

The English sporting ballad as an expression of Anglican culture

Paul Newsham

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to present a study of the English sporting ballad as a sub-genre of the broadside ballad which became popular in the seventeenth century with the spread of cheap printed materials. After necessarily defining the sporting ballad, the roots of the genre will be traced back to the lyrical poetry of the classical civilizations, through the epic poetry of northern European cultures to an example early modern English poetry extolling the virtues of the Cotswold Games. The process by which the growth of participation in mass sports coupled with the emergence of the broadside ballad genre created fertile ground for the English sporting ballad to flourish will also be explained. The songs will then be placed in their historical context as vehicles for the promotion of values identified with Anglican culture and which were anathema to the Puritan or Non-conformist mind. This will be followed by an analysis of a selection of the ballads to illustrate how exactly the types of social behavior which would have been frowned upon in Puritan circles, such as drinking, gambling and the wearing of flamboyant clothing, were regularly celebrated in the ballads.

KEY WORDS

ballad, sporting, English, Puritan, Anglican.

Introduction

On my first encounter with the genre of the English sporting ballad I was reminded of a comment made by Hugh Kearney in his comprehensive study: *The British Isles. A history of four nations* [1, p. 193]. While discussing religious divisions in eighteenth century England, he remarks:

The dominant Anglican culture embodies attitudes towards leisure which were criticised in dissenting circles. Racing, gambling, theatre-going, card-playing and dancing were all activities tolerated and often encouraged within the dominant culture. At a popular level, the village alehouse was the secular counter-part of the parish church.

When one examines the content of these sporting ballads with their bawdy descriptions of village fetes, blood-sports, drinking and gambling, it appears that they, in a sense, promote what Kearney describes as Anglican culture. This motivated the carrying out of a study of the genre in order to place it in its historical context as something promoting the Anglican view of life as opposed to that propagated by Puritans and dissenting Non-conformists.

The lack of any reference to English sporting ballads in any British sporting encyclopaedia, including the most recently published, further aroused my interest. *The Encyclopaedia of British Sport*, published in 2000 and edited by Richard Cox, Grant Jarvie and Wray Vamplew [2], for example, has an entry on sporting art but no mention of sporting ballads. Perhaps more surprisingly, *The Encyclopaedia of Traditional British Rural*

Sports of 2005, edited by Tony Collins, John Martin and Wray Vamplew [3], with its focus on the importance of folklore to traditional sports, contains no entries regarding sporting music or popular ballads. The English sporting ballad, therefore, is worthy of study not only in terms of its fascinating cultural and historical contexts but also because it seems to have escaped the notice of British cultural historians.

It is important at this stage to define exactly what the English sporting ballad is and in order to do that one must look at the broader definition of the ballad. The ballad is often defined, quite simply, as in Princeton University's *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, as "a short narrative song" which is "preserved and transmitted orally among illiterate and semi-literate people" [4, p. 62]. This definition serves the early period of the ballad well enough, though from the period of Romanticism folk ballads came to be treated as a higher form of art and used as a literary genre of poetry. The later emergence of the broadside ballad, transmitted as it was in printed form to be sung by the people, also illustrates that the ballad, later in its existence, was enjoyed by the literate. The encyclopaedia also lays out the features of a ballad as firstly being focused on a single important event or episode, secondly as being dramatic and finally as being impersonal. Ballads are oral in nature with the story being paramount and thus "language is plain and formulaic" [4, p. 62]. They contain lots of repetition for mnemonic purposes and are all "essentially lyrical poems with greater or lesser infusion of lyrical elements" [4, p. 63].

As Eric Nebeker, in his essay posted on The University of California at Santa Barbara Broadside Ballad Archive website explains, the broadside ballad was printed on one side of a sheet of paper, sung and sold on the streets of London and other large towns. It covered the traditional ballad topics such as tales of knights, battles and chivalric love but also “current events, religious issues, wonders and ‘monstrous’ happenings (such as the births of deformed children), and other timely topics” [5]. To Nebeker’s list of broadside ballad topics we can add sports as all the songs which will be analysed in this paper can be classified as broadside ballads. This is a very important point when looking at the sporting ballad from a cultural perspective due to the ubiquity of this type of verse.

Broadside ballads were pasted on walls in alehouses and sung by regular folk. According to Nebeker, they were, “[printed with the names of familiar tunes to which they could be sung (...) were more than art, more than song. They were, in a sense promiscuous-available to all and used in all kinds of ways. Thus, broadside ballads really were everywhere”. The importance of the broadside form of ballad to British cultural history is evident. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, Nebeker points out that “there were more copies of ballads in circulation than just about any other kind of printed work”. It follows logically then that the English sporting ballad can be broadly defined as a broadside ballad which tells the story of a sporting episode or event.

The roots of the sporting ballad

The origins of the ballad in England are certainly at least as old as the year 1300 which is the date of the manuscript of *Judas*, the oldest known British ballad [4, p. 63]. In order to trace the roots of the sporting ballad, however, it is necessary to go much further back in time to the classical civilisations as well as the barbarian cultures of Northern Europe and their tradition of hymns and chorally performed poetry exalting the heroes of their sports. It is relevant not only to look at the traditions of lyrical poetry which most closely resemble the ballad in terms of form, but also at the traditions of epic poetry which specifically resemble the sporting ballad in terms of content.

