

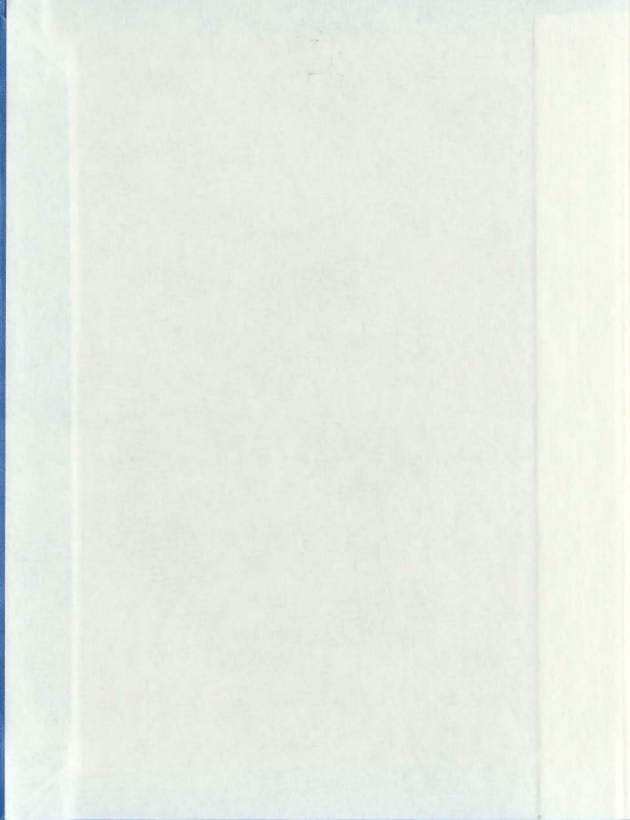
THE OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLIFE OF A
NORFOLK LURCHERMAN

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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JUSTIN PARTYKA



The Occupational Folklife of a Norfolk Lurcherman

by

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**A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**Department of Folklore
Memorial University of Newfoundland**

June 2001

St. John's

Newfoundland

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of little Jack

Long may the rats run in heaven

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the occupational folklife of a Norfolk lurcherman, an individual who hunts using the type of cross-bred running dog known as a lurcher. The study begins by exploring the sociocultural world of the lurcherman in the rural county of Norfolk, England, which has a rich tradition of lurchers being used by both poachers and professional warreners. The origins of the lurcher dog are discussed, highlighting its role as a counter-hegemonic force. Emphasis is placed upon the lurcherman's work technique, discussing the specific tools, informal knowledge and skills of the trade. Alongside this is the lurcher's central role within the work group. Ethnographic observation of the lurcherman examines how work technique is put into practice. Looking at the issues surrounding lurcher breeding emphasises its nature as a folk science. The study concludes with a speculation of the lurcherman's future.

Acknowledgements

While I spent many painstaking hours writing this thesis, it is inevitably the work of many minds, and would not exist without the much appreciated contributions of others. I must first thank Pete Carter for agreeing to be the main focus of my study. He was enthusiastic and supportive of my work, and patiently sat through many hours of interviews with me. Along with Pete, are the other lurchermen he put me in touch with, notably, Sammy Vaughn, John Stanway and Derek Clarkin. Their expertise was invaluable.

During the course of my research I met and interviewed many people who regrettably did not end up featuring in my final thesis. Regardless of their exclusion, each and everyone of them helped to introduce me to the fascinating world of hunting with dogs. A big thank you goes to the following: Bill Shorthose, Joint Master of the Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Foxhounds, and his wife Susan, whose kind hospitality was much appreciated and has not been forgotten; David Jones, Huntsman of the David Davies Foxhounds, and his wife Susan, for informing me about foxhunting and terrier work in Wales and putting much needed food in my belly; John Harrison, Huntsman of the Ullswater Foxhounds, and his wife Annie, who also welcomed me into their home and fed me; Barry Todhunter, Huntsman of the Blencathra Foxhounds; Trevor Adams, Joint Master and Huntsman of the Duke of Buccleuch's Foxhounds; Michael Hedley, Joint Master and Huntsman of The Border Hunt Foxhounds; John Hume, Master and Huntsman of the Cumbria Beagles; Roy Ellis; Tom and Connie Richardson; and finally Jack Grant and Eddie, who provided me with a good night's ratting.

Dr. Peter Narváez receives a much deserved thanks for agreeing to supervise this thesis during his busy schedule, and for helping the writing of it to go as quickly and smoothly as it did. Appreciation goes to the folklore department's bibliofiend Dr. Paul Smith for the kind loan of numerous books I consulted during my research, along with Dr. Martin Lovelace who was always willing to offer advice on this work when needed. I am extremely grateful to fellow folklore graduate student Bruce Mason for bringing to my attention the work of Jay Mechling which proved crucial in shaping my approach to this topic. I am also indebted to my fellow music lovers, Dr. Neil Rosenberg, Dr. Mike Shute, and Patrick Boyle whose conversations all helped to give me a much needed rest from the stress of academics.

I must not forget those people who are most important to me. Jessie, for putting up with me during what were often very trying times. Not only did she encourage and convince me to write this thesis, she was a sounding board for my ideas, rectified my occasional erratic spelling and punctuation, and was even able to turn me into a cartographer, all at the same time as being my best friend. Also Mum and Dad, for all the support they have provided me since I began university, especially in my decision to move to Newfoundland. I love you all. Finally, I want to thank the Grateful Dead—their music kept my sanity.

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Introduction

To use a local Norfolk expression, folklore fieldwork can be a “rum’un.”¹ Given the vagaries of fieldwork, a student of folklore might change the focus of his or her research if a more viable topic emerges in the field. As Bruce Jackson advises the folklorist going into the field: “be prepared to dump your plan entirely if something really fine presents itself.”² I can say from personal experience that Jackson offers some good advice. The topic pursued on a whim, oftentimes turns out to be most exciting and rewarding. This study exemplifies the pattern of changing plans when informants provide unanticipated data. My initial proposal to my department was based on the idea of undertaking a survey of folklore in Norfolk, England, my home (see maps 1 and 2). As expected, the vagueness of such an idea was met with criticism from my department, but my proposal was passed and along with my fellow folklore graduate students, I was let loose out into the field to begin my research.

Once in the field, it became quickly apparent to me that I would have to focus my research topic on one area of study if I was to return to Newfoundland with sufficient data upon which to base the writing of a thesis. Serendipity played a crucial role in this regard. On my return to England, I had been asked by the father of a fellow folklore student from British Columbia, to try and find him a Border terrier from an established line of working dogs which he could use for ratting and hunting nutria, which he does on a regular basis down in Northern Washington state. It was apparently extremely difficult to find any Border terriers in North America from a working line. I also learned that North American terrier men often consider the best working dogs to come from Great

Britain, and when looking for a dog they prefer it to have the blood lines of a British terrier. In my quest for a working Border terrier, it was suggested that I attend a special Border Terrier weekend which was being organised in Northumberland, in Northern England.

On attending the event I was introduced to the fascinating nature of the dog world. Although the weekend mainly focused upon the “show dog” aspect of the Border terrier, it was the working/hunting side to the dogs which I found most interesting. In a talk given by working terrier expert David Jones from Wales, I discovered the long tradition that surrounds the use of terriers as hunting dogs in Britain in their assistance to fox hound packs. When a fox goes to ground, a terrier would be entered into the fox’s den to either bolt it to the hounds, locate it for the terrier men to dig out and dispatch of, or when circumstances require, to kill it. I also discovered the dichotomy that typically exists between the show dogs versus working dog cultures and the deleterious effect that the show dog has had on working lines. As David Jones pointed out, the Border terrier has lost popularity today as a working dog because it is becoming increasingly difficult to find one that is capable of working. While David described his work with terriers in Wales, including the rescue of them from disused mines and quarries, along with answering questions about the use of working terriers, as a folklorist it started to become readily apparent to me that use of dogs for hunting is a rich folk culture based upon a tradition of informal knowledge and skills. While I unfortunately never did find the dog I was looking for, all was not lost. Instead what I did find was an exciting thesis topic.

My initial research on hunting with dogs took me on a three week field trip around England, Scotland and Wales, gradually learning more about this fascinating topic by interviewing terrier men, Masters of fox hounds, and lurchermen, while at the same time reading extensively on the topic. The area I found to be most interesting was the skills and traditions associated with the lurcherman. The lurcherman is an individual who hunts using the type of cross-breed running dog known as a lurcher. Ironically, this led me full circle and the main focus of thesis became a Norfolk lurcherman, Pete Carter.



Fig. 1. Lurcherman, Pete Carter with Rae, one of his many lurchers over the years.³

Although I already knew Pete as a friend, this was not based upon his interest in dogs. While I was aware that Pete had owned lurchers, it did not occur to me to identify him as a lurcherman, and it was a side of him I knew little about until now.

I first met Pete Carter about six or seven years ago. I was just learning to play guitar and I heard that he gave lessons at the music store in the town of King's Lynn which is about fifteen miles from my home. I got in touch with Pete and arranged to start having lessons from him. As I got to know Pete I discovered that being a musician was how he made his living. During the 1960s, while he was still a teenager, the band he played bass in, headed to Germany performing on the cut-throat bar and club circuit in much the same way that the Beatles had done just a few years before. Apart from the occasional odd-job, Pete has supported himself and his family through music. He is a multi-instrumentalist and gives lessons on almost any stringed instrument including six-string guitar, bass, sitar, mandolin, banjo, the Turkish ud, and flamenco guitar. Pete still plays bass occasionally in a rhythm and blues band, although in recent years he has concentrated on performing solo as a flamenco guitarist. As he discussed with me though, the lessons are his "bread and butter," as the demand for flamenco in rural Norfolk is not that great. Pete has persevered, and along with a growing local interest in the music, he has started to travel further to perform. This recently got him a gig on the sitar at an Indian themed twenty-first birthday party which was held at a large manor house near Leicester at which he performed amongst belly dancers and a sword swallower. Alongside this he has recorded two CDs, one of traditional flamenco pieces and the other a collection of multi-instrumental recordings which loosely fall into the category of world

music. Pete is currently composing new tracks for another CD he hopes to record during the summer of 2001. It was only when I interviewed Pete for my thesis that I started to learn of the other side to him—the passion he has for lurchers and rabbiting. I discovered that Pete's interest in this has deep rooted traditions within his own family and the area in which he lives, and the enthusiasm and knowledge he has on the subject even surpasses that of his musical side. Not only is Pete well read on many aspects of hunting, but he has also written extensively himself on the subject. This was mainly in the form of a regular article that Pete wrote under the name Stag Carter, which for many years appeared in the *Country Man's Weekly*, a magazine for fieldsports enthusiasts that receives national coverage in Great Britain. Largely drawing upon his own personal experiences as a lurcherman, Pete's articles have brought him nation-wide recognition for his expertise in the working of lurchers and other running dogs. While Pete describes himself, first and foremost as a musician, in that this is how he earns money, he attempts to live as self-sufficient lifestyle as possible, what he terms as "bucking the system," and sees his role as a lurcherman being central to this ideology.⁴

This thesis is a study of the occupational folklife of Pete Carter as a lurcherman in the twenty-first century. The use of the term *folklife* featured in this study comes from the definition provided by Roger Abrahams which suggests: "*folklife* commonly means the ways the group work together and the devices deployed by the group in carrying out that work."⁵ Because of the solitary nature of this occupation in which the work group is typically made up of just the lurcherman and his dog, the use of oral genres which have been traditionally collected by occupational folklorists do not fall within the realms of my

study. Instead I will focus upon the traditional aspects of Pete's occupation as a lurcherman with special reference made to work technique. To this end, I have formulated my ideas of work technique from the previous scholarship in this field by Robert McCarl—especially his pioneering theory of the "*canon of work technique* [which] refers to... [the] body of informal knowledge used to get the job done."⁶ In examining Pete's canon of work technique I will reveal how this is constructed around his informal knowledge of traditional skills used by both the professional warrener/rabbit catcher and the poacher, which both have deep rooted traditions within Norfolk. The essential role of the lurcher in this work will also be discussed. As E.G. Walsh has written, the lurcher "was and is a dog bred purely for work; and that work has not changed throughout the centuries."⁷ Developing the lurcher's central role as a working dog, I will draw upon Jay Mechling's scholarship on "folk traditions between human and nonhuman animals" and argue that the lurcher can in fact be seen as a member of the lurcherman's work group.⁸ Alongside this I will also discuss the long tradition that the lurcher has of being the poor man's dog, often associated with rural labourers, Gypsies and poachers, hence subversive and counter-hegemonic activities.

As a folklorist I came to this study of the lurcherman at a crucial time. Entering into the twenty-first century, the work of the lurcherman is clearly an occupation in passing. Pete's great-grandfather had made his living as a professional warrener/lurcherman. But already in Pete's own lifetime such a career is no longer a viable option. The work of the lurcherman has shifted from a professional occupation to merely being a pastime. The main causes for this can be seen as both sociocultural

change and the effects of ecological issues. Although it could be argued that such changes are inevitable in the shadow of historical evolution, this raises concerns for the folklorist interested in traditional and informal skills and work techniques such as those used by the lurcherman. Furthermore, at the time I began my research, the threat to this dying tradition of the lurcherman's work was further exacerbated by the current British Labour government's push to ban hunting with dogs.⁹ Because of these issues, as a folklorist I felt an urgency to document what remained of this traditional occupation before it was too late. While some of the occupational techniques of the lurcherman have been included in obscure magazines and the occasional book, these writings are generally hard to obtain for the average reader. As far as I am aware, no academic scholarship, especially from a folkloristic perspective, exists on the lurcherman. Hence my own work will be the first, but hopefully not the last.

