the artistic turn would indeed be efficacious.<sup>149</sup> In this way I am indebted to those scholars who led the way in the

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<sup>149</sup> This easy acceptance would perhaps have felt different for a scholar with a more established background in classical research paradigms, or an artist challenged to "make academic" his or her long-held academic practice. In some ways I feel that I "grew up" with the notion that art could be research and as such this project has only served to cement my inherent belief. An analogy might be the seemingly effortless use of digital technologies by people born later than say, 1990, who can only scarcely remember, if at all, a time before its relative ubiquity in daily life. This is in

fields of artistic research and arts-based enquiry.<sup>150</sup> Their groundbreaking work meant that my research had clear precedent, even if as Hannula et al admit, “the situation is [still] best described as one of confusion” (Hannula et al, 2005: 11).

This has not been so clearly the case for my understanding of folk, a term which due my pre-existing involvement in the folk movement had invested in me a strongly opposing viewpoint.<sup>151</sup> It was more difficult to let go of my belief in the inherent superiority of archaic tradition, the urgency and incontrovertible necessity of preservation and the honour of authenticity. I don’t remember anybody specifically telling me these things as I was growing up, but they were an implied and integral aspect of my personal engagement with the community.<sup>152</sup>

Some of my (casual and unrecorded) conversations with members of the folk movement have revealed unexpected support for the re-assessment of the conditions which currently delineate “folk” from “not folk” in the community imagination. For example, Duncan Broomhead, who participated in the *Conversation Hats* study was unwavering in his support for the inclusion of girls’ carnival morris dancing in the history of morris in the Northwest. In one of our

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contrast to the more gradual or partial adoption, or resistance altogether, of people who functioned for large parts of their life without it.

<sup>150</sup> To name but a few: Hannula et al, 2005; Wright and Schneider, 2006, 2010, 2013; Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009; Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005; and my colleagues and teachers at MIRIAD.

<sup>151</sup> Prior to becoming an ethnomusicologist, I had read books by Cecil Sharp and Bert Lloyd and several generic publications about seasonal customs, and as a performer I sought to perform material gathered from “source” performers over modern commercial recordings. As a teenager I chose folk clubs over nightclubs because I enjoyed the participation and sense of shared purpose, but also as a means of enacting my rejection of “popular” culture, held in dichotomy with folk.

<sup>152</sup> While this represents little more than singular anecdotal evidence for the disconnection of popular attitudes towards folk performance and contemporary developments in the scholarship, as an artist I have come to place greater value on personal experience as – at least – a marker of potentiality for interrogation. Through this research, I found that I was not alone in the folk movement in articulating these kinds of perception.

conversations in the follow-up to my work with Lymm Morris, he reflected on his life as an amateur scholar (and performer) of morris dancing;

*When we [morris dancers] joined in the...folk revival we were just given 'tradition.' 'Tradition' – it was a word that was just bandied about so much. But theirs is the real tradition, yeah, they're not interested in the past* (Personal interview between Lucy Wright and Duncan Broomhead, December 2012).

However, at other times, my artistic expansion of the possibilities of “folk” were met with discomfort or perceived as a personal attack on extant practice. In my introduction, I stress that my research is in no way intended to criticise or undermine the position of current folk performers in the Northwest or beyond, and this must be restated in the conclusion. As such, while I recognise the spirit of the phrase “real tradition” in Duncan’s assertion, it has never been my goal to create new ways to delineate or judge one kind of folk against another. Quite the opposite: I wish to open the definition to other relevant performances to give extra value to each. Performances like The Long Company and the Lymm Dance are no less folkloric, by my approach than they ever were – to reiterate Boyes’ suggestion from the introduction, *some songs and dances have a longer history than others, but it is singing and dancing which is 'traditional,' not the songs and dances in themselves* (personal email, 2012). But they are also no *more* folk than girls’ carnival morris dancing, despite its current disengagement from the term. My approach aims towards inclusivity, not exclusivity.