We begin in Mesopotamia by looking at hymns celebrating sporting prowess. Donald Kyle, in his study of sport and spectacle in the ancient world, gives specific examples of Mesopotamian sport from literature such as The Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, describing a struggle between Gilgamesh, King of Uruk (c 2700 BC) and a rival, Enkidu, with wrestling imagery: “They seized each other, they bent down like expert (wrestlers)” [6, p. 27]. For Mesopotamian civilisation, athletics were associated with the celebration of festivals and leadership and kingship. As Kyle explains, “Shulgi, King of Ur 111 (c2094-2047BC) supposedly performed physical feats in the courtyard of the temple at Ur, and hymns credit him with feats of athletics and trials of strength”. One of such hymns, for example praises the running of a 200 mile round trip between two religious festivals in Nippur and Ur in one day [6, p. 28]. Due to the lack of any evidence to the contrary, this appears to be the oldest example of song dedicated to sport in the ancient world.

When one thinks of the connection between ancient civilisations and sport, Ancient Greece, with its great festivals of games, immediately springs to mind. When tracing Greek antecedents of the English sporting ballad, the work of Homer is important for, as Kyle points out, his epics “provide the earliest and greatest descriptions of athletic competitions in Western literature” [6, p. 54]. It is important at this stage to point out that Homer’s epics are quite distinct from the ballad as ballads should, by definition, contain lyrical elements. However, the sporting ballad shares certain characteristics with particular books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as they both contain narrative stories with sport as a partial theme. As with the above-mentioned Mesopotamian examples, what is also interesting about Homer’s sports-related epics is that they were written to be sung.

The Ancient Greeks also developed a tradition of singing odes in praise of their sporting heroes. The ode was used by Pindar, and later by Bacchylides to describe the sacrifices and effort necessary for sporting victory. Pindar, for example, describes athletes’ victories in his odes, ascribing them to the piety of the victor, good fortune and the play of the Gods. It is the work of Bacchylides, however, that is perhaps more relevant to this paper because he was of a lower social sphere than Pindar being more understandable to the Hellenic mind and was to a greater extent than Pindar, widely read or heard by the average person. This popular form gives Bacchylides’ odes a much greater relevance to popular broadside ballads, being similarly unsophisticated musically and aesthetically, yet of great cultural importance. Bacchylides also gives much more detail about sporting victory. For example, he provides a full thirteen verses on the running of the horse Pherenicus while Pindar only gives a brief mention of the same event [7, p. 56]. The work of Bacchylides is perhaps the best illustration of how the Ancient Greeks glorified sporting success in their verse. Yet we may also observe the phenomenon in ancient civilizations far-removed from the Mediterranean.

The Ancient Celts, as pointed out by Polish sports historian E Piasecki (1929) in his history of physical education, “were a group of keen and valiant tribes in the exercises of the body” [cited by 8]. Indeed, one could argue that their tradition of national games based around Tara in Ireland (known as the Aonach Tailtui) is even older than that of Ancient Greece. That is certainly the point of view which is expressed by Sean J Egan in his book *Celts and their games and pastimes* [9]. Egan’s book is the first to gather all sources of Celtic sport in one place and he describes sports such as horse racing, foot racing with obstacles and hammer throwing as taking place at the ancient Tara games. The game of hurling, which is still played to large crowds in modern Ireland, is claimed by Egan as being prehistoric and dating back at least 3000 years. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that such a musical and sporting people as the Celts should also mention sporting skill and prowess in their verse. Indeed, Gaelic football (Ghaelach Peil) is mentioned in the *Tain Cuailnge* (Cattle Raid of Cooley) epic, part of the Ulster cycle, as being played by the great mythological hero of Celtic literature, Cu-Chulain. Cu-Chulain is also mentioned as being playful and skilful with wrestling and playing ball.

The Viking societies of Northern Europe also used their epic literature to praise sporting prowess. Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* contain a number of protagonists' boasts about their skills in various sporting activities such as archery, wrestling, swimming, sailing and ski-running. This is particularly true of *the Saga of Sigurd the Crusader and his Brothers Eyestein and Olaf* [10] with its ale-table boasts of prowess in snow-skating and archery. Similarly, the tribes of Anglo-Saxon England had a tradition of epic poetry with sport appearing as a partial theme. In *Beowulf*, we see the protagonist challenged by Unferth, who mocks Beowulf's foolishness for attempting a swimming contest in the North Sea with Breca, claiming that Beowulf was the loser. Beowulf responds to these taunts by claiming that he is the ablest swimmer alive, and regales his listeners with a fantastic story about how he swam the North Sea in full armour while carrying his sword, slayed nine gigantic sea-monsters and still won the swimming-contest, dragging the defeated Breca behind him with one hand.

So we see that even though the ballad, in the strictest sense of the term, did not arrive in England until at least the eleventh century, the idea of sung poetry celebrating sporting heroes was a much older tradition. There were possibly many more Anglo-Saxon epic stories with sport as a partial theme, though there is no written evidence to substantiate this. The later Christian Anglo-Saxon scholars, such as Bede and the Chroniclers, were more concerned with describing issues of politics and religious conversion in the Dark Ages than retelling the heroic tales of their pagan forefathers. It is necessary, therefore, to move forward to the England of the Middle Ages and the evidence that exists of ballads and songs connected with sport from this period.