In undertaking this study, I have broken my thesis down into the following chapters. Chapter 1, "The Sociocultural World of Pete Carter," serves as an introduction to Pete and his role as a lurcherman. In doing so, issues of environmental and familial influence will be discussed. The area of Norfolk in which Pete lives has a deep rooted tradition of using lurchers for hunting both legally and illegally (see map 3). His great-grandfather was a professional warrener in the area, and the infamous poacher Frederick Rolfe, celebrated in the book *I Walked By Night*, lived a few miles away. As a modern-day lurcherman, Pete is seen as tradition bearer of the regional and family folk culture which surrounds the occupation.

Chapter 2. "The Lurcher," discusses the history, usage, and development of the lurcher dog. As I will discuss, the exact origins of the lurcher are speculative at best. Central to an examination of the lurcher lies its role as both a subversive hunter and counter-hegemonic force. In looking at these aspects, I will explore the traditions of the lurcher within Norfolk and the various social groups who historically have used this dog. Pete's own experience with lurchers will also be discussed.

Chapter 3. "The Lurcherman's Work Technique: Tools and Knowledge of the Trade," examines the folklife which surrounds this occupation. Drawing upon the ideas of Robert McCarl, I will discuss the material culture of the lurcherman's work, and the construction and use of these items. This includes the lurcherman's essential tools of the "purse net" and the "long net" which are used to catch rabbits, and the esoteric knowledge needed to successfully work with these items. As well, the role of the ferret in the lurcherman's work will be explored. Alongside this is the crucial function of the lurcher within this occupational sphere and the techniques used to train and work with it. As I will argue, the lurcher must be seen as a member of the lurcherman's work group.

Chapter 4. "In the Field: An Ethnographic Observation of Pete at Work," shifts to the microcosmic perspective and examines Pete undertaking his work as a lurcherman. My ethnography follows Pete from the field to putting the rabbit in the pot. In doing so I explore Pete's use of informal skills and knowledge based upon his experiences as a lurcherman, to deal with specific situations encountered in the work environment. Once again the central role of the lurcher in this work will be focused upon including the use of

non-verbal communication between Pete and his dogs. This chapter also provides a review of the fieldwork process.

Chapter 5. "The Art of Lurcher Breeding: Concepts of a Folk Science," investigates the crafting of the lurcher as a working dog. Central to this aspect of the lurcherman's occupational folklife is the quest for the perfect dog based upon each individual lurcherman's specific needs. The informal approach that the lurcherman brings to the issues of genetics allows lurcher breeding to be seen as a folk science. The classic dichotomy that exists between the hegemonic world of the show/pet dog, and the counter-hegemonic one of the working dog will also be introduced.

Conclusion. "The Lurcherman's Future: An Occupation Hanging in the Balance." provides a speculative evaluation of whether this traditional occupation will continue to exist into the twenty-first century, and the implications this creates for the folklorist. The contribution that this study makes to folkloristics will be addressed, along with ideas for future study which derive from this work, especially in the realm of occupational folklife scholarship and working animals.

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted during the months of July and August 2000, and completed in January 2001. As noted earlier, when beginning this study I initially conducted interviews with various individuals who are involved in hunting with dogs. In total these interviews amounted to approximately twenty hours of recorded material, with almost half coming from the interviews I conducted with Pete and other lurchermen, Sammy Vaughn, John Stanway, and Derek Clarkin. When I came to evaluate these materials it became obvious to me that it would not be feasible to utilise

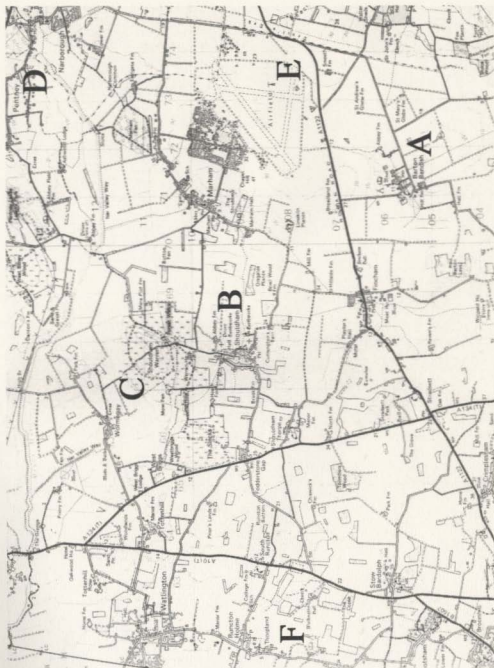
such a large amount of data in the writing of my study. This problem was solved by my decision to focus the study upon Pete's occupational folklife as a lurcherman. Because Pete was to be the central focus of my work I decided that it was important to transcribe the interviews with him in their entirety, which amounted to 120 typed pages. I found this to be very useful in the identification and evaluation of the various aspects of Pete's occupational folklife which he discussed during the interviews. The interviews with the other lurchermen were transcribed selectively when required. As I discovered, the process of working with large amounts of tape recorded data can be both painstaking and extremely time consuming for the folklorist, but are an essential part of any study of the nature conducted here. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, the use of photography as a method of documentation was utilised extensively during my ethnographic observations of Pete at work. This resulted in a total of approximately two hundred colour photographs from my time in the field with Pete. The work of the lurcherman has been very poorly documented using photography, and I therefore considered that an essential part of my fieldwork would be to document this passing traditional occupation visually while the opportunity was still available.¹⁰



Map 1. Great Britain, showing the location of the county of Norfolk.



Map 2. County of Norfolk, showing key places mentioned in the text and major towns.



Map 3. Pete Carter's local area.

Notes

¹ "Rum'un" refers to something considered to be strange, abnormal, or unusual. It can be used to refer to something or someone, as in "he's a bit of a rum'un." Keith Skipper, *Larn Yarself Norfolk: A Comprehensive Guide to the Norfolk Dialect* (Dereham, Norfolk: Nostalgia Publications, 1996) 82.

² Bruce Jackson, *Fieldwork* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1987) 59.

³ Pete Carter, personal collection.

⁴ Pete Carter, personal communication, 5 Sept. 2001.

⁵ Roger D. Abrahams, "Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore: Performing Services," *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, ed. Robert H. Byington (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1978) 20. emphasis in original.

⁶ Robert McCarl, "Occupational Folklore," *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliott Oring (Logan, Utah: Utah State UP, 1986) 71-2.

⁷ E.G. Walsh, *Lurchers and Longdogs* (Saul, Gloucestershire: Standfast P. 1978) 1.

⁸ Jay Mechling, "'Banana Cannon' and Other Folk Traditions between Human and Nonhuman Animals," *Western Folklore* 48 (1989): 312. Also online at: New Directions in Folklore, Internet, 5 June 2001. Available: www.temple.edu/isllc/newfolk/banana1.html.

⁹ Although a majority vote for a total ban of hunting with dogs was reached in the House of Commons in February 2001, this was rejected by the House of Lords. However, at the time of writing the push for a ban is still part of Labour's manifesto and the party is still adamant that a future ban will take place. As expected this topic has been met with much protest by Britain's many hunting supporters. For details of this topic see the following internet sites:

Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales, online, Internet, 5 June 2001. Available: <http://www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk/mainsections/huntingframe.htm>.

"Countryside Alliance welcomes Lords rejection of hunting ban," (27 Mar. 2001); online, Internet, 5 June 2001. Available: <http://www.countryside-alliance.org/news/latest01/010327coun.htm>.

"New Poll Shows Slump in Support for Hunting Ban," (26 Apr. 2001); online, Internet, 5 June 2001. Available: <http://www.countryside-alliance.org/news/latest01/010426hps.htm>.

"Former Anti-Hunting Chief attacks hunting ban," (10 May 2001): online, Internet, 5 June 2001. Available: <http://www.countryside-alliance.org/news/latest01/010510cut.htm>.

"'Jury Still Out' in Countryside over Labour Manifesto," (16 May 2001): online, Internet, 5 June 2001. Available: <http://www.countryside-alliance.org/news/latest01/010516lab.htm>.

¹⁰ The equipment used during this fieldwork was as follows: all interviews were recorded using a Sony WM-D6C cassette recorder. The microphone used was a AKG D 230 omnidirectional dynamic type. The recordings were made onto both Maxell UE 90, and TDK D 90 cassette tapes with Dolby NR set to the off position. All photographs were taken using a Canon EOS 300 single-lens reflex camera. The lenses used were either a Canon EF 50mm 1:1.4, or a Canon EF 28-105mm 1:3.5-4.5, depending on the situation I wanted to photograph. All photographs were taken on Fuji Superia 400 colour print film. For the application of the photographs in this work, each print was scanned using a Hewlett Packard scanjet at 200 dpi, and then manipulated using Adobe Photoshop 6, before finally being printed on a Hewlett Packard black and white laser printer.

¹¹ This map is a section taken from, *Ely & Wisbech*, Ordnance Survey Landranger Ser. 143, map (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1997).

Chapter 1

The Sociocultural World of Pete Carter

Pete Carter lives in the small village of Barton Bendish, situated deep in the heart of the county of Norfolk on the east coast of England (see map 2 and map 3, point A). Norfolk lies in the “wheat-belt” of Great Britain, and the flat sweeping countryside of this predominately rural county is renowned for its arable farming (see figs. 2-5).¹ Corn (wheat) is grown on a large scale, as are many kinds of root vegetables, along with fruits and above ground produce during the summer months.² For many years agriculture was the main form of employment in the region, and although this has gradually decreased over the last two centuries with the introduction of mechanized farming methods, it is still common in many villages to find a few individuals who work on the local farms as labourers. Historically, for the typical working class family living in a rural county such as Norfolk, economic conditions were generally poor. Not surprisingly, many men participated in various activities to help support their families. The area in which Pete lives was no exception to these conditions, as he recalled to me: “I was brought up in the countryside here, and when I was very very young, most of the people worked on farms. A lot of them kept a lurcher because they always had a rabbit on the table, couldn’t afford to buy a lot of meat.”³ Norfolk has a long tradition of people living off of the land, be it legally or illegally through the activity of poaching. The landscape with its acres of arable fields, hedgerows, woodland and commons is a rich haven for rabbits, hares, pheasants and other game birds, and functions as a dynamic ecological force within this rural environment. It was not just the average farm labourer who poached either. Documented

poaching convictions in Norfolk during the nineteenth and early twentieth century also list farmers, gamekeepers, blacksmiths, bakers, chimney sweeps, carpenters, shepherds and railway men amongst the many persons who were found to be guilty of poaching.⁴ This perhaps reflects the general impoverished conditions of rural life at the time, which forced people onto the land in search of extra food for the table or, in some cases, extra money for the pocket.

Very little has been written on the history of poaching in Norfolk, although Michael J. Carter's book, *Peasants and Poachers* does provide a good introduction.⁵ A brief summary of key historical events in rural Norfolk is useful in placing Pete, the modern day lurcherman, into the context of the rural traditions that lie at the heart of the area in which he grew up and still lives (see fig. 6). The real need for the agricultural labourer and small time farmer to help subsidise his income began around 1765. Wages had been on a gradual decline while food prices had begun to rise, which was also coupled with the land enclosure acts that had started to take place at this time. The intention was that more money could be made from higher rents and greater and better crop growth. Common land was fenced in and drained and the former users were notified usually by the landlord pinning his intentions on the local church door. Little could be done to object to these circumstances and although some labourers benefited in the short term by being employed to plant hedges and build roads for the land enclosure, they lost many of the necessities on which they relied such as pasture land for animals, and wood for fuel and building materials. Those that had depended on the common land now found themselves at the mercy of the landlord, reduced to inferior simple wage labourers, their

rights overpowered by the greater hegemonic forces of the larger farmers and gentry who benefited from the enclosure acts.⁶ The years following the enclosures (the official Enclosure Act was passed in 1812) saw great social unrest occurring throughout the county of Norfolk.

Prior to the Enclosure Act, even greater increases in food prices due to the effects of the Napoleonic wars and two years of poor harvest in 1794 and 1795 led to bread riots in many towns and villages. In Brandon, a crowd of 200 people gathered at the market place and protested for "Cheap Bread, a Cheap Loaf and Provisions Cheaper."⁷ At times, greater force was used, as occurred in the towns of Downham Market, Ely and Norwich when "mills were broken into, millers and butchers attacked and the food distributed amongst the crowd" (see map 2).⁸ Later, the agrarian riots of 1816 saw farm labourers destroying farm implements such as threshing machines and mole ploughs used for drainage. These machines were seen as the main reason for winter unemployment, as until that time threshing and drainage by hand was the main work available for labourers during the winter months.⁹ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century the conditions of rural life did not improve a great deal, with periods of social unrest continuing. Increased mechanization had forced 149,000 people to leave Norfolk between 1851 and 1861 in search of employment elsewhere.¹⁰ The Crimean War of 1851 had caused an increase in food prices, and later the First World War of 1914 also had a similar impact on the rural areas. The wages of the agricultural labourer did gradually increase during the twentieth century, although it has remained a low paid form of employment, with worker's incomes often supplemented by government assistance.¹¹

Considering the social and economic conditions of rural life at the time, it is perhaps not a surprise that poaching activities were so common place, as suggested in the following statement by Lord Suffield to the House of Lords in 1825:

The recipe to make a poacher will be found to contain a very few and simple ingredients, which may be met with in every game country in England. Search out (and you need not go very far) a poor man with a large family, or a poor man, single, having his natural sense of right and wrong... give him little more than a natural disinclination to go to work, let him exist in the midst of lands where the game is preserved, keep him cool in the winter, by allowing him insufficient wages to purchase fuel; let him feel hungry upon the small pittance of parish relief; and if he is not a poacher, it will only be by the blessing of God.¹²

It has been reported that between the years of 1857 and 1862 there was a total of 1,450 cases of poaching in Norfolk, and between 1863 and 1871 a total of 2,156 persons were convicted of poaching in the county.¹³ Just these documented figures alone give some idea to the amount of poaching that went on in the county during those years; it can be assumed that many other cases went on that have not been accounted for. For the people of rural Norfolk these were desperate times, and to seek extra food for the table from the wild animals that lived around seemed a perfectly natural activity. Landowners did not see it that way though, with the 1816 Game Law Act reflecting their sentiments.¹⁴ It was deemed that any person found to be trespassing at night while armed and in search of game was liable to be sentenced to up to seven years transportation to Australia if they were convicted. Inevitably this usually turned into a life sentence as the return journey from Australia was almost impossible.¹⁵

Being sent to Australia was not the only risk to poachers, as many landowners resorted to man-traps and spring-guns in an effort to keep poachers from their land.