### **Limitations of the research**

We have already seen how the conclusions of this thesis are parallel and intertwined. They are also fundamentally inconclusive. This is, it is argued, a condition of an artistic research approach. As Hannula et al advise:

one must offer the opportunity for participation, experimentation and even failure and similarly for taking risks and avoiding a final set-up of established research methods and ways of presenting research results. In other words, one must offer space for creative uncertainty, experimentation and errors (Hannula et al, 2005: 163).

And it is true that such creative uncertainty, experimentation and error do not necessarily tidy up neatly once a research period draws to a close. The artistic researcher, as Hannula et al insist, should not try to force this kind of “completion” to the end result:

It is obvious that artistic research cannot and must not give definitive answers. Instead it must be able to bring new viewpoints and factual connections to certain themes in a fresh and notable way (Hannula et al, 2005: 116).

What is left then, in addition to new juxtapositions and relationships forged, is a suggestive account, a kind of “this is my experience, how about yours?” framework for future research. As already argued, my approach should not be viewed so much as a concrete and polished set of stages to be applied or replicated by others, but rather an voyage of discovery, with possible extrapolations to assist future voyages and voyagers.

One way to acknowledge this is to give voice to the follow-up questions and problems that inevitably (and often forcefully) arise from the research. Throughout this report it has been my intention to leave visible the areas of difficulty - how they shaped my approach - and the ways in which my practice struggled and sometimes failed to hit all the marks my pre-determinations had set. Now considering the research as a whole, I am able to offer some thoughts on the limitations as well as the strengths of the approach developed and to reflect on the ways in which my own research might develop in future.

## Limitations of the approach

Beginning with what for me is the newest (and most exciting!) approach to research – collaboration and relational aesthetics – it is important to qualify that this is not some kind of magic bullet to solve all the problems of scholarly mediation and hierarchism. Such research remains dogged by relationship inequalities, challenges of representation and viability within the constraints of an institutional framework. My work has only just begun to deal with this complex way of knowing.

Although it is sometimes understood as such, collaboration does not necessarily equate straightforwardly with equality or shared experience. In fact, my use of the term here is tempered by awareness of Maria Lind's analysis of the problems of using "collaboration" as a catch-all, *an umbrella term for the diverse working methods that require more than one participant* (Lind, 2007: 17). If to "collaborate" in research really meant to undertake any kind of investigation involving others, then there is little to differentiate it from any other research approach. Instead, the goal is perhaps more usefully summarized by Helen Carnac as *a process that unravels through the doing of something in real time and perhaps in ways we might liken to a conversation* (Carnac, 2013: 69).

"Real time," I have decided, is an appropriate description (perhaps intentionally so) of the issues arising from the collision of personal and institutional timescales in a single project. Taking time over research with other people seems unavoidable; it is neither possible nor desirable to rush. At each dialogical stage of relationship building, care and attention must be paid to lay the right kinds of foundations, to

leave enough room for two or more people to manoeuvre, and to create the right kind of space to co-exist peacefully and even productively. I know that in my own research, this has been a persistent challenge, and one that I have not absolutely resolved to satisfaction. This was perhaps most acutely illustrated during *Sewing Difference* in which my own requirement to “complete” the work in a given time period came up against the divergent aims and expectations of my co-creators. I had to frequently remind myself that whilst this joint project might be of high priority for me, it did not necessarily represent the same kind of concern for my co-creators.

This in turn highlights relationship inequalities that can threaten to overshadow collaboration. Although my intention was to enable my participants and co-creators to direct and express themselves, whether they were garment makers, Girl Guides or members of the carnival morris community, I was unable to reconcile the fundamental fact that this work for me had an additional personal goal – to gain a PhD. Although never concealed from those with whom I worked, as I wrote in my fieldnotes during the ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park presents Rose Queen’ project, *it always begins as my research first, and a collaborative project second... I try very hard to minimize this but for the sake of reflexivity it needs to be acknowledged* (personal journal entry, Lucy Wright, July 2013).