Much of what we know about the early performance of verse in England is thanks to Joseph Strutt's monumental survey, *The Sports and Pastimes of England from the Earliest Period* [11]. Strutt traces the roots of the English ballad singer from the bardic traditions of the Britons to the Anglo-Saxon Gleemen who celebrated the deeds of the great and the good in heroic poems which were sung to the accompaniment of the lyre [11, p. 148]. He then goes on to describe how, with the coming of the Normans, Gleemen were replaced by minstrels who comprised "rhymers, singers, story-tellers, jugglers, relaters of heroic actions, buffoons and poets" [11, p. 152]. It is with these imported French songsters that we start to see the epic poem embellished with rhymes. Another type of minstrel, the *jestour*, produced "compositions (...) consisting of particular tales and romances, for the entertainment of public companies, on occasions of joy and festivity" [11, p. 154]. Minstrels were hired for parish festivals, such as those of the Whitsun ale, throughout the Middle Ages and achieved the status of being protected by the most influential members of society. Strutt goes on to describe how minstrels eventually lost their status in society and were classed at the same level as vagabonds in the later reign of Elizabeth 1 (reiterated by Oliver Cromwell in 1656). Minstrels were metamorphosed into public ballad singers, singers of popular stories in public at wakes, fairs and church-ales. According to Strutt [11, p. 230], "the Ballads multiplied with extraordinary rapidity in the reigns of Elizabeth, James 1 and Charles 1". It is these descendants

of the Gleemen, the minstrels and the public ballad singers that would first have performed the English sporting ballad.

To understand the transition from the epic verse of Old English literature and its sporadic references to sporting feats and the emergence of a genre of ballad devoted wholly to sporting events, one must understand the growing popularity of sports in medieval England. A vivid portrayal of this popularity is provided by William Fitzstephens' twelfth century description of the oldest recreations and games of the Citizens of London (*Descriptio Nobillissimae Civitatis Londoniae*). In a paragraph titled *De Lusi* (About Play), Fitzstephens writes [12, p. 3]:

After the midday the entire youth of the City goes to the fields for the famous game of ball. The students of the several branches of study have their ball; the followers of the several trades of the city have a ball in their hands. The elders, the fathers, and men of wealth come on horseback to view the contests of their juniors, and in their fashion sport with the young men; and there seems to be aroused in these elders a stirring of natural heat be viewing so much activity and by participation in the joys of unrestrained youth.

This scene is clearly a description of an early form of association football. Fitzstephens goes on to describe many other public recreational and sporting activities such as horse-racing, wrestling and animal-baiting which were being enjoyed by many of the London populace at this time. Joseph Strutt (1801) gives further detailed accounts of the popularity of the myriad of sports and games being played in medieval England. A combination of the emergence of the ballad as an English form of verse, the rising popularity of ballad performance at public festivities and the growth of popular sports in the Middle Ages provided fertile ground for the appearance of the English sporting ballad. Indeed, we can see sport as a partial or even main theme in some of the earliest recorded English ballads.

The main source of the earliest ballads from this period is the collection of over three hundred ballads of Francis James Child compiled in the late nineteenth century. The oldest of the ballads, *Judas*, has already been mentioned as dating as far back as the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Many of the other ballads are more difficult to date and it cannot be said with any certainty that they date from before 1600 as they were taken from broadside ballads which came into print much later. This is certainly the case with those Child ballads that are interesting to this paper, including those discussing the adventures of Robin Hood.

The Robin Hood legend is thought to have originated in the fifteenth century, though whether the Robin Hood ballads listed in Child's anthology are so old is unclear. Stephen Knight, in his authoritative study, *Robin Hood A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, informs us that seven Robin Hood ballads survive from before 1600 and twenty-seven from the seventeenth century [13, p. 7]. He goes on to explain that the pre-1600 ballads were among the very earliest printed forms of verse [13, p. 49].

One of the Robin Hood ballads is particularly interesting as it celebrates his skill as an archer. In a sense, '*Robin Hood's Chase*' describing Robin's victory in an archery contest for a Queen Katherine and his subsequently being chased by a King Henry (it has been suggested that this refers to

Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon placing the ballad in the sixteenth century) could be described as among the earliest English sporting ballads. Although the chase is the main theme of the ballad, the reference to sport is also evident in the song [14, p. 346].

Yet there is one Child ballad which is certainly believed to have dated well before 1600 and has sport as its main theme. *The Ballad of Chevy Chase* celebrates a noble hunting party on the Cheviot Hills and is believed to date back to as early as the 1430's. It was certainly written down as *The Hunting of Cheviot* in *The Complaynt of Scotland* which was printed about 1540 and could lay a claim to being the first English sporting ballad. Child gives two versions of the ballad, and an excerpt from the second version may act as an illustration of its sporting nature [14, p. 398]:

*GOD prosper long our noble king, our liffes and saftyes all!
A woefull hunting once there did in Chevy Chase befall.*

*To driue the deere with hound and horne Erle Percy took
the way:*

The child may rue that is vnborne the hunting of that day!