Although the man-trap was designed to cause great pain and probably maim for life anyone caught in its steel jaws, the spring-guns were designed to be deadly. Loaded with shot, they were then hidden in bushes and connected to a trip wire which fired the gun on any unsuspecting poacher or his dog. Notices were put up publicising that these deadly traps were being used in an area, therefore placing responsibility on to any victim who fell foul of such devices rather than the landowner. As Michael J. Carter has pointed out though, many of the people who were caught by such traps were not poachers but rather innocent men, women and children. Two examples being William Brownell of Necton, near Swaffham who was shot dead by a spring-gun while gathering some wood along a cart road, and the Rev. Mr. Lawson, Curate of Needham Market who while out enjoying his pastime of botany became caught in a man-trap where he remained for almost an hour and a half before the gamekeeper was found to free him (see map 2). Following cases like these Parliament passed an act to ban the use of such devices in 1827.¹⁶

Perhaps the most well known of the nineteenth century Norfolk poachers is Frederick Rolfe, who became known as “the King of The Norfolk Poachers,” and whose life of poaching is celebrated in the book *I Walked By Night*.¹⁷ Rolfe lived most of his life in the village of Pentney which is only a few miles away from Pete Carter’s home (see map 3, point D). Like many people living in rural Norfolk during the nineteenth century, Rolfe was employed in agriculture and looked to poaching as a way to help supplement his low income. Although life was hard and the risks great, Rolfe recalls his poaching days with fond memories:

Poaching is something like drug taking—once begun no goen back, it get hold of you. The life of a Poacher is any thing but a happy one, still it is exciting at times, and the excitement go a long way to sothe his conscience if it trubble him.... The Professnial man is of cors an Outlaw to the Laws of the Land, and nothing but a rouge and a Vagerbond in some People's eye, but he is not so black as some people paint him—but black enough perhaps. Be that as it may, I wold soner have a night out with either gun or dog, than go to the best Diner Party ever Provided.

Of corse I have had a lot of sumones, but that did not trubble me as long as I could pay, and I supose it have cost me a Hundred pounds one time and another in fines. While I could keep out of Prison and keep my freedom I did not mind that.

Well I had got the name of the King of The Norfolk Poachers in them Days, and I expect I earned it. I could run like a hare once I had got a start—no one could catch me, and him who cant run cant poach.

I rember once I got disturbed at night, and had to run for it as there were two Keepers close to me, in fact it was one of them as was given me the run. I had to carry my bag and gun, but as sone as I got the chance I dropped the bag in a ditch, and made for the river Nar. I jumped in and got out the other side, as the Keepers landed on the other Bank, so I got the laugh of them again and a good ducking into the Bargin, but that did not matter. I went back in the early morning and retrieved my bag and the game, as they never knew that I had dropped it (sic).¹⁸

Although the continuing heritage of these formative years in Norfolk rural life is not so evident today, it was still very much a part of daily life when Pete Carter was growing up during the 1940s and 50s. Poaching was not such a common nocturnal activity as it had been one hundred years before but it still went on, and as Pete informed me occasionally still does. To live off of the land on some level, either legally or illegally, was an expected part of rural life. It was not uncommon to find game such as pheasant or hare served at the table, but it appears that in Pete's family at least, it was a rabbit which found its way to the table most frequently; as he recalled from the days of his childhood:

When I was very young I used to spend every Sunday at my grandparents house, because I used to go to the village Sunday school and then go there

for Sunday dinner; and regardless of what meat they had, they always had a rabbit as well. [They did] not throw the head away, the rabbit's head was carefully skinned out as well and would be cooked with the rest of it; and it was the greatest delicacy, when my grandfather sat at the head of the table, when he'd finished everything else, the rabbit's head was last and he used to have that. He would hold it in his hand with his two thumbs on top of the thin skull and crack it apart like a walnut and suck the brains out.... That was like the treat, you got something you like and you always leave it until last.¹⁹

Not only does this narrative highlight the extent to which rabbit was at one time as much a part of the typical diet, just as chicken, beef or pork is for the average meat eater of today; it also can be seen to reflect the socioeconomic conditions of rural life that Pete's grandfather's generation experienced. As the old adage goes "waste not want not," and even the rabbit's head was considered worthy eating. The art of being thrifty has continued through the family generations and Pete still practices it today. He eats every rabbit that he catches and although he chooses not to eat the head himself, it is not wasted and is given to his dogs, as is the skin and feet, along with the innards that are shared between the dogs and ferrets. Although both Pete and his wife Margaret work, it was evident when I visited their home that they try to live on a self sufficient basis as much as their present day lifestyle allows.

Pete has separated his back yard into three sections to help with this. The first section consists of a typical lawn area, which is also where the dog pen is for easy access. Behind this, separated by a fence is the vegetable garden and greenhouses. There is evidence of Pete's frugality here, as the ground is covered with old carpet that has holes cut through, into which Pete has planted various vegetables. He told me that his next door neighbour is a carpet fitter and he brings home the old used carpets for Pete to use when

he needs them. It appears to be a very effective method of keeping the soil free of unwanted weeds, and also helps to hold the moisture in the ground. This may look rather strange, but it is not about aesthetics, it is both a practical and cost free way for Pete to grow his vegetables as efficiently as possible.

The rear section of the yard has some apple and pear trees and is where Pete keeps his chickens (see fig. 7). Although he has eaten the occasional chicken in the past, these are kept mainly for laying eggs. Again aesthetics are not important here, and Pete tries to keep the environment for his chickens as natural as possible, allowing them to roost in the trees and amongst the bushes. Hence this section of the garden is somewhat of a wilderness but it serves its purpose well. Another interesting feature is the elevated chicken coop that Pete recently made to protect his chickens from foxes. In keeping with his practical philosophy, he constructed this from scrap wood which included two old doors that he used for side supports (see fig. 8). The drawback of keeping chickens is that they attract rats. In an attempt to combat this, Pete places homemade rat traps around his yard. One is a metal cage type with a spring loaded door that his brother made, and another is a sunken water type that he made himself from an old plastic drum, over which was balanced a metal plate baited with pork fat—the idea being that the rat steps on the plate and falls into the water, while the smooth plastic sides of the drum keep it from escape (see figs. 9-10). It is evident that these kinds of folk practices reflect Pete's goal to create an environment based around basic needs rather than the superficial wants of the larger western world. Traditionally, an important aspect of rural life has also been to have a food supply right outside one's backdoor, be it fruit trees, vegetables, or poultry for

eggs and meat. This is a family tradition that Pete continues which extends back to at least his grandparents, as he describes:

It was just perfectly natural wasn't it. They [Pete's grandparents] had ducks and turkeys and chickens roaming around. I remember walking behind him once, he had these Muscovy ducks, just walking in the yard behind him and he just picked up this piece of wood and just out of the blue, bang, hit this duck across the head with this piece of wood and it just went all wobbly, and he just picked it up and rung its neck and that was it.²⁰

In looking at Pete as the modern day lurcherman it can be argued that he is attempting to continue two intertwining traditions from days past. The first of these is the concept of self-sufficiency discussed above. Through this approach to life, Pete is not only keeping to the basic philosophy of his grandparents and family at large, he also becomes part of the Norfolk heritage of using a dog to help fill the pot, just as Frederick Rolfe, the "King of The Norfolk Poachers" had done, and countless others before and after him during the last two and a half centuries of life in rural Norfolk. The second tradition continued by Pete as a lurcherman is one directly connected to his family and the village of Shouldham where he grew up (see map 3, point B). This is the occupational techniques used by professional warreners to catch rabbits (see fig. 11). In explaining why he chooses to hunt rabbits to provide meat for the table, Pete has remarked: "Well I suppose it is 'in my blood,' as they say. My great grandfather was a professional warrener and a certain measure of his skills have filtered through successive generations of the family."²¹

Because [rabbits] were pest proportions for the farmers, and also unlike today, they were actually worth money, he used to take hundreds and hundreds at a time to the railway station and send them to London. They used long nets and ferrets; we don't get rabbit warrens like it now, but you

would get several acres that were nothing but holes, and they would put long nets on little hazel stakes. Hundred yard long net, make it twenty-five yards square, then they probably put some bits across the middle as well, throw in half a dozen ferrets, the rabbits would bolt and run into the nets. They would also have terriers and a mixture of terriers and lurchers or whatever to nip them in the nets, or catch them [rabbits] as they come out of the holes.²²

Pete's great grandfather's real name was Castledine William Matthews, but he was known as Peter Matthews (see fig. 12). He owned a smallholding in the village of Shouldham, although his trade was that of the professional warrener. With his son-in-law Alec Thompson who was known as Jack, Peter travelled all over Norfolk and into parts of Suffolk and Lincolnshire controlling the rabbit population for land owners and farmers (see fig. 13). At first light they would load up their cart with the nets, spades, traps, and boxes of ferrets which they needed for the days work ahead of them. The family usually kept about eight dogs at a time to assist in catching the rabbits and the majority of these ran to work under the cart, including a large terrier named Joe who had a tendency to run right behind the pony, the hooves flying either side of his head. It was not uncommon for them to travel fifteen miles on a daily basis to destinations around Shouldham, with places further afield usually requiring a stop over of several days. At the end of the day, the cart would be reloaded, this time with the extra weight of up to two hundred rabbits and the dogs who were allowed to ride home after a day's rabbiting. Peter and Jack made all their own nets used in the work, along with Jack's wife Kate, who also could be regularly found sitting on a stool in the back garden gutting and skinning one hundred rabbits at a time. Often Peter and Jack would take the running dogs out in the evening, including Peter's favourite lurcher bitch "Trixie," to drive rabbits into long nets. This was

often done at an area known as Shouldham Warren where it was known for the men to set up six hundred yards of long net at one time (see map 3, point C).²³

It appears that Peter Matthews escapades as a warrener were well known amongst the family, and Pete tells an interesting story which shows how one of Peter's occupational techniques became part of the family's folklore:

When I was a child, every Friday night saw my mother heating large pots of water on the stove and then bathing each of the children in turn, in the old tin bath in front of a roaring fire.... Every time she poured a jug of water over my head to rinse my hair, she would encourage me to hold my breath by repeating the words, "don't breathe Trixie, don't breathe Trixie." One bath night as these words were accompanying the sensation of being half drowned by jugs of hot water, I sought an explanation as to their origin. "That's what your great grandfather used to say to his little dog when he was listening for a ferret," she explained. Apparently, this saying has been used throughout the entire family ever since.²⁴

This story refers to Peter Matthews supposedly famous ability to be able to hear ferrets underground by sticking his spade into the ground and putting his ear on the handle. It was said that not a blade of grass nor twig could touch the blade of the shovel and the men and dogs around him were not allowed to move a muscle, resulting in him saying "don't move Trixie" to his trusty lurcher bitch (see fig. 14).

Peter Matthews died in 1949 at the age of eighty-five, at the time Pete was just a young boy. Although he was unable to experience his great grandfather's days as a warrener first hand, the tales and accounts of the era that are found within the family's oral history have allowed Pete to gain a great deal of knowledge about this fascinating man and his trade. In addition, Pete's first hand experience with the next generation of warreners around the Shouldham area have allowed him to expand on this knowledge:

Joby Rye, he was the last professional rabbit catcher; he is in his nineties now. He used to do it for a living and I can remember when I was at school he used to have this big shed, his wife was a school teacher at the primary school, and they lived next door to the school. So I used to go round there with his son and on the beams of this shed would be just hundreds of rabbit skins hung there, and they would all be inside out, as when you pull it off it just pulls off like a jersey inside out. You hang them up there to dry and there used to be an old man who would come around and collect the rabbit skins from all the rabbit catchers, he would come around once a week and collect the skins. I remember he used to have a pony and trap and he had one of those saddle blankets, those multi coloured blankets over his knees. [If Joby] used to sell a rabbit to someone else to eat, he would sell the rabbit to them but insist on having the skin back because the skin was worth money. I think they were worth money for the felt trade, they used them for hats and coats and all sorts. Apparently the wild rabbit skin was better than the tame rabbit skin because the wild buck rabbit urinates all over the does and that was supposedly a plus.²⁵

Although Joby is now in his nineties and has trouble recalling his days as a warrener in any great detail, Pete had fortunately gone to talk to Joby in 1992 when his memory of being the last of the great Shouldham warreners was still vivid (see fig. 15). During the visit Pete was honoured that Joby presented him with a gift of three one-hundred-yard hemp long nets which had been hanging in his shed since his retirement. Although they were over thirty years old they were in perfect condition and have remained so in Pete's use of them since. It turns out that Joby's skills as a warrener were learned directly from Peter Matthews whom he spent every Saturday rabbiting with between the ages of twelve and fourteen. When Joby left school at fourteen, he was employed on the Abbey Farm estate in Shouldham as assistant to the warrener Sammy Porter. Some of the land they covered was next to Shouldham Warren which was known at the time for its infestation of rabbits. Joby and Sammy worked on full time rabbit control from September through to March and spent the rest of the year doing farm work.