Another practical consideration, perhaps even more unseemly than timeliness, has to do with funding. Working in this way costs money. Specialists must be recompensed for their time. Volunteers should not be out of pocket by the end of a project. I was conscious of not placing expectations on others to perform, make or otherwise support my research without being able to offer at least a contribution towards the regular or potential value of such work. This is

as much a personal campaign as a moral one. As a musician, perhaps particularly as a folk musician in an industry that is notoriously underfunded, I am aware of perceptions that performing should be done “for the love of it”, which while partially true, does not necessarily tally with the need to make a living or the inherent value of the skill involved.<sup>153</sup>

An unexpected, but fundamental benefit: artistic research has opened new ways for me to work with others and to adapt to the changing terrains of the research experience. It is perhaps revealing that during this thesis writing process I have felt more comfortable in representing the experiences and views of performers drawn from the folk movement than the carnival morris dancing community. There are a number of reasons for this, including pre-existing familiarity, ease of access and shared references and educational backgrounds. However, in some ways this is paradoxical. Early on in my research with The Long Company I became aware that one of the inherent challenges of studying the scholarly members of post-revival folk performance groups<sup>154</sup> is that many of my informants were also experts in their field, not just in the sense that we might all claim to be experts of our own lives, but because they have studied, documented and collected it too. It is, for founding members of groups such as Lymm Morris or ‘The Long Company,’ almost a prerequisite for taking custodianship of a historical performance, and an important badge of honour. It is also the way that much folkloric research gets done in this country. As such, it always felt acutely necessary for me to find a new angle in order to offer anything new – and as contemporary art is often concerned

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<sup>153</sup> Doing practice-led research can be expensive, and although I was fortunate to receive funding to complete my doctorate, I am almost certain that the everyday running costs of my conducting an artistic research project – with all the expense usually associated with fieldwork and materials on top - exceeded that of my more desk-bound colleagues in English Literature or Art History, for example. In the current financial climate nationwide, with its budget cuts and austerity measures, it is clear that artistic research projects will need to be able to prove their worth – intellectually and economically.

<sup>154</sup> And as Georgina Boyes says “we are *all* Post-Revivalists” (Boyes, 1993: xi)

with seeing things differently, this was one way in which my approach might succeed in making a contribution.

This striving for newness was not so pressing in my encounters with girls' carnival morris dancing. The near-completely blank page of prior scholarship from which I set out to work meant that almost any contribution to knowledge I might make in describing and analyzing girls' morris would be both original and distinct. Such unprecedented freedom, it is fair to say, is both exhilarating and unnerving. I have felt almost overwhelmed by the sense of responsibility to adequately represent my participants and collaborators, knowing that whatever depictions or impressions I created in and through my research, were likely to be the first. And while members of The Long Company and Lymm Morris have the opportunity to make public-domain statements about themselves, and to respond, counter or reject outright the statements I make on their behalf, it would be my voice, and not the voices of girls' carnival morris dancers which will speak loudest in this particular arena.

Where in earlier case studies, art practice had opened the possibility for myself, as an individual, to develop and communicate new insights about folk, in my work with girls' carnival morris it helped me to cultivate a space in which others might come to express and represent themselves, to use their own voices to explain to others about the conditions and meanings of their performance.

#### Limitations of the scope of the research

This project circumscribes its research area purposefully, but expansively. As such, while many discrete performances, traditions and practices from the

Northwest are referenced in this commentary, few are given the space they would otherwise deserve.

Returning to time constraints again, there is the danger that in seeking to cover too much, the research does not deal with enough of anything. This would perhaps be a fair assessment and I am well aware of the whistle-stop tour that this thesis has been. Throughout the writing up process I have had to remind myself that the over-arching goal of my research has been to experiment with new ways of approaching and thinking about ethnomusicology research, rather than to offer complete or comprehensive ethnographies or histories of specific folk performance traditions.