As the Middle Ages end and the Early Modern period begins, the tradition of popular English sports is already well-established. This is evidenced by the holding of Robert Dover's Cotswold Games, also described as the first English Olympics. The existence of a form of regional (or even national) games at this stage in English history illustrates the extent to which sport had gripped the national imagination and the remarkable collections of verse, *Annalia Dubrensia* (The Annals of Dover), was compiled to celebrate the event. Although the exact starting date of the Games is unclear, with estimates ranging from the mid-sixteenth century to the second decade of the seventeenth century, many details of the event are recorded.

The Games were held on what has now been renamed as Dover's Hill, then known as Kingcombe Plain, above the town of Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. They took place on the Thursday and Friday of Whit-Week, or the week of Whitsun, which usually fell between mid May and mid June [15, pp. 18-25]. The games played at the Cotswolds are clear from the illustration produced in 1636 which appears in Gosart's edition of the compilation. As Anthony à Wood (1813) notices, there were [cited in 16, p. ix]:

*Men playing at cudgels, wrestling, leaping, pitching the bar,
throwing the iron hammer, handling the pyke, leaping over
the heads of men kneeling, standing upon their heads. Also
the dancing of women, men hunting and coursing the hare
with hounds and greyhounds with a castle built of boards
on a hillock, with guns therein firing, and the picture of the
great director capt. Dover on horseback, riding from place
to place*

In a sense, any discussion of *Annalia Dubrensia*, in terms of tracing the roots of the English sporting ballad, should be placed before the Child ballads as, in the same way as the epic poems of Germanic literature, it contains poetry rather than song, of course with sport as its theme. However, from a purely historical and chronological perspective it is important that we discuss *Annalia Dubrensia* here. For, according to Celia Haddon, in her comprehensive account of the Cotswold Games [15, p. 25], *Annalia Dubrensia* was published in 1636 to counter the increasing criticism from

Puritan elements of the Games' licentious nature. Thus, we first start to see English verse about sport and games in the wider context of English religious and social history in the Early Modern period.

Penned by such well-known poets as Michael Drayton, Ben Jonson, Thomas Randolph, and Thomas Heywood, the poems in the *Annalia* not only praise Dover but also display loyalty to the late King James. The poems are also characterised by the repeated disdain shown for the Puritan opposition. Ben Johnson's contribution, with its talk of '*the glories of our blesses Jeames*' and '*hypocrites*' and '*envie*' is a good example of both these features [16, p. 23]:

*I cannot bring my Muse to dropp, Vies Twixt Cotswold, and
the Olimpicke exercise:*

*But I can tell thee Dover, how thy Games Renew the glories
of our blesses leames;*

*How they doe keep alive his memorie; With the Glad Coun-
trei, and Posteritie:*

*How they advance, true Love, and neighbourhood, And doe
both Church, and Common-wealth the good,*

*In spite of Hipocrites, who are the worst, Of Subjects; Let
such envie, till they burst*

The disdain for Puritans evident in *Annalia Dubrensia* is central to the theme of the following paragraphs where the historical context of emergence of the English sporting ballad in seventeenth century England will be explained.

The historical context

Placing the English sporting ballad in its wider historical context essentially means talking about its religious context. Any cultural history is affected by religion, even if we take into account the modern phenomenon of secularisation, and this is particularly true of English history in the period which is relevant to this paper. When considering the historical roots of the great religious divisions in English society, it becomes clear that the sporting ballad represents the culture of one side of these divisions, namely, the Anglican side.

The sixteenth century was witness to extraordinary religious changes, the most notable of which, of course, being that England ceased to be part of the Roman Catholic Church. The century also saw the re-emergence of the old idea that subjects should follow the religious practises of their rulers. Yet it was Henry VIII's need for a male heir, rather than any particular religious conviction, that led to the split with the Catholic Church. In 1534, Henry was named supreme head of the church in England and the country started on the road to being Protestant. Yet there were no major changes in doctrine as Henry was essentially a religious conservative and it was rather under the rule of Edward VI that the old faith was suppressed. The Counter-Reformation under Edward's Catholic elder sister Mary was short-lived (1553-1558) and it fell to Elizabeth I to find a religious settlement.

Resisting pressure from Calvinistic Protestants, Elizabeth compromised, signalling the true foundation of the Anglican Church. The Act of Uniformity and the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer were the tools by which this compromise was implemented. There was no abuse of the Pope in the litany, both consubstantial and transubstantial beliefs were

allowed and Royal injunctions stressed continuity with the past. It was under these conditions that the religious strife of later decades must be understood. When King James came to power it was not disgruntled Catholics he had to deal with initially, rather those Protestants i.e. Puritans who felt uncomfortable with the spiritual state of the country. As James VI of Scotland was travelling down to London to be crowned James I of England, he was presented with what was known as The Millenary Petition. Allegedly signed by a thousand Puritan preachers, the petition demanded the removal of Catholic symbols from the English church and a clearing up of the ambiguity in the 39 articles regarding the dispute between Calvinistic predestination and Catholic free will.