When he was eighteen Joby became a full time self-employed warrener. He teamed up with another Shouldham man who was known as "Luggy" Goby because of his exceptionally large ears, and together they worked to control the rabbits on about four thousand acres of land in the area.

Their work consisted of clearing rabbits from woodland as well as the large field burrows that were found on pasture land. For the open burrows, they used the traditional method of surrounding them with long nets and then entering ferrets, which Joby had learned from his days assisting Peter Matthews and Sammy Porter. For the woodland, they would clear away some of the undergrowth and then put in sections of long net. A single ferret was then used on a line and the rabbits were located and dug out, with any that bolted going into the nets. Because much of his work was done in the enclosed woodland areas, Joby preferred to use a mixture of assorted mongrel terriers to assist him, such as his favourite dog Kim, who was the result of the unintentional mating between his terrier bitch Mona and a collie dog from the local farm. Joby considered lurchers good for working on open ground, but he saw the terrier type better for working in confined woodland. Regardless of the dogs used, there is no doubt that Joby was extremely good at his job, as shown by the records he kept in an old tattered note-book which reveal that during one season he caught a phenomenal 4,742 rabbits, the heaviest weighing four and a quarter pounds after being gutted. Following his experience of working in woodland, Joby was hired as a rabbit controller by the Forestry Commission in 1952 where he once again worked alongside his old partner, Sammy Porter. Part of their job was controlling rabbits in the summer in an effort to protect them from damaging the young trees. Joby

retired at the age of sixty, and for a while assisted the gamekeeper on the Luddington estate near Shouldham on a part-time basis. The method of control used though was mainly gassing which did not hold any appeal to Joby in comparison to the traditional methods that he had practised. By this time though, the disease myxomatosis had started to devastate the rabbit population and the days of the professional warrener were to be no more.²⁶

Pete's interest in lurchers and running dogs in general possibly stems from both family and wider cultural influences. An important factor must be that Pete's father was a lifelong greyhound racing enthusiast, who both raised and raced his own dogs, and as Pete remarked, "[he] used to go about five times a week all over the place." From an early age Pete would have been exposed to running dogs and his father's passionate interest for them, so it seems logical that this background has developed into similar interests of his own. The second factor in creating Pete's interest is the influence of the rich running dog culture that exists in Norfolk, especially around the area in which Pete lives. The lurcher type dog is said to have originated within Norfolk and is synonymous with the warreners, poachers, Gypsies and drovers who are part of the county's rural history. There is also a long tradition of hare coursing with greyhounds in Norfolk. Coursing is undertaken on open arable farm land, and basically consists of two dogs running competitively against each other in pursuit of a wild hare—the winner of the race, being the first dog that is able to pressure the hare into making a turn. Situated only a few miles away from Pete's village of Barton Bendish is the Swaffham Coursing Club, which is the oldest in Britain dating back to 1776. Although the club meets once a week during

the season, the main event of the year is the Anglia Cup competition. This is the second largest coursing event in Britain, and is based on a sixty-four dog stake which is run over three days.²⁷ Pete does not belong to the Swaffham Coursing Club, but he knows many of its members having reported on their numerous meets, including the Anglia Cup, for the magazines he used to write for.

Writing on the importance of the folklore of the "Grand Generation," Mary Hufford, Marjorie Hunt and Steven Zeitlin suggest that "many times the skills and knowledge that older people have acquired become outmoded by rapid technological and social change."²⁸ In the role that Pete has as a lurcherman, it could be argued that he has become what C. W. von Sydow terms an "active tradition bearer."²⁹ Pete does not just know of the history of lurchers and rabbit catching within Norfolk, he has become both an active participant of that tradition and an expert on the subject in the process. Hence, he is actively helping to keep the tradition alive. Through Pete's documentation and knowledge of the folklore of his family and the region in which he lives, it could also be claimed to a certain extent that he too has become the folklorist, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains: "The field of folklore has been built from the memories of the elderly. Folklorists, as experts in inscribing old folkways in the threshold of their disappearance, have long collaborated with the 'grand generation' to fix in writing—and more recently on tape and film—traditions that would have been forgotten with the passing of their bearers."³⁰

It seems apparent that for the majority of persons who are involved with hunting, be it the poacher or the professional warrener, one's interest in such activities begins at an

early age. As Pete considers, "it is in the blood" and is an interest which can be seen to develop out of an inherit nature coupled with schoolboy adventurism. Just like Joby Rye, and also presumably his great grandfather, Peter Matthews, Pete began his days as a rabbit catcher early on in his youth:

My entire childhood and early teens were spent mouching around the fields and woods around our village in the company of Judy, our lightly built, working Border collie bitch.... From what I can remember of my early years, I recall occasions when Judy would freeze upon detecting a squatting rabbit before pouncing on it like a cat. This often entailed diving into thick brambles and the bitch was never deterred by the heaviest of cover. I also remember the odd occasions when Judy dug rabbits out of shallow stops, and I have still not forgotten feeling as if I had found the crown jewels when presenting my mother with a rabbit for the pot.³¹

In his autobiography entitled *The Rabbit Skin Cap*, George Baldry recounts his experiences of growing up in rural Norfolk during the nineteenth century. From his descriptions, it appears that exploring the nearby fields on hunting adventures was as much a part of schoolboy life then, as it was for Pete one hundred years later. Baldry writes:

Harvest time was near and we was looking forward to running rabbits in the big field along side the road home from school. I thought if I could git a piece or two of Father's herring netting and put over some of the holes along the fence, the rabbits'd draw away there as the field was cut.

One morning away come ten harvesters with their scythes on their shoulders—no reaping machines then—and start mowing by the field gate. I slips round to the other end with my netting ready hid up and puts it over the most likely holes I thought they would bolt into, laying it loose over a stick to keep if from being pulled inside. Then I hides in the fence well under cover, armed with a short stick.

The cutters come along up the top end of the field and started a-shouting, "Lo—lo—lo"—and bounce come a fat rabbit into my net. Had it in a moment and taps him sharp behind the ears with the side of my palm which soon finished him, that being the only right way to kill a rabbit—done in a second. Wasn't long afore another slips out of the standing corn

and into one of my holes and I soon had him. Then I hid 'em both up in different places, as I heard my Mother say, "He who hides can find."³² Likewise, Sammy Vaughn, a retired professional warrener from Machynlleth in

mid Wales recalled to me how he used to go rabbiting with his father and grandfather as a young boy and remarked, "I used to go around on the shoulders of my grandfather—I was born right into it" (see fig. 16 and map 1). Just as the two generations before him, Sammy became a professional rabbit catcher at the age of sixteen:

JP: So you were a professional?

SV: Yes, a professional rabbit catcher. I used to live on it, that was my living.

JP: Whereabouts was that Sammy?

SV: All around here. Perhaps go thirty miles one day. I would have 500 snares set, check them twice a day, apart from ferreting in between.

JP: So would farmers hire you?

SV: Yes, that's right, and farmers being farmers I usually had to give them a cut.

JP: So what dogs did you have?

SV: All lurchers, I would only ever take two at a time, and I used terriers as well. Terriers go in the bushes and send the rabbits out.³³

Like many other professional warreners, Sammy's career ended in 1953 with the outbreak of myxomatosis. He went into the police force in 1957, but all the time he was in the police force he always had a lurcher and ferrets. Since his retirement, he does still have a lurcher, but because of health reasons he is no longer able to actively go out catching rabbits, so he ceases to keep ferrets.

In his autobiography *The Great Game: The Life and Times of a Welsh Poacher*, Harold Wyman describes the early start of his albeit illegitimate career, when his grandfather taught him how to poach trout:

It was he who taught me to knock-in the night lines under the banks of the local brook, where I brought out many a spotted trout. He also taught me the art of tickling the trout that frequented the crystal clear pools. The

object of this exercise was the insertion of the finger and thumb into the gills, pinching them together, then it was simply a matter of lifting the fish from the water. He showed me the best spot to find the trout, under the root of an overhanging tree. I found the trout used to dart under these places whenever they detected any sign of danger, but they would soon succumb to the soothing touch of a boys hands.³⁴

In examining the above examples of hunting beginning in childhood, it can be seen that they all function to provide a link to the past. Basically what is occurring here is the process of upholding tradition. This appears to operate on two levels: either the tradition is physically passed on by the older family member and then is continued by the younger generation, or the younger generation is seen to continue a wider cultural tradition which is part of the larger society in which they live. Harold Wyman is a clear example of the direct connection to tradition through the familial experiences of being shown the technique of how to poach trout. Sammy Vaughn also follows the familial process through his exposure to the work of a professional warrener. In contrast, George Baldry's boyhood adventures stem from more of a general environmental influence, in that he is merely continuing the widespread tradition of catching rabbits and game, historically found within rural Norfolk, as a response to the impoverished conditions experienced by the typical country dweller. In defining Pete's role within this process, he can be seen to fall into both categories. His childhood rabbit catching adventures, just as George Baldry's, are rooted within the larger historical rural traditions of the area in which he lives. But at the same time, for Pete there was also a degree of direct influence through his exposure to the activities of professional warrener Joby Rye, as well as the familial influence in the legacy of his great grandfather, the professional warrener Peter Matthews, who exhibits a strong presence within Pete's family history. It appears that the

role of the younger generation plays an important part in the continuation of traditional activities, as folklorist Lucy Long discovered during her work on Appalachian cloggers. Long was amazed at how old the cloggers where, and was surprised that the tradition did not completely die out. She then realised what kept the tradition alive, when she saw young children dancing at the feet of their grandparents. As Long's observation suggests, it is through the early involvement of children that skilled practitioners of traditional activities are able to be replenished on a continuous basis.³⁵

In placing Pete within the context of being a lurcherman, one of the key shaping factors in developing his outlook on life appears to be his experience of playing in a band in Germany. This occurred around 1965/1966 when Pete was merely twenty years of age and starting to develop his own attitudes on the way he wanted to live his life in the future. This was an important time for Pete and one he spoke of at length when I interviewed him.

The band was playing in a bar which was situated right near a harbour, and all the fishermen from the trawlers used to come in and get drunk. Pete recalled that there would be terrible fights, wrecking the bar, with bodies and chairs flying around the five foot high stage on which the band performed. The band's contracts were arranged so that they would receive just enough money each week to live on, and at the end of the month, they would be paid the balance of the contract. It turned out that the owner of this particular club had to go into hospital, while at the same time he was also going bankrupt. Not surprisingly, when the end of the month came, the band was not paid the remainder of the money owed to them. The band members had just enough money to get home to England,

but by this time, Pete also had a pregnant girlfriend to consider. Some of the fishermen said they could get Pete a job on trawler, which is what he decided to do:

So off I went. It was three weeks to Iceland—gales and sleet and hail stones, and working twenty-four hours round the clock, in very spartan conditions. It was a nightmare really, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world because it was such a great experience. But it completely just breaks you in half. How people did it for a living all the time? Lots of the crew were people who had been in prison, couldn't get other jobs, or one or two had been born into it.... The conditions were terrible. It was a round the clock thing, it took four days to get there and four days to get back. Me and my friend used to have to catch a watch steering the ship, and we used to do four hours, eight 'til midday and then four hours, eight 'til midnight. That was how we did it until we got there. But once you start fishing it is twenty four hours a day for three weeks, you get no sleep at all, and the work is very hard.³⁶

The majority of Pete's time on the trawler was spent working out on the deck. The fishing nets would be set out and the ship would drag them for approximately an hour and a half, but occasionally this would be extended up to four hours. At the end of this time, the nets would be hauled in and it would be suspended above the deck. Pete, or one of his fellow deck hands would then slip the knot in the net and all the catch would spill out onto the deck. Pete recalled: "You are wearing these big thigh length boots, and you are standing up to your thighs in fish. You get your feet all the way down until you can feel the deck and you are more or less anchored there in fish, so you can use both hands, and you just have a very sharp little knife and you gut these fish by hand."³⁷ After the fish were gutted, they would be hosed down and cleaned and then shoveled down a hole in the deck. The fish hold below the deck was lined with cow hides to help insulate it and the fish would be stacked in boarded compartments and packed with dry ice. Once fishing started this was a continuous process, and while the fish was being packed below,

the deck hands would be gutting the next catch of fish. Pete commented that "you would pray for the net to be half empty so that you could get an hour's sleep."³⁸ The work was so exhausting that Pete cannot ever remember being as tired as he was when doing this work, as he described: "when you are that tired you lay down and the instant your head hits the pillow, you are deeply asleep, unconscious, bang like that."³⁹