Despite my continuing research interest in this area, this project still does not adequately deal with the contemporary folk movement, nor but peer beneath the surface of girls' morris dancing and the town carnival movement. Although this research began with the intention of understanding more about contemporary folk performance – those initially addressed in Chapter 1 – as the project developed my attention became increasingly diverted by the novelty and possibility of girls' carnival morris. This is not, I hope, reflected in this thesis, in which I have sought to give equal attention to each of my case studies, but it has also meant taking the scalpel to large amounts of descriptive research about the history and practice of girls' morris dancing in order to focus on my broader argument – the generative potential of artistic research in ethnomusicology.

However, I would like to make the following recommendations for future research:

Girls carnival morris dancing and the town carnival movement

In the Introduction, I stated that the Northwest of England was historically neglected in folk scholarship, but it is clearly apparent that the vibrant carnival community - unique to the region - is full of untapped possibility for scholars across the fields sensitised to the study of people, performance and place. Girls' morris dancing is only one strand of performance associated with the town carnival movement, which also gave rise to majorettes, "jazz" (kazoo) bands and "entertainers" among other practices, all yet to receive adequate (any) scholarly attention.

Acknowledging that the town carnival movement has managed admirably to date without the intervention of scholars,<sup>155</sup> it is my opinion that further research in these areas is important for two reasons. Firstly, girls' carnival morris dancing is by some distance the largest current subsection of carnival performance, experiencing growth throughout the region in recent years despite the reduced role of the town carnival in community life.<sup>156</sup> However, jazz bands and entertaining troupes are (said to be) comparatively diminished, and majorettes' baton-twirling has become increasingly subsumed into the nationally performed import, cheerleading. Many key figures in the community are still alive, offering the

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<sup>155</sup> Perhaps even *because* of a lack of scholarly interference. I was chastened by Dave Harker in a personal email, *What's so good about 'scholarship' - as traditionally defined by self-defined 'scholars' - anyway?* (Email correspondence between Lucy Wright and Dave Harker, January 2013)

<sup>156</sup> The simultaneous decline of the "traditional" town carnival and the recent upsurge of girls' morris dancing was acknowledged with mixed feeling by the members of the carnival movement interviewed during this project. Lyn Booth said, *"the dancing troupe world is far bigger than it ever was, but there again we haven't got the town carnivals that we always had...people are too busy, too fast moving life, each going their own way."* (Interview between Lucy Wright and Lyn Booth, January 2013) As a troupe choreographer, Samantha Hamer's remark that *"it'll have to change if it wants to survive..."* reflects a pragmatic stance adopted by many in the community, along with the acceptance of the inevitability of further change. *"I would change the rules to make it as beautiful as you could be. I would say 'yeah they can wear fake tan, yeah they can wear make up, yeah they can' and now you see it's not... They need to make it more glamorous and the more kids'll wanna join."* (Interview between Lucy Wright and Samantha Hamer, August 2013)

possibility to document most of its recent history while it remains in living memory.<sup>157</sup>

A resultant state of reticence may contribute to its being overlooked by folklorists, the relative newness of the tradition, as well as its significant popularity within the communities of which it is a part<sup>158</sup> offers a comforting lack of urgency in recording its history and practices. But this is also amongst the greatest strengths of such a case study, enabling scholars to observe at first hand how customary practices continue to adapt over time, and to search for correlations with social and community politics. Keen to avoid falling back on lazy preservationist shorthand, it seems to me that further prioritized attention is required to document and compile the experiences of these pioneers of the Northwest carnival movement, from whom today's living tradition is so directly derived.<sup>159</sup> And not just document, but understand and support. To propose a metaphor used by the archaeologist, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "there is an assumption that by digging stuff up you saved it. Except you haven't."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> As Ray Dommert appealed in the last published account of girls' morris in the 1980s, "much more should be established about the Carnival morris and its recent history and it is important to remember that the above [study] is based on one event in the north of the Fluffy area and not a major championship." (Dommert, 1986: 7)

<sup>158</sup> As I have already argued, both of these qualities were considered by many early folklorists to be not just lacking from pre-revival folk performance, but also preclusions for its existence. As the remit of folklorists has changed, these characteristics have arguably become some of the most sought after.