One of the most important acts of James' reign, in terms of relevance to this paper, was the 1618 Declaration of Sports (later reissued by Charles I in 1633). It was intended to resolve a dispute in Lancashire between Puritan ministers and a largely Catholic gentry about the practising of sports and entertainments on the Sabbath. The declaration, in the form of a book of sports, listed those activities, including archery, dancing, leaping and vaulting as permissible sports, together with May-games, Whitsun-ales and Morris-dances, exactly the type of activities to be exalted in the English sporting ballad. For literary historian, Gregory Semenza, it was no accident that the dispute took place in Lancashire. As Semenza points out [17, p. 98], "in Catholic Lancashire, whose numerous men and women were thought to be torn between the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church and simply opposed to Puritanism, sport occupies a vital position: The Anglican's church's allowance of sport shows potential converts it is not culturally puritanical".

It is generally viewed by historians that the Book of Sports represented a rebuke to Puritanism. By the early seventeenth century the reputation of Puritanism as being opposed to sport and merry-making was already well-established. As Dennis Brailsford points out [18, p. 33], "Holy days, wakes and festivals were primarily seen as occasions for drunkenness, rioting and other immoral behaviour". So the Book of Sports seems to represent the first real sign of the cultural divide between dissenters and the Anglican Church over the type of activities so prevalent in the English sporting ballad.

However, Cindy Dyer, in her article on the historical context of the Declaration of Sports, argues that the situation in James' reign was a little more complex. According to Dyer, there was common ground between Anglican officials and Puritans over sport on Sundays and both groups were largely opposed to the 1618 Declaration of Sports [19]. Dyer goes on to explain that sabbatarianism was just as important to Anglican officials as it was to Puritans and the idea that the two groups were juxtaposed regarding Sunday sports is a misrepresentation. Kenneth Parker [20, p. 117], in his study of the English Sabbath, corroborates this point by citing an HMC Report of 1888 (HMC: Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IV London 1888, p. 391) stating that in May 1603 James issued instructions that secular officials were to ensure that the Sabbath day not be profaned with bearbaiting, dancing, bowling and other unlawful games and exercises. Dyer then points out that after the Gunpowder plot of 1605 it was Catholicism that became the key threat to the King's

authority in religious matters and that between 1605 and 1618 anti-Puritan sentiment diminished [19, pp. 44-45].

In fact, one could say that until James' reign, the Anglican Church had been largely Calvinist in outlook despite the Elizabethan compromise. It was not until 1604 that we see the rise of Arminianism and the idea of the universal extant of God's Grace in the established church. By June 1626 this shift to Arminianism had led Charles I to forbid all predestinarian teaching by royal proclamation, outlawing Calvinism throughout England. It was not until the 1630's, however, that the shift to Arminianism brought about a more liberal attitude towards Sunday recreation. Archbishop Laud's anti-sabbatarian campaign concentrated on the protection of church wakes and in 1633 Charles reissued the Declaration of Sports with an additional clause protecting them. So, on the eve of the run up to the Civil War period, the definition of a Puritan or Non-Conformist had shifted from a Calvinist Predestinarian to anyone who believed in a recreation-free Sabbath and who refused to implement the declaration.

The civil strife which shook the British Isles in the seventeenth century arose out of disputes that had religious issues at their core and it was in Presbyterian Scotland that the first signs of war emerged. The imposition of the Common Book of Prayer led to the Bishops' Wars north of the border and provided the largely Puritan parliament in England the perfect opportunity to limit the King's power. The situation was exacerbated by the Catholic rebellion in Ireland of 1642 and by this point the King and the parliamentarians were both gathering their forces for battle. When, in 1644, the Presbyterians joined forces with the English Parliamentarians the country was set for a full-scale civil war.

The Interregnum which followed the execution of Charles and the rise of Oliver Cromwell has become notorious for attacks on cultural activity by Puritan elements who were now the political power holders in England. Along with the burning of books and the destruction of church art (most notably the stained glass windows) came the banning and subsequent burning of the Declaration of Sports. Clearly, the idea of sports and games, particularly on the Sabbath, was not acceptable to the hard-line Puritanical elements in Cromwell's republic. It is in this context that one must understand the Restoration period. As Bessie A Gladding [21] points out in her article on music as a social force in seventeenth century England, although the Puritans were not as anti-music as has been suggested, the Restoration was a period in which all people, great and small, important and unimportant, seemed to have within them a passion for expressing themselves through the medium of music. Further, Robert Halley, in his book on Puritanism and non-conformity in Lancashire paints a vivid picture of the cultural release which the Restoration represented [22, p. 344]:

The morris-dancers, the pipers and fiddlers, the bear-wards, the wrestlers, the rush-bearers, and the players, came forth in extra-ordinary gaiety and strength, as if they had been refreshed by their long repose. The restraint which Puritanism had imposed upon boisterous mirth and Sunday sports having suddenly yielded to the popular excitement, the people of Lancashire were determined to enjoy their newly acquired liberty and obtain some compensation for the gravity and dullness of their last twelve summers. The old

times had returned and the merry-makers resolved to invest them with more than their old honours. People would be merry at the expense of those who had compelled them to refrain from the sports of their boyhood.