Although working on the trawler was back-breaking, Pete regards it as an incredible, once in a lifetime opportunity and has fond memories of the experience. His twenty-first birthday was spent during a gale that lasted four days, with conditions so extreme that they had to stop fishing. Each member of the crew was allocated a certain number of items from the ships store which they had to pay for if they wanted them. This included things like a bottle of lemonade, bars of chocolate, and a wide selection of alcohol including a case of beer, a bottle of rum, a bottle of whiskey, a bottle of vodka, bottles of wine, and as Pete recalled, a bottle of pink champagne. Many of the fishermen would spend their free time playing poker and drinking and, by the end of the first week, had drunk their entire allocation. Pete did not usually drink much of his so he would let the others buy it. For Pete's birthday though, his fellow crew had a big cooking pot two feet deep into which they poured the pink champagne and a mixture of other drinks, and they all sat around together and drank from this. Pete vividly remembers though the storm during which his birthday took place, and he described to me his fascination at the powers of the ocean and the wild life which lived in such conditions:

I remember that gale, we were just slowly going around in a circle trying to hold a position, and you don't really realise how rough it is because you are on the boat and it is moving with the sea like a cork. If you were static and a wave that high came crashing over the top of you, as big as a house,

it would be a horrendous sight. But when you are on the ship just bobbing like a cork, you get these huge waves higher than a three storey house, one minute you are on top of it looking down in this huge valley, then the next few seconds you are in bottom looking up at it. You don't really get the feeling that there is a huge wall of water going to crash down on top of you. It amazed me these gannets diving for fish, where the storm brings the fish to the surface and churns it all up. The waters there are relatively shallow like all good fishing grounds are. These gannets were just holding on the wind, and they would fold their wings and shoot into the water like an arrow. It was fascinating to watch them coming out with a fish. They just thrive in those conditions.⁴⁰

It appears that Pete was able to thrive in those conditions as well. Through his descriptions of this experience, it is clear that Pete had a strong sense of adventure instilled within him. This was already evident during his childhood days of catching rabbits with his Border collie Judy, but the time in Germany seems to have reinforced this. Pete's responsibilities had led him to try new things, to seek adventure through the independence that he was given. His fellow band mates returned home to England, instead Pete opted to take a job on a German fishing trawler—a decision which was very admirable for a twenty year old from the depths of rural Norfolk. As his descriptions of the period show, Pete was open to new experiences, and perhaps in search of the adrenaline rush which he found in them. After three trips on the boat between July and November, Pete finally returned home to England. Commenting on his return he said: "When I came back from Germany, when I was about twenty [-one], when I'd been there with the band, I thought I'd get a dog and the obvious thing would be to get a lurcher you see."⁴¹ Not only was Pete choosing a dog which reflected the heritage of the area in which he lived, he was also choosing one in which he would find the same important

values which he appreciated within his own life—most notably, that of self-sufficient independence and a strong sense of adventure. Pete's days as a lurcherman had begun.



Fig. 2. Norfolk plowed field.

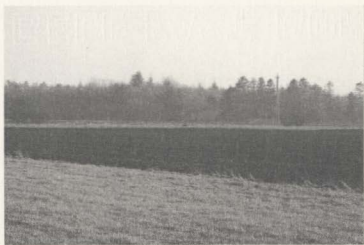


Fig. 3. Norfolk field.



Fig. 4. Norfolk corn field.



Fig. 5. Norfolk field at harvest time.



Fig. 6. Pete Carter, modern day lurcherman.⁴²



Fig. 7. Pete's back yard.



Fig. 8. Pete's chicken coop.



Fig. 9. Metal cage rat trap.



Fig. 10. Plastic drum rat trap.



Fig. 11. Professional Norfolk warrener circa 1920s.⁴³



Fig. 12. Pete's great grandfather, Peter Matthews,
with terriers.⁴⁴



Fig. 13. Pete's uncle, Jack Thompson, with
lurcher (left) and terrier.⁴⁵



Fig. 14. Pete demonstrating his great grandfather's ferret listening technique.



Fig. 15. Joby Rye with his tools for rabbiting.⁴⁶

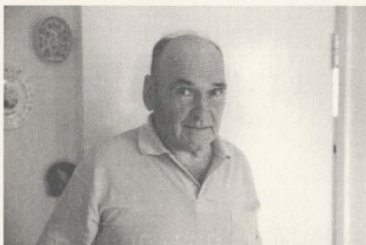


Fig. 16. Sammy Vaughn at his home in Machyllneth, Wales.

Notes

¹ R. G. Stapledon, *The Land Now and To-morrow* (London: Faber, 1935) 62. The four counties that make up Britain's wheat-belt are Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Literature on Norfolk includes: Tom Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1993); William Andrews, ed., *Bygone Norfolk* (London: William Andrews, 1898); Jane Hales and Wm. Bennett, *Looking at Norfolk* (Wymondham, Norfolk: Geo. R. Reeve, 1971); Arthur Mee, ed., *Norfolk* (London: Hodder, 1940).

² Arthur Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk* (1804; Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1969) 187-369.

³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴ Michael J. Carter, *Peasants and Poachers: A Study in Rural Disorder in Norfolk* (Suffolk: Boydell, 1980) xi.

⁵ I contacted numerous archives and libraries within the county and none appeared to hold anything apart from a small number of newspaper reports which have been utilized in M. J. Carter's book.

⁶ M. J. Carter, 1.

⁷ M. J. Carter, 3.

⁸ M. J. Carter, 3.

⁹ M. J. Carter, 6-7.

¹⁰ M. J. Carter, 39.

¹¹ M. J. Carter, 84-5.

¹² M. J. Carter, 9-10.

¹³ M. J. Carter, 122-3.

¹⁴ For a detailed historical discussion of the Game Laws see: "Woodman," *Notes on the Game Laws of England and Wales* (London: Jenkins, 1962).

¹⁵ M. J. Carter, 9.

¹⁶ M. J. Carter, 16-7.

¹⁷ Lillias Rider Haggard, ed. *I Walked By Night* (1935. Ipswich: Boydell, 1974) 69.

¹⁸ Haggard, 68-9. The unusual, inconsistent spelling and capitalization appears in the original text and is an attempt by Haggard to capture Rolfe's Norfolk dialect.

¹⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

²⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

²¹ Stag Carter, "A Message for 'Omnivorous hypocrites' From Deep in Norfolk!" *The Countryman's Weekly*, Apr. 22, 1994. 18.

²² Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

²³ Pete has written about his great grandfather's days as a professional warrener in the following articles: Stag Carter "A Norfolk Warrener and His Dogs," *Sporting Dog*, n.d., 16-7; and Stag Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers and the Norfolk Lurcher," *Sporting Dog*, n.d., 16-7. It should be noted that all subsequent references to Stag Carter used in this study, refer to the articles written by Pete Carter. My access to these was from Pete's personal clippings collection of the articles he has written, hence the publication details of some of the articles was unclear. I have tried to be as accurate as possible in my referencing of these.

²⁴ Carter, "A Norfolk Warrener," 16.

²⁵ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

²⁶ Pete has written about his visit to see Joby Rye in the following article: Stag Carter, "Joby Rye—Last of the Shouldham Warreners." *Shooting News*, 10-16 Apr. 1992, 18. For a discussion on the outbreak of myxomatosis in Great Britain see: Frank Fenner and F. N. Ratcliffe, *Myxomatosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1965) 321-34.

²⁷ The largest coursing competition in Great Britain is the Waterloo Cup held at Altcar near Liverpool. At one time, this was Britain's biggest sporting and gambling event, and during the height of its popularity in 1874, it "attracted a crowd of eighty thousand people." Today approximately ten thousand people still attend the annual event. See: Robin Page, *The Hunting Gene* (Barton, Cambridgeshire: Birds's Farm Books, 2000) 82.

- ²⁸ Mary Hufford, Marjorie Hunt, and Steven Zeitlin, *The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1987) 77.
- ²⁹ Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones, *Folkloristics: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 305-6.
- ³⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, introduction to Hufford et al., 12.
- ³¹ Stag Carter, "Lurchers Were Once Little More Than Collies!" *Shooting News*, 31 July- 6August 1992, 11.
- ³² George Baldry, *The Rabbit Skin Cap*, ed. Liliias Rider Haggard (1939. Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1974) 62-3.
- ³³ Sammy Vaughn, personal interview, 29 July 2000.
- ³⁴ Harold Wyman, *The Great Game: The Life and Times of a Welsh Poacher* (Dyfed: Fieldfare, 1993) 1-2.
- ³⁵ Hufford, et al., 27.
- ³⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ³⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ³⁸ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ³⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ⁴⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ⁴¹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁴² Pete Carter, personal collection.
- ⁴³ Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall, Norfolk.
- ⁴⁴ Pete Carter, personal collection.
- ⁴⁵ Pete Carter, personal collection.
- ⁴⁶ Pete Carter, personal collection.

Chapter 2

The Lurcher

I quickly learned when beginning my research on the lurcher, that there are no definitive facts and figures concerning the dog's history or description. As lurcher expert E. G. Walsh has stated, "[the lurcher] is an ephemeral being, with no recorded past, a fleeting presence and, in many cases, no future."¹ The very nature of the dog and its use lends itself to creating a shroud of mystery over exact details of any kind. It appears that up until recently, for anyone to know about the dog was based upon a folk knowledge which was spread orally. Even now, many lurchermen still depend on this orally learned knowledge. In recent years, a limited amount of literature on the lurcher has started to appear, albeit of various standards. Walsh's book, *Lurchers and Longdogs* appears to offer the most reliable historical study, along with the numerous articles Pete has written on the subject, which are basically his own folk knowledge put into print. My own discussion and interpretation of the lurcher in this chapter is based upon information I have gained from both printed sources and interviews with Pete.

The basic definition of a lurcher is "a cross-bred running dog."² The archetypal cross of the lurcher is the greyhound-Border collie—combining the speed of the greyhound, with the stamina, intelligence and agility of the working Border collie sheepdog (see figs. 17-20). In explaining the reasons for this crossbreeding, Pete commented to me:

The original intention of cross-breeding them is—you have a greyhound which is the fastest dog in the world, but it has very little brain power, it also has poor scenting ability, and it's got very little stamina as well so it's burned out very quickly. So therefore, the idea of breeding with something

like a working collie for example, which used to be the favourite cross, is that you get the brains, the nose, and the stamina from the collie, plus the speed from a greyhound. Hopefully, you have got a good all-round hunting dog that can find game and catch it.³

The issues surrounding lurcher breeding can become rather complex and I will discuss some of these in a later chapter, although it should be mentioned at this point that it is common to find other combinations of crosses in a lurcher as well as the greyhound-Border collie. Other running dogs used are whippets, salukis, and deer hounds. It has also become popular to find various terrier types used in the cross-breeding, along with Labrador retrievers. Various combinations of these numerous breeds are used by lurchermen in trying to create the best lurcher for their needs; whether they are looking for a good all-round dog capable of tackling almost any quarry, or seeking a more specialist dog solely for rabbits or hare. Regardless of the various breeding combinations used, the purpose of the resulting dog was always the same. As Walsh highlights, the lurcher “was and is a dog bred purely for work; and that work has not changed throughout the centuries.”⁴ That work was to basically “fill the pot,” as the dog’s role was to provide food for its owners and feed itself in the process. It is therefore not surprising that the lurcher is traditionally known as being the poor man’s dog, and is traditionally associated with drovers, poachers, and Gypsies, hence subversive and counter-hegemonic activities to large land-owners. Because of the lurcher’s skill in catching rabbits, it also became the dog of choice for many professional warreners.

When exactly this type of cross-bred running dog became known as a lurcher is unclear. The first documented use of the term lurcher to describe a dog was in 1668 by the Dean of Ripon John Wilkins. In an essay for the Royal Society concerning the

"Species of the Natural Bodies," Wilkins includes a section on "The Rapacious Beasts of the Dog Kind," and lists the greyhound as a "Greater Beast" and the lurcher as a "Lesser Beast" of swift running hunting dogs.⁵ Why the term was used to describe such a dog appears to be connected to its counter-hegemonic role. The Oxford English dictionary lists various definitions for the words "lurch" and "lurcher" which could be used to describe such a dog and its activities. The definitions for "lurch" read: "a cheat, swindle; to lie concealed; to be in a lurking place; to lie in wait; to remain in or about a place furtively or secretly; to get hold of by stealth, pilfer, filch, steal." For "lurcher," as well as the obvious definition of "a cross-bred dog, properly between the sheepdog or collie and the greyhound; largely used by poachers for catching hares and rabbits," the dictionary offers "one who pilfers or filches in a mean fashion; a petty thief, swindler, rouge," and also, "one who loiters or lies hidden in a suspicious manner."⁶ Many of these definitions date back to at least one hundred years before Wilkins' use of "lurcher" in 1668. It is quite possible the activities or actions of such a dog were described using the terms "lurch," "lurching," or "lurcher" well before Wilkins wrote his essay. As Walsh points out, "most of those that kept and used lurchers could not write."⁷ Subversive individuals, such as poachers, were not generally well educated, and even if they could write, to document the use of their dogs for illegal activities was not within their best interests. Most likely, the term "lurcher" to describe such a dog was in common usage orally amongst those who used them, or the landowners who despised them, and over time became the standardised term and gradually made its way into print. It appears that, by

the time William Taplin was writing in 1804, the use of the term "lurcher" to describe such a dog was well and truly established:

The dog passing under this denomination is supposed to have been originally produced from a cross between a shepherd's dog and the greyhound.... we find him almost invariably in the possession of, and in constant association with, poachers of the most unprincipled and abandoned description; for whose services of nocturnal depredation of various kinds they seem in every way inherently qualified.... Some of the best bred lurchers are but little inferior in speed to many well-formed greyhounds; rabbits they kill to a certainty if they are any distance from home; and when a rabbit is started not far from a warren the dog invariably runs for the burrow; in doing which he seldom fails in his attempt but generally secures his prey. His qualifications, natural and acquired, go still somewhat farther; in nocturnal excursions he progressively becomes proficient and will easily and readily pull down a fallow deer so soon as the signal is given for pursuit; which done, he will explore the way to his master and conduct him to the game subdued, where ever he may have left it. To the success of poaching they are in every way instrumental and, more particularly, in the almost incredible destruction of hares; for when the nets are fixed at the gates and the wires at the meuses, they are despatched by a single word of command to scour the field, paddock or plantation, which, by their running mute is effected so silently that a harvest is soon obtained in a plentiful county with little fear of detection.⁸