<sup>159</sup> Despite a firm personal resistance to the application of narratives around extinction and preservation, I was interested to note that a belief in a just-past "golden era" for carnival performance and fears over its imminent demise were common to my conversations in the carnival community, as much as, if not more so, than those undertaken with members of groups associated with the folk movement. As a former troupe principal, Ian Mackinnon reflected, "*it's getting far more difficult to attract, train and retain talented and committed dancers*" (Interview between Lucy Wright and Ian Mackinnon, August 2012) and Lyn Booth said of the town carnival movement, "*People don't have time or the interest to work for small local communities...I don't think they'll ever come back. I admire the ones that do stay together.*"

<sup>160</sup> Interview between Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and Peter Popham, 'Ashes to Ashes: the latter day ruin of Pompeii,' Prospect Magazine, April, 2010: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/ashes-to-ashes-the-latter-day-ruin-of-pompeii/#.Uvlg3hY5s20> (Accessed November 22. 2013)

Secondly, as I hope to have persuaded, the Northwest carnival movement is a much overdue inclusion to the history of English folk performance. Its re-assessment in the context of post-Harkerian folk scholarship, has the potential to de-stabilise and re-orient understandings and approaches to “folk”, the reverberations of which may be felt in the discipline of ethnomusicology and beyond.

A preliminary list of issues to be addressed in future scholarship:

- the relationship and eventual schism between girls’ carnival morris dancing and Northwest (clog) morris, i.e. the historical relationship between the town carnival movement and the English folk revival, including the progression from performance to a live brass band to recorded pop music<sup>161</sup>
- the neglect of women’s and children’s traditions in folk scholarship
- twenty-first century girls’ carnival morris as a leisure pursuit increasingly distinct from the town carnival procession
- girls’ carnival morris dancing and multiculturalism / urban identity-making
- girls’ carnival morris dancing and class

#### The Long Company Mummers, Lymm Morris Men and self-identifying folk

At the same time, self-identifying folk performers are taking an intriguing and diverse range of approaches to the notion of tradition, which requires further attention. Some suggestions include:

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<sup>161</sup> My research implies that the practice of performing to a brass band, which was common in the 1940s and 1950s is almost unknown and unheard of by performers in the 1960s.

- invention and re-invention in mummers' plays and morris dancing
- perceptions of revival amongst men's morris dancing sides
- manifestations of change and continuity within small performance groups
- performance as a research technique with morris dancing and mumming

### **Concluding remarks**

That this future research should be conducted using artistic research strategies depends on the predilections of the individual researcher, but I hope that I have shown in this work that art practice, in and through the various stages of the research process may offer one way to proceed. As Hannula et al suggest, artistic research provides new opportunities and mechanisms with which to *interact with communities of practice other than research communities* (Hannula et al, 2005: 167). The possible liberation effected through this forging of new relationships may provide a valuable and coherent trajectory for the future study of contemporary folk performance.

For music and performance scholars more generally, the broader challenge is to re-think existing approaches and conceptualizations of visual and experiential methods. One doctoral thesis does not an "artistic turn" make, and the ethnomusicology discipline still lags behind its sister subject, anthropology, in the testing and development of new and transferrable models. On the one hand, this may seem unimportant. If a trans- or even post-disciplinary academy becomes a reality rather than a distant imagining, scholars in future may choose to define

themselves far more by research process than by disciplinary identity.<sup>162</sup> The research landscape might thus come to be characterized by permeable territories of approach, in addition to subject specialism, supporting the free-flow of information and ideas between scholars with different research interests but comparable working practices. Music and performance students in the future may not have to choose between training in a discipline sensitized to performance as a research interest, or training in expanded research methodologies. Or perhaps this is overstatement and idealism.