The crowning of Charles II in May 1660 was supposed to represent the advent of a period of religious tolerance and the Declaration of Breda set out a manifesto to heal and settle. However, peace and stability remained elusive with Episcopalians and Presbyterians competing for ecclesiastical superiority in a climate of pervasive religious intolerance. It was under these conditions that a narrow form of Anglicanism was imposed under the Clarendon Code, ending duality of religious practice. Religious non-conformity now became synonymous with political disloyalty and during the 1680's and the period of James II's succession crisis, the Anglican hierarchy cooperated in a vigorous persecution of religious dissenters.

Although the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 established a political stability which had been lacking for most of the century, religious unity had not been achieved. A bitter hostility between the established church and the dissenting sects remained and, as Hugh Kearney points out, this religious divide became key to understanding the cultural landscape of England at this time: "What seems to have occurred during these two centuries was that for many the sense of belonging to a particular Church replaced an earlier cultural identity. The divisiveness of the feudal period gave way to a new form of divisiveness based on religion" [1, p. 184].

The Glorious Revolution is traditionally seen as a victory both for progress and Protestantism in general. The period following the Revolution, the monarchy of William and Mary, is also seen as a time of religious tolerance. However, although the Toleration Act of 1689 and the removal of the Corporation Act (1662) and the Test Act (1673) allowed dissenting Protestant groups to worship freely (none of these acts applied to Catholics), dissenters were still excluded from holding public offices and attending universities leading to a perpetuation of distrust and hostility between the cultures of established church and dissent. As Kearney points out, "Episcopal culture was dominant in the universities, the major public schools and the army and navy as well as in the church itself" [1, p. 190], whereas dissenting culture had strength in the North and West and London.

So England moved into the eighteenth century "a society deeply divided on religious grounds" [1, p. 192]. The unity created by the fear of James II's Catholicism proved temporary and the Occasional Conformity Act (1711) and Schism Act (1714), although later repealed under the Hanoverians, entrenched these divisions. While the fear of the Pretender kept tensions under control in the first half of the eighteenth century, the cultural differences between established Church and dissent were widening. For Kearney, the growth of consumer society at this time can be seen as an indication of the strength of the dominant culture. The dissenters were on the defensive, insisting that "going to horse races, cricketing and playing at cards are not going to be practised and in no ways allowed by professors of the gospel" [1, p. 193]. "Fiddling and vanity and singing vain songs" were also discouraged.

From the Reformation period to the mid-eighteenth century we see a development of the Anglican Church into an institution which represented not just a form of worship but also a cultural way of life. This way of life involved not only a progressive tolerance of the sports and entertainments of a growing consumer culture but also a conservative tolerance of those festivities which predated the Reformation. In his empirical study of the different Protestant sects which existed in England, John C Sommerville points out that by the 1690s Anglicanism realised it had to win the hearts and minds of the English people. He goes on to state that "surely it is this group, whose history has yet to be written, who deserve to be called the first Anglicans-the first to sense the peculiar and embattled nature of their English heritage and to organise themselves to promote it" [23, p. 132].

This is the context under which the proliferation of the English sporting ballad, particularly in the broadside form, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be understood. The desire to win the hearts and minds of the people has clear parallels with James I's attempt to lure Catholics in Lancashire towards Anglicanism with his Declaration of Sports. For most of English society, the broadside ballad was one of the very few forms of written language to which they would have been exposed. Clearly, the tolerance of ballads celebrating sports, gambling and merry-making by the established church is of deep cultural significance.

Analysis of the ballads

Before looking at a selection of the ballads it is useful to remind ourselves of what Hugh Kearney wrote about the divide between Anglican and Non-conformist culture. Kearney stated that it was activities such as "racing, gambling, theatre-going, card-playing, dancing" that were criticised by dissenters and encouraged by the dominant Anglican culture and that "at a popular level the village alehouse was the secular counter-part of the parish church" [1, p. 193]. He also notes how the growth of consumer culture became associated with this dominant culture. He quotes an eighteenth century commentator (no source provided) as pointing out that it was at church that:

in a populous city in the north, the macebearer cleared the way for Mrs Mayoress who came sidling after him in an enormous fan-hoop of a pattern that had never been seen in those parts. At another church [he] saw several negligees with furbelowed aprons ... but these were woefully eclipsed by a burgess' daughter just come from London who appeared in a Trollopee of Slammerkin with treble ruffles to the cuffs, pinked and gymped and the sides of the petticoats drawn up in festoons.

Kearney makes the salient point that "such, fashions were unlikely to be seen in dissenting chapels". We will, therefore, look at how certain types of behaviour which dissenters would have frowned upon are celebrated in the songs. Beginning with the frequent references to gambling and drinking, we will then see how the ballads reflect the growth of consumer culture with their descriptions of the fancy forms of dress so vulgar to the Puritan mind.

A selection of twelve sporting ballads has been used as the basis for this analysis. The majority of the ballads (seven)

are taken from the 1977 *English Sporting Ballads* album by The High Level Ranters and Martin Wyndham-Reed [24]. This is a useful source as the songs on the album cover many different types of sports and historical periods. Most of the rest of the ballads (four) come from the Bodleian Library Broadside Ballads Database [25]. Ballads were chosen from this source as they were similar in theme to those on the above-mentioned album. The other ballad was chosen from *The Manchester Ballads* [26] by Henry Boardman and Roy Palmer and refers directly to one of the ballads in the abovementioned album.