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the exact origins of the lurcher are somewhat uncertain. Walsh suggests that the running dog probably originated in the Middle East with the pure-bred Saluki, which is depicted in rock drawings in the region that are over four thousand years old. As the use of this breed spread out from the Middle East, the type was altered to suit local conditions (see fig. 21). Amongst the running dog types that developed out of this diffusion are the Irish wolfhound, the Scottish deerhound, the whippet, and the greyhound. It is generally believed that the greyhound first arrived in the British Isles in Mediaeval times with the various Celtic invasions during the period 1,000 AD.⁹ This was most likely a different type of dog to the pure-bred greyhound we

know of today. Being used to hunt and oftentimes in battle as well, these dogs would have not only been big, but also fairly strong, capable of easily pulling down a fully grown deer, or tackling a wolf if the situation should arise. In Mediaeval England a forest was defined as a specific piece of land which was governed by laws. Amongst these laws was the preservation of game animals, specifically, the wild boar, the roe, the red and fallow deer, and in some areas the hare was also included.¹⁰ The forest land not only covered woodland areas but also vast areas of open land, such as heaths and commons and general waste land. Most of this land was property of the Crown and it is estimated that during the reign of the Norman Kings from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, designated forest land covered over one third of the country. It was during this period that warrens were introduced which meant both a piece of land on which animals could be hunted and taken, and also the right to hunt on that piece of land. Therefore, to be able to hunt, an individual would have to be given a warren from the Royal Court.¹¹

Although it was necessary for all men to live off of the game of the land as a means of survival, not all persons were legally allowed to do so. The right to hunt the forest land and warrens was extended down from the King through to the nobles, lay and clerical, knights and landed men. No man lower on the social scale was allowed to legally hunt game in the designated forest areas.¹² The common man or peasant was able to hunt on the land outside of these areas, but this was extremely limited and what land there was had very little game. As a reaction to these frugal times, the only option was to run the risk of poaching on the King's land. Reports of poaching from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries are numerous and many of these state that a greyhound was used in

the offence.¹³ Again this can be interpreted as a greyhound type dog rather than the pure-bred greyhound that is found today. Because of the extent to which poaching occurred, a Forest Charter was introduced in 1060 which made it illegal for the common man to keep greyhounds unless they were crippled in some way to prevent them from running, rendering them useless as poaching dogs.¹⁴ This act was usually in the form of the dog having the toes of one foot broken or cut off, or a tendon severed in its leg. Those persons that resisted having their dogs mutilated were forced to live at least ten miles away from the forests. If they were found any closer, they had to pay twelve pence for every mile, and if they were found within the forest, they had to give up their dog and pay ten shillings to the King.¹⁵

Although there is no exact factual evidence of when the *lurcher* type dog first appeared, it makes sense to assume that it was with the introduction of such laws to prevent poaching with greyhound dogs, that the *lurcher* possibly originated around this time. I stress the word *type* here, as with the greyhound, this early *lurcher* would not have been the collie-greyhound cross as known today. Instead, it was probably more of just a mongrelised mix (including some greyhound blood) in an attempt to have a dog that could still be used for poaching but not fall under the laws which affected the greyhound. Hence, the idea of the *lurcher* was a subversive form of counter-hegemony. Gradually over time it appears that the *lurcher* became more of a standardised type of dog and was recognised for its role as a poacher's dog. An Act by Charles II in 1670 authorised "gamekeepers to seize 'all such Bowes, Gunns, Greyhounds, setting-dogs, lurchers and other dogs to kill hares.'" ¹⁶ Although the *lurcher* became known as the poacher's dog.

and was effectively used by some of the best professional poachers, Pete considers that the dog was not as widely used as some people believe:

The vast majority of poachers were not professionals who plied their trade full time. Most were labourers with starving families driven to poaching by the fencing of common land on which they could no longer catch rabbits or keep live stock. The lurcher was the insignia of a poacher and the majority of these men would not dare to keep one.¹⁷

The stigma of being seen with a lurcher, or having the reputation of being a lurcher owner, had the potential to result in dire consequences for those men who depended on the landowners for employment and accommodation. This sentiment was felt well into the twentieth century, as this situation from Pete's own family reveals:

As recently as the 1930s when my father was a young man, he came home with two lurchers. This created an uproar in the household. My grandfather... who was head groom at Marham Hall, told my father to get rid of the dogs immediately, amid fears that he might lose his job and the entire family be evicted from their tied cottage.¹⁸

It should be acknowledged though, that like much of the lurcher's history, Pete's comments should be treated as speculative. This example of his father bringing home two lurchers does give a welcome insight into the opinions on lurchers at that time within Pete's own family, but it should also be recognised that Pete's grandfather had a good job and the family was not starving and dependent on these dogs to provide them food.

History has shown that desperate times often lead to desperate measures. Not to say that every labourer's cottage or peasant dwelling had a lurcher inside, but it is possible that many housed some kind of dog with greyhound blood in it, strictly because of the usefulness that the lurcher had, regardless of its physical appearance. Like any subversive activity, especially one with a long history like the lurcher, it is impossible to

really know the extent to which lurchers were owned, let alone used for poaching. As discussed previously, one of the main aims, especially during the lurcher's earlier use, was to have a dog that looked as least like a greyhound as possible. One can have great results with such a dog, as an experience by Darren Wright, one of Pete's fellow lurchermen, exemplifies. Darren owns a lurcher bitch which is three quarter Bearded collie and one quarter greyhound blood (see fig. 22). Pete recounts the following in one of his many articles:

As Darren walked his bitch down a lane he met a local rustic who shouted the following pearl of wisdom as he passed: "If you want to catch rabbits, you want to get yourself a lurcher, boy!"

It came as some satisfaction to Darren that his bitch had not been recognised as a lurcher, yet she has taken fur and feather by day and night, worked with ferrets and long nets and has... made a name for herself in the beating line on a local shoot.¹⁹

Even today, to be seen with a lurcher in a rural setting by a stranger can result in suspicion. For those men that may be using their dog for less than legitimate activities, it can still be in their advantage to have a lurcher that looks as least like the stereotyped (greyhound like) lurcher as possible. In Darren's case, he was able to have a very useful all-round dog that did not look much like a lurcher. However it should also be remembered that to have such a dog is not always possible, depending on what the lurcherman wants to use his dog for. Inevitably, the more one tries to breed a lurcher that does not look somewhat like a greyhound, the greater the danger of sacrificing some of the dog's speed in the process.

While I have made much of the lurcher's appearance in the above discussion, it must not be forgotten that the dog came into existence primarily on a functional basis,

which was to be a hunter. According to Guy Smith, the lurcher was, and still is essentially kept because it is a “cunning and quiet worker, fast, and easily able to kill both hares and rabbits.”²⁰ Walsh also highlights why the lurcher has been used by many rural folk over the years: “hunting by scent is noisy and takes time to accomplish; those who do not wish to advertise their presence use dogs that hunt by sight and hunt silently no matter what the temptation to ‘open.’”²¹ These subversive and counter-hegemonic qualities of the lurcher have rendered it the dog of choice amongst poachers, drovers and Gypsies. As Pete comments on these social groups, “all were people whose lifestyle paid scant regard for the law or what other people thought of them.”²² Referring back to the dictionary definitions discussed previously, the lurcher is basically used because of its ability to lurch—to go about the business of stealing with little, if any detection. It was therefore ideally suited to the lifestyles of these itinerant groups.

When journeying around Norfolk and the neighbouring counties of Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, to come across a Gypsy site of some description is common place. It should be acknowledged that the use of the term “Gypsy” in this study comes from its emic use within Norfolk, along with its use in texts which have been utilised. In recent years, scholars and activists of Gypsy decent have argued for the use of Rom, Roma and Romani to replace “Gypsy,” and the derogatory, stereotyped connotations the term carries.²³ To see dogs of various descriptions (including lurchers) running loose or tied to the caravans/mobile homes appears to be an integral part of the scenery, and is almost expected when passing by such sites (see fig. 23). Commenting on the keeping of lurchers by Gypsies, Pete informed me that, “traditionally, early on, all the

Gypsies had them [lurchers], and you would see them running around every Gypsy camp. Because they were running loose all the time, they would catch enough rabbits to feed themselves, rabbits, hares, anything else; probably steal chickens from farm yards, just about anything really."²⁴ Such dogs were an essential part of the nomadic lifestyle of the Gypsy, helping to regularly provide food for the pot, and more importantly expecting or needing very little care in return. Generally, it is unlikely that the average domesticated/urbanised pet dog would or could perform such a service, and if it ever did the owner would probably be horrified in the process. However, it does appear that this canine version of hunter gathering is part of a dog's natural instinct. To support this idea, I have recently come across a first hand example of the self sufficient dog, which was told to me by a fellow folklore graduate student, Jessica Grant:

When I was growing up [in rural British Columbia], one of our deer hounds, she was just wild, and she actually ran off with a coyote pack and ran with them for a number of years. She would show up at home once in a while and she often brought home live chickens. We rarely saw her, she would just leave stuff on our door step and we would know that Corrie had been around. She ran with some sort of pack in the woods near our house. There is that instinct to be wild.²⁵

It is believed that Gypsies first came to Great Britain around 1500.²⁶ At this time, as with the rural peasant, the Gypsy dog would have been a mixture of various blood, and no doubt would have included some greyhound. Because of the various land laws that were in place throughout British history, it is quite possible that there was much interaction between the rural peasant and the Gypsies, whose camps would have been set up on the same land frequented by the peasant in search of game. It therefore makes sense that Gypsies became known for having lurchers, and for being poachers, just as the

rural peasant, and later farm labourer did. In some ways, these men were one of the same—both up against a prosperous ruling elite which tried to oppress them every way possible. As Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald discovered, the counter-hegemonic knowledge of poaching was an integral part of Gypsy life, and writing in 1944 proposes “all Gypsies do not poach... but all Gypsies know more than a little about poaching.”²⁷ Vesey-Fitzgerald goes on to describe the poaching activities of a Gypsy by the name of James during the early 1940s. James is said to poach only when he needs food to eat and does not do it to sell game for money. His equipment includes a catapult, a few nets, and of most interest here, two lurchers:

His dogs are trained to a pitch I have not yet encountered in any other dogs anywhere, though I have heard rumours of a Dorset farm labourer who, if the jade does not lie, has a better pair. The dogs are a pure-bred greyhound and a greyhound x collie [lurcher]. They seem to know exactly what their master means by every word and every gesture, and they know exactly what to do when the night's work is over. They never accompany him home, and they always return home separately and by devious routes. I understand that the Dorset man can get his dogs to meet him at a given spot, and though this may sound incredible I do not believe that it is beyond the ability of a good trainer with intelligent dogs. James's dogs are not up to that standard, but they are not fools. They know better than to follow at master's heels. They know exactly what to do should a policeman or a gamekeeper appear: they vanish—but they will be waiting in a hedge or ditch further along the road. Nor does James ever talk to them. His orders are given by signs and occasionally by whistle, but as often as not the dogs know what is required of them and have no need of orders. And they know better than to follow master home: the night's work finished the three separate, each finding its own way home.²⁸

Although Vesey-Fitzgerald's description of these dogs at work is anecdotal, his observations are useful in highlighting the subversive and independent nature of the lurcher as a working dog. The Gypsy dog was an essential tool, being both a guard to the camp and a supplier of food. And as Walsh contends, the Gypsies “brought their dogs to

a state of training that would have been beyond the abilities of most gundogs or police dogs.”²⁹ I have also read a report of there being a “Romany whistle” that is recognised by many Gypsy dogs, but I have been unable to find any information on what this actually sounds like.³⁰

Inevitably, the British Gypsy could not escape the socio-economic and technological changes that occurred throughout the country. In the years following World War II, there was rapid increase in the scrap metal trade (in which Gypsies have traditionally had an interest), and this resulted in a generally more affluent Gypsy population.³¹ The development of the country’s road system also led them to make the shift from horse to motorised transport, and today, Gypsies pull their modern caravans with expensive off-road vehicles, or vans and trucks. Because of these changes over the last fifty years, the need for the Gypsy to depend on poaching has diminished. Therefore the collie-greyhound lurcher does not have the use it once did and has been replaced by larger lurcher type dogs which have more deerhound, greyhound, or saluki blood than collie. These larger and faster dogs are often used for the sport of hare coursing, which has become known as a popular pastime amongst many Gypsies. Although they do occasionally enter into organised events, some are also believed to be involved with illegitimate coursing as well. This alleged activity has gained quite a reputation amongst lurchermen, as Pete informed me:

Gypsies, travellers and some other people [some lurchermen], they would gamble on hare coursing. Unlike ordinary greyhound coursing, which is just run for points and is not about killing a hare; unlike that, they would run their dogs at three hares each and the one that caught the most was on the kill. They would gamble large amounts of money and they still do.... They sort of say, just like some families will say, “well I’ve got a better

dog than you," "oh no you haven't, I'll bet you £1000." They just go out on the fens where it is wide open space, it is not their land and they just go and do it. The farmer comes along and they say "go away or we'll turn you car over" or something. Or the police just come and have a chat with them and off they go. Some of them even follow the dogs in 4x4 vehicles, just across the crops and everything, they don't care. They just do what they want really. It's illegal, but I suppose if they have to go to court they just move somewhere else.³²