However, on the other hand, I have also argued that the unique contribution which ethnomusicologists and other music scholars might have to make to the development of models from and between artistic research and arts-based enquiry, should not be underestimated. I have already suggested in this thesis that ethnomusicology is a practice-led discipline, but it is also important to reinforce the potential for ethnomusicology to develop as an artistic discipline, and perhaps even for art practice to be developed as an ethnomusicological discipline. The practice of folk, whether as a performance or a material practice, for me, feels like a good place to begin.

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<sup>162</sup> My evidence for this is admittedly anecdotal, drawn from attendance at doctoral and early career conferences in the fields of ethnomusicology, art and geography. Few presenters attending the ethnomusicology or geography events called themselves ethnomusicologists or geographers preferring to discuss the specificities of their individual project or research process (while at the art events participants were far more comfortable to make use of the term “artist”). Perhaps this is symptomatic of a new kind of researcher and a generation more inclined to view ourselves as independent travelers within the academy – largely unaffiliated and unconstrained by disciplinary boundaries – but able to borrow and contribute more freely.

## **Postscript**

On April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014, the eve of my Doctoral viva, I held a *Making Traditions* dissemination event at the People's History Museum in Manchester. It was a carnival-esque affair, attended by more than seventy people - many wearing homemade or borrowed "folk" costumes - and included performances by Lymm Morris Men, Edwin Beasant, the 2nd Alexandra Park Guides, Waters Green Morris and the Irlam Royalettes. On display were works made in collaboration with Sindie Peel, Aazar, Clare Louise Vincent, Annie Dearman and Samantha Hamer, several of whom were also present. There was a reading corner and a music session and a warm, celebratory atmosphere, centred upon the richness and vibrancy of the Northwest's folk performance traditions. In a brief moment of calm, I surveyed the large room and thought about what had happened there.

Throughout the project I had been aware of the requirement to produce a final exhibition showcase of some kind to be attended by my examiners. In developing my practice I always had an eye to how it might function in the context of an examination, but in actuality, this wasn't so much a display of discrete and completed "works of art" but rather a drawing together of some of the tangled strands of my project – and a further opportunity for reflection. The event represented a meeting of disparate practices and groups who might not otherwise have had the cause to mix. My own finite pairings with costume-makers, performers and scholars in the field combined on that evening to create something broader and more communally-owned.

Future publications will reflect more fully on the research that was my exhibition. While my thesis at times seemed to jump around, struggling to maintain cohesion, my exhibition seemed to hold everything in tension in a way that seemed to clarify

and reaffirm what my goals for the research had been. Integrated. Collaborative. Forwards-facing. Perhaps the best moment of the evening was witnessing the audience's reaction when the Irlam Royalties finished their gruelling performance – the first time that most present (even self-confessed “folkies”) had ever witnessed the dance. The girls, mostly teenagers from a suburb of Salford, admitted they felt out of their comfort zone performing to the crowd, which included “traditional” morris dancers, but the huge swell of applause after they had finished – easily the biggest of the night - and the impromptu carnival morris master-class in the bar later on highlighted what makes an artistic research approach so valuable.

A short video of the event is included with this thesis as Appendix 3.

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Appendix 1.