We begin with a look at references to gambling in *The Boat Race* from the *English Sporting Ballads* album [24]. The sleeve notes inform us that the ballad describes a race between Clasper and Coombes on December 18th 1844. It is clear from the ballad that one of the main sources of entertainment for the crowds was to bet money on the outcome:

*The stakes is laid all things made right they posted down
their tin, sir
On Wednesday we do hope and trust that Clasper he will
win, sir
And when they get to Lemington the loser will repine, sir
When he finds that he has lost his stakes upon the river
Tyne, sir
Upon the River Tyne*

We see a similar reference to laying bets in the ballad *The Great Foot Race* which, according to the album sleeve notes [24], tells of an 1845 race between Richard Hornby and George Eastham (the Flying Clogger) over two hundred yards at Preston, Lancashire. It again seems as though gambling is one of the main forms of entertainment for the spectators:

*The blair of Lancashire was there a man of high renown
To cheer yer spirits up me lads and let the bets go down
For Clogger he has won this race as he has done many more
He's taken the bets on many a man for one pound or five
score*

In *The Charcoal Black and the Bonny Grey* [24], which portrays the sport of cockfighting, it is clear that gambling is the main source of entertainment:

*They all went in to take a cup, The cock-s they then were
soon set up
For ten guineas a side these cocks did play, The charcoal
black and the bonny grey
But when these two cocks came on the sod, The Biggar lads
said now what odds
'No odds, no odds!' the rest did say, We'll hold our guineas
and beat your grey*

When it comes to pugilistic sports, the description of gambling becomes key to the storylines of the ballads. We can see this first of all in *The Ballad of Trubshaw and Green* which describes a wrestling match from the second quarter of the eighteenth century [24]:

*By the wrestling rules of Bunny, this famous match was
made
Between All-in Green and Trubshaw, and heavy sums were
laid
When they stepped into the ring Trub-shaw first did All-in
fling*

*Then for Trubshaw we'll shout huzza, he's sure to win the
day*

*A Staffordshire wrestling man who'd closely watched the
play
He offered on his favourite a weighty sum to lay
And said to All-in Green, „I see thy courage sink“
To our Trubshaw we'll shout huzza, he's sure to win the day*

*Said All-in Green's mistress, „A wager I will hold
Of fifty bright Guineas in true and shining gold
That Richard throws his man, let him do the best he can
For Trubshaw you may shout huzza, he'll never win the day“*

In *The Ballad of Spring and Langan*, which describes the 1820 fight between Englishman Tom Spring and Irishman Jack Langan for the bare-knuckle boxing world championship, one of the protagonists actually tries to hustle his opponent and his backers by fighting deliberately weakly in the first twenty rounds in order that more bets are laid on the fight. The scheme is spotted by his opponents' backers and the fighters soon return to normal competition [24]:

*Then Spring with cunning began the fight, in order to get
on more bets, sir
But for 20 rounds or more he appeared to be quite weak, sir
The friends of Spring were up to that, the odds they still kept
betting,
And Langan's friends took up the same, till they found that
Spring was scheming,
For they began to smell a rat, and found out Spring's inten-
tion,*

To lead them all into a stake, and leave their pockets empty
Gambling, then, seems to be an integral part of many of the sporting events covered in the ballads. Such is its importance that, as we have seen in the last two songs analysed, the plot of the ballad is partly based on the bets made on the event. It is a similar story with the consumption of alcohol. Time and again we see evidence that drinking was part and parcel of attending the sporting events described.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, drinking is described as an important element in the jolly race days and wakes often described in English sporting ballads. This is true of a ballad celebrating the Manchester races which, according to Harry Boardman and Roy Palmer, took place at Kersal Moor between 1729 and 1846. In the chorus of *From the Land of Cakes to the land of Cotton*, we see a list of public houses mentioned as well as the amusing observation that the local pub landlords will be getting rich as a result of the races [26]:

*They'll eat and drink at a pretty pace, Bridgwater, Bull's
Head i' the' Market Place,
White Horse and Spread Eagle, Hanging-ditch, Landlords
are growing all very rich*

We also see drinking mentioned in a ballad celebrating the Newcastle Wakes which were held throughout the Middle Ages, though in slightly more modest terms [24]:

*And whilst we sing, each year shall bring our festival so gay,
With ale and cakes, our merry wakes Upon St. Matthew's
day*

Drinking is also prevalent in ballads which describe specific sporting events, such as *The Great Foot Race*. This time

the refrain at the end of each verse talks of drinking a toast to the success of the Clogger, the local hero [24]:

*We'll drink success to Clogger that man of courage bold
He won the prize at the five-barred gate and bore away the gold
And bore away the gold
He won the prize at the five-barred gate and bore away the gold*

The Boat Race ballad also mentions drinking a toast to the potential victor (if it is the local man) after the race is done [24]:

*And now if Clasper gains the day you'll all agree with me sir
In Durham and Northumberland there'll be a glorious spree sir
They'll fill their glass and drink this toast with hands together joined sir
Success to Clasper if he wins the race upon the Tyne sir
That race upon the Tyne*

Another reference to drinking is in *Alnwick Football Song* which describes an event which had been taking place on Shrove Tuesday at Alnwick in Northumbria for many hundreds of years. Once again we see a reference to drinking a toast, this time to the sporting event itself rather than just the victor [24]:

*Now Tommy's got home into town, Let's give him a huzar man
And drink a pint of good stone brew, On the strength of the football man
Here's a health and to his grace, Landlords and tenants all displaced
And every honest son see face, Next year shall kick the ball man
Next year shall kick the ball*

We are left in no doubt that drinking alcohol, along with gambling, constitute key elements of the sporting events described. People of a Puritan disposition must have shuddered on hearing such ballads. They would have been just as dismayed with the descriptions of the flamboyant clothing on show, evidence of the growing consumer culture which was in direct opposition to the Puritan ideal of a frugal existence.

The description of the flamboyant dress of (mainly female) spectators is relevant to those ballads describing sporting events which are also social days out. We can see this first in the ballad *Eccles Wakes*, dating from the early nineteenth century, according to an 1878 issue of *Notes and Queries* (No. 15, 13 April 1878 item 203) where it was found. The history of the wakes at Eccles, according to the locally-published website *Memories of Eccles*, is as such [27]:

*ECCLES WAKES were held over three days, beginning on the first Sunday after 25th August. This is the feast day of St. Mary, to whom the Parish Church is dedicated.
The Wakes are said to have had their origins in the ancient custom of rush bearing. People would bring cartloads of rushes to spread over the church floor. The carts and the people themselves would dress up for the occasion [sic] and celebrate with music and dance.*

By the 19th Century the Wakes had become a somewhat less than pious affair. Races and competitions were held as well as blood sports. These included bull and bear-baiting and cock fighting

When one reads or listens to the lyrics of *Eccles Wakes* one gets the impression of a riotously fun day out. The narrator talks of the "wonderful throng" of people dressed up in their best clothes, the cakes on sale and the banter between the cotton workers from the big town of Manchester just a few miles up the road and the local Eccles folk. Spectators from the larger town of Manchester mock the relatively humble dress of the narrator and his girlfriend. The description of the Manchester cotton workers' attire is evidence of the way people dressed up for such events [24]:

*Y'on fine dressing workfolk from Manchester town,
They strutted as if the whole Wakes were their own
Thou putters-out, warkers, yea, cutters, and all,
Dressed like masters and dames jeered me and my Moll*

We also see a description of fine dress in the ballad *Sporting Humours of the Races* describing a similar event in the Birmingham area [25]:

*Haste away without delay, Mind the ladies' frills and laces,
See them running on the hay, Coming home from _____
Races*

Followed by lines poking fun at the ladies' fashion of rustles on the back of dresses:

Lasses for to make them plump, Will wear a rustle on their rump

It is clear in the similarly titled ballad *The Humours of the Races* that the local gentry make an effort to dress in their finest clothes when attending such a sporting event [25]:

*And ladies grandly dress'd with dandy cap beside, Sir
They have a cabbage net to cover o'er their faces
With a footman at their heels they're coming to the races*

The extravagance of attire is described in much more detail when it comes to the common folk attending the same races:

*We've wonderful lasses that wear the flounc'd gown
We've wonderful dandies in country and town
We've wonderful bands through the city do flock
With their wonderful frills to hide their black smock*

The final example of flamboyant clothing is taken from a ballad describing an event which is still one of the most important social occasions in the English sporting calendar. *Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race* was written in 1880 to celebrate the event [25]:

*In their pretty dresses of coloured cotton, don't they fit tight
around the bottom
There's Poll and Jane as they row past, Looking through
their opera glass*

The regularity of references to the wearing of flamboyant clothing, along with those to drinking and gambling are surely evidence that the English sporting ballad in its popular broadside form promoted a non-puritanical way of life. Whether this constitutes an attempt at deliberate propaganda is not clear, though broadside ballads of a more overtly political nature were often very clear in their distaste for Puritan and non-conformist creeds.

Conclusion

The English sporting ballad stems from a long tradition of sung verse celebrating the virtues of sporting skill,

stretching right back to the earliest of the ancient civilizations. It can also be argued that the epic verse of Dark Age and early medieval Northern Europe, as much as the lyrical poetry of the ancients, was also a forerunner of the sporting ballad. In the medieval era, a combination of the import of Franco-Norman balladic culture and the growth in the popularity of sport in England led to the emergence of the genre. Once ballads started to be transmitted in the popular broadside form, they became an important means of transmitting cultural norms and values. In this context we see the sporting ballad identify itself with the Anglican side of the great religious division in England which developed from the Reformation through to the nineteenth century. This was evidenced by the preponderance of references to drinking, gambling and flamboyant dress in the selected ballads. Thus, the English sporting ballad came to represent an expression of Anglican culture.

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Correspondence should be addressed to: Paul Stephen Newsham
MA, ul. Staszica 19/9, Poznań 60-526, newshp@ifa.amu.edu.pl,
697 691 824