With the large bets that sometimes take place, a top quality coursing lurcher can make its owner quite a lot of money. Such a dog is therefore highly prized amongst Gypsies and taken very seriously, as professional poacher and lurcherman Harold Wyman experienced first hand. In his book *The Great Game: The Life and Times of a Welsh Poacher*, Wyman tells the story of being in a pub one night with a fellow lurcher owner, when a group of Gypsies come in. His friend gets into conversation with one of the Gypsies about lurchers and ends up gambling on an illegal course with him. Knowing that his friend is going to run an exceptional dog, Wyman offers to place a bet with the Gypsy and is rudely refused. In return, he replies to the Gypsy, "I have never seen a 'hedge crawlers lurcher' get more then three hundred yards. All gypsy dogs... are fed on bread and oxo." Not surprisingly, Wyman's remark led to a full-scale brawl breaking out between him and his friend against the group of Gypsies.³³

The county of Norfolk has been historically associated with a specific type of lurcher, which is known as the "Norfolk lurcher" (see fig. 24). This type of dog has achieved almost legendary status amongst lurchermen, and is considered by some to be the original lurcher. The origins of the Norfolk lurcher are said to be a cross between a greyhound and a Smithfield collie, and believed to lie with the drovers from the eighteenth and nineteenth century (see fig. 25). At this time, all the livestock was driven

to market on foot, with the main one being Smithfield, in London, hence the name of the Smithfield collie. Commenting on the role of the drovers, Pete informed me that,

The drovers were virtually like Gypsies and lived rough on the road with these herds of cattle [or sheep, or even turkeys and geese], taking them to market. They weren't farm workers, they used to do it all the time—they would collect them and take them to market, but they would take their time getting there so the cattle didn't lose too much weight, they would graze on the way and the drovers used to poach and live off of the land.³⁴

Although many drovers worked out of Norfolk, travelling the one-hundred or so miles to London on foot on a regular basis, the county was also a major stopping point for the many drovers who were heading to Smithfield from Northern England and Scotland. The rich meadows of Norfolk were a much needed stop for the tired cattle, some of which had already travelled over two-hundred miles if coming from Scotland. To give an idea of the scale to which droving went on, it is reported that in 1750, twenty thousand Scottish cattle passed through Norfolk on the way to Smithfield market.³⁵

Because of the nature of the drover's work and the lifestyle that he led, a dog or two was an essential companion. It is unclear what type of dogs the drovers actually used. In his book *The Drovers*, K. J. Bonser provides two different descriptions of drover's dogs. The first one states that "they are larger, stronger and fiercer than the Shepherd Dog and their hair is smoother and shorter. They are mostly of a black and white colour, their ears are half-pricked, and many of them are whelped with short tails." The other description is said to be that of the dogs of Dorset drovers and reads, "rough, very long, soft hair, no tail, colour black or blue, a white ring around the neck, bald face, belly and feet white. They vary in size, the smaller are better for the drover. Their hair gives them protection against weather."³⁶ From these descriptions it appears that the drover's dog, or

what has become known as the Smithfield collie, did not exist as a standardised breed, unlike the border collie of today. Instead, it seems that the Smithfield was a “rough and ready” dog of various mixed blood, and therefore, ideally suited to the harsh life and working conditions it had to endure. Because of the drover’s nomadic lifestyle and semi-dependence on his dog to help fill the pot as well as herd the cattle, Brian Plummer believes that the drover’s dog was actually a lurcher.³⁷ Although it is feasible to consider that perhaps some greyhound blood did end up in a Smithfield collie occasionally, whether it can be said that the dog of the drover was a true lurcher is debatable. As with the drover, the Smithfield collie is said to have become extinct. Some people argue that the true Norfolk lurcher, if there ever was such a thing, also disappeared along with the Smithfield.³⁸ Recently, a lurcherman in Norfolk has become known for breeding, what he considers to be a “modern day Norfolk lurcher” (see fig. 26).³⁹ Although it is reported that he was able to locate a strain of traditional Smithfield collie blood to breed from, this has not been verified. In response to this, Pete believes that the old Norfolk lurcher was a different type of dog than its modern counterpart, and “that the so-called Norfolk lurchers that we see today are merely an attempt to recreate the appearance of the old breed.”⁴⁰ As with the lurcher in general, the exact origins of the Norfolk lurcher, if such a thing even exists, are a mystery. Nonetheless, it is still common today to find a lurcher with a longer coat being described as a “Smithfield” or “Norfolk” type; terms no-doubt used because of their legendary status rather than accurate description.

As I have highlighted throughout this chapter, the mark of a good lurcher is ultimately a dog that is an efficient worker. For the professional poacher this seems to be

even more crucial, as not only can there be high risks involved, he is also depending on his dog to assist him in catching as much game as possible. Unlike the farm labourer or Gypsy, who at any given time, would poach only enough game to feed the family, the professional poacher aims to get not just enough for his own dinner, but also enough to be able to sell for a good profit. The same can be also be said for the professional warrener who is depending on his haul of rabbits to keep him in work and provide him with income. Traditionally, it appears that the preferred poacher's lurcher was the Norfolk type. Frederick Rolfe, known as the "King of the Norfolk Poachers," suggests that, "the best breed of dogs are a cross between the Smithfield cattle dog and the Greyhound, as you get the greyhound speed and the Smithfield sence, and there are no breed of dogs with the sagasity of the Smithfield (sic)."⁴¹ It can be assumed that Rolfe is talking about the old type of Norfolk lurcher, although his description of the dog having a "deep chest, sturdy legs and plenty of coat," does not provide any further insight into what exactly these dogs looked like compared to today's lurcher.⁴² Considering that Rolfe was poaching during the late nineteenth century, it is most probable that the dog he describes was basically just the lurcher of varied mix which was used by the average farm labourer and Gypsy at the time. In describing one of his faithful poaching companions, Rolfe highlights the important functional role that the lurcher has in assisting the poacher. As he points out, the dog is essentially there to facilitate the work at hand:

I had one old dog so perfectly trained, if he walked to a field gate he knew well enough if there was a hare on that field. He would just whine and stand still till the net was ready, and the hare would be quickly dead. Me and that dog killed hundreds of hars and rabbitts. I kept him till like me he

could not work any longer. If there was a Keeper or a Policeman about he knew and would let me know as plain as if he could speak (sic).⁴³

As in Vesey-Fitzgerald's description of the Gypsy poacher's lurchers at work, Rolfe's dog is also said to be able to warn his master when the poacher's enemy—the game keeper or policeman—is close by. Assuming that these reports of such acute canine senses are true, it appears that the poacher's lurcher comes to hold the same sense of criminality held by his master. It could be though, that these dogs are merely trained to give warning to the approach of any individual that is close by, regardless of whether they are a game keeper, policeman or merely a stranger out for a walk. The majority of techniques used by poachers are basically the same as those used by the professional warrener, or average lurcherman, only without permission. Therefore, it could be the dog's ability to warn of approaching strangers that distinguishes the poacher's lurcher from any other. The warrener would not need his dog to perform such a function because he works by day and is doing so with permission from the landowner.

Although for many years the collie-greyhound and the Norfolk type were considered to be the ideal all-round lurchers, and therefore the most widely used, this trend has slowly began to change. In recent years, there has been more of a focus on using lurchers of various different crosses in an attempt to try and find a dog that is ideally suited to the specific game that it will be used to catch. Harold Wyman writes that one of the best "dinner dog[s]" he ever knew of was a lurcher by the name of Judd, which was the result of crossing a greyhound bitch with a Labrador (see figs. 27-28). The term "dinner dog" so used because of the adept nature of this dog at catching almost anything that could be eaten. Not only was this lurcher skilled in picking up rabbits and hares, it

was also able to take pheasants and any other fowl that was required of it. Although Judd was not fast enough to be a good hare courser, the Labrador blood had instilled some retriever like qualities into his hunting instinct. Instead of using the ability of speed to catch hares, Judd was known for hunting them in a “stealth-like” manner, as Wyman describes:

To be effective Judd needed to strike his prey as it broke from the form, and terrain that favoured his abilities was also necessary. Rough grass fields, root crops, etc., any ground in fact, that would encourage a hare to sit tight.... A whiff of his prey's pungent odour would cause him to revert from hunting trot to stealth-like walk.

That knowing look from his friendly dark eyes spoke volumes, and never, was one of his marks a false alarm. Having accurately located a squatting hare, he advanced, tail erect, and gently wagging, at the appropriate moment rushing the hares position. Being in full flight when the prey exploded from its form was all the advantage he needed, so adept was he at exploiting this tactic that his captures were frequent.⁴⁴

If anything, this quote from Wyman refutes the myth of the ideal all-round lurcher being the Norfolk type or the collie-greyhound cross. Judd may have been an exception to the rule of what makes the perfect lurcher, but for the work he was required to do he was ideally suited. This example also points out that having a dog with speed over a long distance can in fact be a hindrance to the lurcherman. This is especially true of the poacher who wants to quickly take game of various kinds, including birds. Having a dog that gives away its presence to every hare or rabbit from one hundred yards away and then proceeds to chase its prey across a field can result in a very unproductive evening of poaching. And a dog with “stealth-like” hunting ability is even more crucial when catching game birds, since a startled bird is nearly impossible to catch.

Pete Carter's own use of lurchers has gradually headed towards the idea of a more specialised dog, as expressed to me in his comments on what makes the ideal rabbiting dog:

Now, purely for rabbits, smaller dogs are favourite really. Because it is a short dash every time, and a bigger dog that can run a hare for two miles, a rabbit will make a fool of him because it is twisting and turning really sharp. It is a very short dash and it takes a while for the bigger dog to get into his stride. His top speed might be faster, but he can't turn on the spot. So he can't turn as sharp and he is not very quick off the mark. That is why something like a whippet or whippet cross is good for rabbits because it is that instant reaction and agility, more than covering the ground in huge strides.⁴⁵

For rabbiting, Pete currently uses this combination of a pure bred whippet and whippet-collie cross lurcher. Although his comments above may be biased towards his own dogs, over the last few years he has had good success rabbiting with his whippet-collie lurcher, "Blue." Naturally after many years of being a lurcherman, Pete has owned various dogs, including the greyhound-collie cross type lurcher on more than one occasion. Pete has never had a lurcher that he did not get good results from when hunting. It is often regarded that a good hunting dog is born and not made, and the careful thought that goes into breeding lurchers is clear evidence in support of this theory. It should be acknowledged that a good lurcherman working to carefully develop a dog's natural hunting instinct is often able to produce an excellent worker out of almost any lurcher that originates from fairly good blood lines. Many of the dogs Pete has owned are good examples of this, as he was often not familiar with the dog and bitch used in the breeding process, much the same as the old time lurcherman would not have been when coming into possession of a Norfolk type lurcher during the nineteenth century.

During my interviews with Pete, when I asked him about the various lurchers he has owned, he provided me with some interesting and informative accounts of some of his dogs. Pete got his first lurcher when he was around twenty-one years of age and had just returned from his time in Germany working on the fishing trawler:

There is a village the other side of Dereham [in Norfolk] called Shipdham. There was an advertisement in the paper, in the Eastern Daily Press, about collie-greyhound crosses, and there was no phone number, there was only an address. So I wrote to it and I got no reply, and after a few weeks, suddenly on impulse I jumped in the car and went over there. And there was this yard that was up to your knees in mud and there was this big greyhound on a chain. He had one puppy left and that was the first one I had. He cost me thirty five shillings—that's £1.75.⁴⁶

As this narrative suggests, the people who own and sell lurchers are often those living on the edge of society. If you were buying a lurcher you would not expect to find one for sale at a modern suburban family home. The lurcherman is often as subversive and devious as the dog he owns, and this should be kept in mind when buying a lurcher from such an individual. The man that Pete got this dog from was the terrier man for the local fox hunt and therefore had an interest in working dogs, so Pete was not too worried that the dog he was getting would not be a good hunter. Pete named this dog Joe, and he turned out to be an excellent worker as Pete described to me:

He was black with a little bit of white on his chest and the end of his tale like a collie, had a smooth coat and he was like a slightly smaller, slightly heavier built greyhound. He was very intelligent; had tremendous stamina, and he would find rabbits and catch them; hares occasionally he would catch them if it was a stamina thing, he hadn't got the tremendous speed but he would get to them. I've seen him run a hare all the way up a hill, it actually hit the fence at the top, turned around and ran all the way back again and he caught it just as they got to the bottom end.⁴⁷

After developing into a very useful lurcher, Joe was only four years of age when Pete discovered the occupational hazards of being a lurcherman. Pete's younger brother had taken Joe out for a spot of rabbiting, when he was accidentally poisoned by strychnine. Although it was illegal at the time, game keepers used to put poison eggs down as bait for foxes. Pete recalled that while Joe's body was still warm it was already stiff. The vet told him that strychnine attacks the nervous system and it makes the body go stiff even before it cools. Just as the man-traps of years past, it seems that it is often the innocent victim who succumbs to the hidden methods of determent used by the game keeper.