***“Et in Orcadia Ego”***

Field materials towards an ethnography of girls' carnival morris dancing



Orcadia Morris Dancers meet at the [REDACTED], a pair of large communal halls with an adjoining kitchen and meeting room facilities, separating a warren of yellow-brick housing estates and scrubby green fields. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It's in the constitution, printed in the lobby entrance: West Lancashire Borough Council pledge to "advance education and to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure-time occupation". On corridor walls, community announcements and event photographs jostle for space with public health notices. In one toilet an advert for a personal injury claims service; "Don't get mugged by an insurer" says a bruised looking man in a suit and tie swathed in thick head bandages, while in another a heavily pregnant woman appeals, "At 18 weeks, the baby started kicking. At 22 weeks, so did the father" and a telephone number for Refuge. The locals call it [REDACTED] a name which the Orcadia troupe have also adopted online to keep their Facebook page private, meaningful to insiders only.

Morris dance practice takes place in the main hall, a big strip-lit linoleum room framed with Formica tables and blue stacking chairs cramped to the sides against a wall of black glossy windows. As the Seniors and mums disperse towards the lobby - to socialise and run a tuck shop while the younger ones rehearse - the Babies start their class. [REDACTED] has come straight from her job as a teaching assistant at a school for children with special behavioural needs [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and has tutored the very youngest dancers since the line was created,

about three years ago. *I think that's what I'm good at*, she tells me later, *I like doing the little ones...it's just repetition really*. As an outsider I've always been a bit in awe of the discipline and skill of these tiny dancers and of the patience and determination of their trainers to achieve such strong results. In contrast to mens' morris dancing which has come to be perceived as an older person's pursuit, carnival morris dancers usually start young, and [REDACTED], they're are getting younger. Aged two to five, you see them in droves at the weekly comps, armies in pushchairs and tiny jeweled dresses, some with nappies still peeking out from under their skirts. Just because they're young doesn't mean that the competition isn't fierce.

[REDACTED] told me once, *I used to think 'oh my goodness me', and I was judging them which is ridiculous, quite ridiculous really, you know 'cause they can't dance but you see the mums and the grandmas come with them and they're on the troupe's bus and they pay the bus fare and helps to keep the buses going so we're forced to have these little Babies and Dinkies... they're helping financially to keep the teams afloat and the costumes are so nice so beautiful now...* [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Everybody tells me that the Babies are the biggest growth area in carnival morris just now, but [REDACTED] too has been a morris dancer since before she could walk. Born into a morris dancing family, she was taken on the troupe bus at twelve weeks old and *I've been going ever since - no choice. But I loved it. I've always loved it.*

She sets up the small grey portable stereo player at the back of the hall and fluffs a few shakers experimentally. *Everyone who's not in Babies, leave now!* she shouts, and the couple of older girls who were in the room leave quickly to check out the park. There are five Babies dancing today but usually there are six. [REDACTED]

has hurt her ankle at the weekend and isn't allowed to dance, but [REDACTED] says she can walk the routines to keep up with the positions and practice the arm-works. Championships are two weeks away and she appeals to them all not to do anything else to risk injury until [REDACTED] is over. The little ones are excited, tonight as a special treat they will be dancing to the Juniors' mix-CD. *Don't tell the Juniors!* [REDACTED] whispers to me.

### Champs

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Appendix 2.**

**EXHIBITION GUIDE**

**Making Traditions | Practising Folk**

*Contemporary folk performance in the Northwest of England: a practice-led enquiry.*

This exhibition guide contains photographs of the costumes produced as part of my practice-led PhD.

At my exhibition, many of these costumes will be animated in performance.

**Sewing Difference (2012)**



Figure 1.

Figure 2.

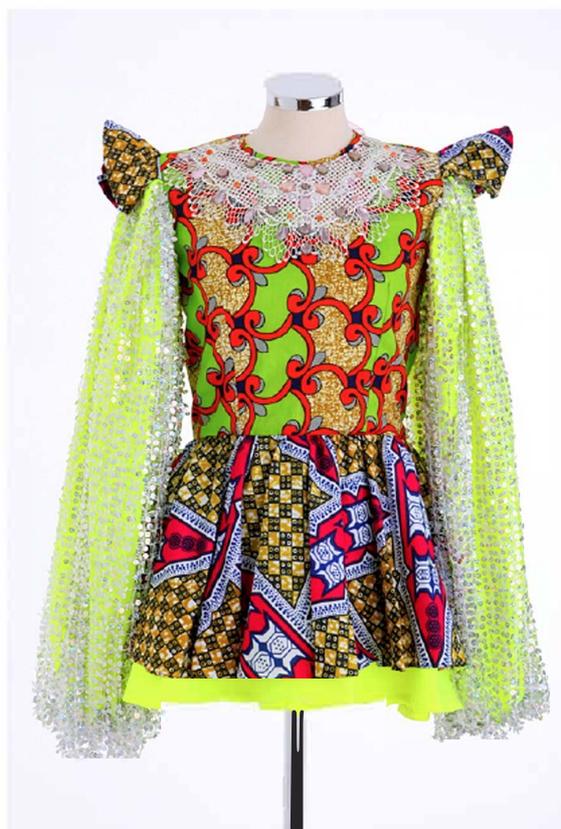


Figure 3.



Figure 4.

Collaboration between Sidnie Peel and Lucy Wright (2012)

**Sewing Difference 2**



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Collaboration between Aazar and Lucy Wright (2012)

**Sewing Difference 3**



Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

Collaboration between Claire Louise Vincent and Lucy Wright (2012)

**Lower Withington Royalties (2013)**



Figure 13.



Figure 14.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.

**Collaboration between Samantha Hamer and Lucy Wright (2013)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Alexandra Park Presents Rose Queen (2013)**



Figure 17.



Figure 18.

Rose Queen's dress by Sindie Peel and Lucy Wright (2013) Rose Queen's robe by Lucy Wright (2013)



Figure 19.



Figure 20.

Rose Queen's crown by Lucy Wright (2013)



Figure 21.



Figure 22.



Figure 23.

Rosebud's dress by Sindie Peel and Lucy Wright (2013)

Rosebud's crown by Lucy Wright (2013)  
*Bear Dance* (2012)



Figure 24.



Figure 25.

Bear costume by Lucy Wright (2012)

**Conversation Hats (2012)**



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.

**Hats by Lucy Wright (2012)**

*Conversation Hats' 2 (2012)*



Figure 29.



Figure 30.

Contemporary Folk Art (2013)



Figure 31.



Figure 32.

Figure 31. by Collins the Florist, Chorlton, South Manchester (2012)  
Figure 32. by Funky Fairy Gifts (2013)

Contemporary Folk Art 2 (2013)



Figure 33.

Key to Figure 33.



A selection of items of contemporary folk art bought on ebay.co.uk:

1. "Girls rhinestone pageant princess bling shoes" by scottishangel1986
2. "Morris dancer earrings" by beadybeadshop
3. "Romany knuckleduster charm, Sparkly Blue/ silver Baby Bling" by tikul
4. "Handmade Customised Phone Cases Bling Gems Cabochons" by kelaldrige
5. "Hand customised bling poppy" by1955davina
6. "Romany Bling Pram Charm Personalised" by Leahjade2007
7. "Bling plug guards" by pinkboutiquex
8. "Barbie Doll Embellished BSamsung Galaxy S3 Phone Case Bling Effect" by princessbarbie-2012
9. "Pink Girly Glitter Decoden Iphone Case" by decodazzle2013
10. "Bling Romany gypsy baby spoons Set of 3" by pinkboutiquex
11. "Personalised Christmas bauble bling romany baubles" by eemilie101
12. "Customised I Phone 4/4s case" by mandamoo1303
13. "Christening Unisex - Baby Bling Cross Romany Dummy Clip with Cross Charm" by tikul
14. "Bling Romany baby shoes" by babylicious-boutique
15. "Baby Bling Romany" by Linda2009Hills

Appendix 3.

***Making Traditions | Practising Folk***

DVD footage from exhibition at the People's History Museum, April 30<sup>th</sup> 2014