At the same time as having Joe, Pete also had a little greyhound bitch that had come from a litter sired by one of his father's racing greyhounds (see fig. 29). She was the runt of the litter and nobody wanted her, but she was quite successful at catching a few rabbits, and had a hunting ability not often found in greyhounds. Pete told me that they did race this little dog a couple of times, but because she was so small, she just got knocked off the track by the bigger dogs. A few years later Pete became the owner of another lurcher. This one, a bitch, was a greyhound/deerhound crossed with a collie-greyhound. Again this lurcher was very good on rabbits, she had a good nose and was even known to catch a few game birds. One of the best lurchers that Pete ever had was a rough-coated greyhound-collie cross called "Zak." Pete remarked that he was a tremendous dog and describes Zak as "a terrific all-round hunter of fur and feather, courser of hares and the best canine friend that anyone could ever wish for."¹⁸ Pete worked with Zak for seventeen years until his declining physical health resulted in him

having to be put down. Over these many years of being a lurcherman, Pete would have been perfecting his skills in handling dogs and the methods used to catch rabbits and hares. He would also have been learning about the lurcher as a dog breed, the advantages and disadvantages of the different crosses and how best to work with them. This is all knowledge that he has gradually built up and which allows him to be the expert on the subject that he is today.

As stated previously, Pete currently has two dogs: a pure whippet named Luke, which used to be his step daughter's, and a whippet-collie cross named Blue (see figs. 30-31). Pete actually got Blue from some Gypsies who were camped in his village. Not only is his narrative about purchasing Blue very interesting, it also highlights the counter-hegemonic nature of the lurcher and its owners. In this instance the dog was not just sold for money but also became an item for trade or barter. As Pete explains:

What I did with Blue, I bought him from some Gypsies when he was seven months old. I gave £15 and two frozen pheasants. He was tied under a caravan on a piece of rope, just up the road here; and I came home one lunch time and there was this lad about fourteen years old. he had a saluki greyhound on a piece of string, they never buy proper leads or anything, and he had Blue with him. Obviously he is not made to be a hare dog, the other one was a good hare dog that he had you see. He just said "do you know anybody who wants to buy this little dog?" I said "no I don't," you know, I didn't need anymore and the rest of it. Talked to him for about an hour, and just to get rid of him I said "throw your dogs in the back of the van and I'll take you home." So I took him back up there. I drove past a few times the next few days and I saw the dog standing there in the rain with a piece of rope around his neck, you know. I thought he is small, really I liked the look of him, thought he was ideal for working with ferrets. So I pulled up and he came out. he wanted £15 for him then on that first day and I was going to give him ten but he wouldn't have it. So he came out—this was typical—I said "are you ready to take £10 for that dog?" "No" he said, "twenty." I said, "you're going the wrong way. You wanted fifteen the other day." "Well I told my Dad and he said I musn't take any less than twenty for it now." He knew because I'd gone back.

Anyway I haggled with him for ages, and he said "have you got any pheasants?" and I said "I got some frozen ones, has your mother got a fridge in the caravan?" He said "no," so I said "when they thaw out you will have to eat them." "Alright then," So I gave him a couple of pheasants out of the freezer and £15. Blue was seven months old then, but he was ever so easy to train.⁴⁹

The saluki the boy had was a useful hare dog, and was probably used or going to be used for coursing. It is interesting that the dog which they sold would have made the better poaching dog. Why they would want to sell such a dog is unclear. It could indicate a decline in the skill of poaching or use of lurchers by Gypsies due to the greater affluence that they now have, or perhaps the dog was considered to be a poor worker and of no use to them. Or perhaps the family simply did not have the financial means to keep the dog and care for it.

There are many tales of hunting dogs being sold for large amounts of money, and even Frederick Rolfe states that he was offered a lot of money for one of his lurchers.⁵⁰ Pete's experience of exchanging an item (and money is this case) for a dog is not an isolated occurrence. Lawton Brooks, an old-time coon hunter from Georgia tells of the time he traded a coon dog for a model-T Ford car.⁵¹ Likewise, in Great Britain it is unusual for a fox hound to be sold for money. Amongst registered packs especially, the standard practice is to give the dog to another pack, or on some occasions, to exchange it for another dog. It appears though, as in Rolfe's case, that the dog which comes to have the high premium is often the one used for illegal purposes and skilled at making a profit for its owner. It is debatable though if a such dog is really worth that much more than any other. Pete's experience with Blue would perhaps suggest not. Although Pete only gave £15 and two pheasants for him, Blue has turned out to be an excellent worker and over

the last ten years has been the result of many rabbits ending up in Pete's pot and freezer. Blue has been an essential companion for Pete as a lurcherman, and his success in catching rabbits has been largely dependent upon the role that Blue has within Pete's occupational folkgroup.



Fig. 17. Greyhound.⁵²



Fig. 18. Border collie.⁵³



Fig. 19. Greyhound-Border collie cross lurcher.⁵⁴



Fig. 20. Greyhound-Border collie cross lurcher.⁵⁵



Fig. 21. Turkish tapestry, circa sixteenth century, depicting hunting scene with running dog in pursuit of hare (top right).⁵⁶



Fig. 22. Darren Wright with his greyhound-Bearded collie cross lurcher bitch.⁵⁷



Fig. 23. Gypsy camp with lurcher.⁵⁸



Fig. 24. Norfolk-type lurcher.⁵⁹



Fig. 25. Norfolk shepherd with Smithfield collie, circa 1920s.⁶⁰



Fig. 26. Modern Norfolk lurcher.⁶¹



Fig. 27. Labrador-greyhound cross lurcher.⁶²



Fig. 28. Labrador-greyhound cross lurcher.⁶³



Fig. 29. Pete aged twenty-two (on right) with his brothers and his first lurcher, Joe (on left), and his greyhound bitch.⁶⁴



Fig. 30. Pete's current whippet, Luke.



Fig. 31. Pete's current whippet-collie cross lurcher, Blue.

Notes

- i. ¹ E. G. Walsh, *Lurchers and Longdogs* (Saul, Gloucestershire: Standfast P, 1978)
- ² Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁴ Walsh, 1.
- ⁵ Walsh, 9.
- ⁶ *The Oxford English Dictionary* Vol. 9. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989)
112-3.
- ⁷ Walsh, i.
- ⁸ Walsh, 10-13.
- ⁹ Walsh, 1.
- ¹⁰ Walsh, 4.
- ¹¹ Walsh, 4.
- ¹² Walsh, 7.
- ¹³ Walsh, 7.
- ¹⁴ Walsh, 126. Pete Carter also provided me with a similar oral account during a casual conversation I had with him about this topic.
- ¹⁵ Walsh, 126.
- ¹⁶ Walsh, 128.
- ¹⁷ Stag Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers and the Norfolk Lurcher," *Sporting Dog*, n.d.: 16-17.
- ¹⁸ Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers," 17.
- ¹⁹ Stag Carter, "When is a Lurcher Not a Lurcher?" *The Countryman's Weekly* February 2 [no year]: 23.

²⁰ Guy N. Smith, *Sporting and Working Dogs*, Field Sports Library Series. (Hindhead, Surrey: Spur Publication, 1979) 220.

²¹ Walsh, 24.

²² Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers," 17.

²³ A recent discussion of the use of the term "Gypsy" appears in, Peter Godwin, "Gypsies: The Outsiders," *National Geographic* Apr. 2001: 78. See also, "Call Us Roma, Not 'Gypsies,'" *Roma Community and Advocacy Centre*, Nov. 1999, online, Internet, 23 Apr. 2001. Available: <http://romani.org/toronto/Roma.html>; and *European Committee on Romani Emancipation*, online, Internet, 23 Apr. 2001. Available: <http://www.eu-romani.org/who.htm>. Although none of these works deal with Gypsies in Norfolk specifically, some older and more recent studies of Gypsies in both Great Britain and other countries include: Farnham Rehfish, *Gypsies, Tinkers and other Travellers* (London: Academic P, 1975), Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Gypsies of Britain* (1944, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), *Gypsies and other Travellers: A report of a study carried out in 1965 and 1966 by a Sociological Research Section of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Welsh Office* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary, 1967), Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), Diane Tong, ed., *Gypsies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (New York: Garland, 1998), Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, and Annemarie Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), Thomas Acton and Gary Mundy, eds., *Romani Culture and Gypsy Identity* (Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire P, 1997). Historical studies also appear in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*.

²⁴ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

²⁵ Jessica Grant, personal communication, summer 2000.

²⁶ Walsh gives a brief speculative history of the Gypsy in Britain with an emphasis on their use of dogs and association with lurchers. He points out though that little is really known about the Gypsy dogs, as trying to get the Gypsy to talk on this subject or any other, is all but impossible. 20-25.

²⁷ Vesey-Fitzgerald, 181.

²⁸ Vesey-Fitzgerald, 185-86.

²⁹ Walsh, 20.

³⁰ *Gypsies and other Travellers: A Report*, 29.

³¹ Walsh, 25.

³² Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000. Pete indicated to me that he knows lurchermen who are involved in this illegal coursing with Gypsies around Norfolk. I would have liked to have gone along on one to experience the events first hand, but Pete was reluctant for me to get involved because of the illegal aspect. Although I am not aware of any specific scholarship on this topic, comparisons could be with the folkloristic/anthropological studies on cockfighting: Alan Dundes, ed. *The Cockfight: A Casebook* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994), this work includes Glifford Geertz's classic essay, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." See also C.A. Finsterbusch, *Cockfighting: All Over the World* (Surrey: Saige, 1980).

³³ Harold Wyman, *The Great Game: The Life and Times of a Welsh Poacher* (Llandeilo, Dyfed: Fieldfare, 1993) 88.

³⁴ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 August 2000.

³⁵ K. J. Bonser, *The Drovers* (Newton Abbot: Country Book Club, 1972) 202.

³⁶ Bonser, 36-7.

³⁷ Brian Plummer, *The Complete Lurcher* (Ipswich: Boydell P, 1979) 12.

³⁸ Plummer, 14.

³⁹ I tried various attempts to try and locate this individual but was unsuccessful, although Pete has met him on a few occasions at coursing events in the past.

⁴⁰ Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers," 16.

⁴¹ Lilius Rider Haggard, ed., *I Walked By Night* (1935, Ipswich: Boydel Press, 1974) 155.

⁴² Haggard, 155.

⁴³ Haggard, 157.

⁴⁴ Wyman, 80.

⁴⁵ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

- ⁴⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁴⁸ Stag Carter, "The Life of a Terrific Hunter and Special Lurcher Companion," *Shooting News*, 25 June-1 July 1993: 5.
- ⁴⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁵⁰ Haggard, 157.
- ⁵¹ Gail Barnes and Pam Nix, "I Swapped that Dog Even for that Ole T-Model," *Foxfire* 13.1 (1979): 42-3.
- ⁵² Walsh, 27. Photograph by Jim Meads
- ⁵³ David Hancock, *Old Working Dogs*, (1984; Buckinghamshire: Shire, 1998) 24.
- ⁵⁴ Walsh, 44. Photograph by Jim Meads.
- ⁵⁵ Pete Carter, personal collection.
- ⁵⁶ Hunting Princes, Mid-16th century, post card, Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul.
- ⁵⁷ Pete Carter, personal collection. This photograph also appears in, Carter, "When is a Lurcher Not a Lurcher?"
- ⁵⁸ Walsh, 23.
- ⁵⁹ Pete Carter, personal collection.
- ⁶⁰ Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall, Norfolk.
- ⁶¹ Stag Carter, "Norfolk Lurcher Society Evening a Great Success," *Sporting Dog* n.d. [1990?] 37. Photograph by Steve Collins.
- ⁶² Walsh, 50. Photograph by Jim Meads.
- ⁶³ Walsh, 50. Photograph by Jim Meads
- ⁶⁴ Pete Carter, personal collection.

Chapter 3

The Lurcherman's Work Technique: Tools and Knowledge of the Trade

Central to the study of any occupation is the actual activity of the work itself—how is the work carried out, what roles do the workers have, and what are the material items used to carry out the work? From his experiences of studying occupational folklife, Robert McCarl has concluded that, “In any occupation... the relationship of the individual to his or her tools, machines, physical environment, formal and informal work processes and (most importantly) fellow workers is central to both the accomplishment of work and our understanding of it.”¹ In attempting to define these multifaceted dynamics which make up any occupation, McCarl coined the term, “the *canon of work technique*” to describe the activities which take place and skills needed to get the job done. This canon is largely created on an informal basis. It does not conform to a written set of rules, but instead is based upon the knowledge of experience, which is crucial to the success of any occupation.² In his work with fire fighters in Washington D.C., McCarl highlights this importance of occupational experience, pointing out that the “rookie” begins an occupation with a limited canon of work technique compared to his co-workers with years of experience.³ For the inexperienced worker, the process of developing an established canon is through the learning of the specific techniques associated with the occupation. This takes place through learning by hands-on experience (performing the job), but also through the more experienced knowledge that is passed on by one’s fellow workers in the form of “imitation and instruction.”⁴ Essentially, as McCarl notes, to have technique is to “form...[an] interaction with tools, environment, and other workers that

connotes expertise and esoteric knowledge.”⁵ It is technique which sets the standards for defining an occupational group, and comes to be “prescribed by the group and used as a criteria for the determination of membership and status within it.”⁶

In the following two chapters I will examine the occupational folklife of the lurcherman using the basic theoretical approaches set out by McCarl in his idea of the canon of work technique. This current chapter will focus upon the tools and knowledge of the lurcherman, as well as the concept of work group. There will be an emphasis placed on Pete Carter’s occupational folklife, as well as information taken from other sources when relevant. The next chapter will take a microcosmic approach and attempt to document Pete’s canon of work technique based upon my ethnographic observations during his work as a lurcherman.

Because of the subversive and counter hegemonic associations that the lurcher has, it comes as no surprise that the occupational folklife of the lurcherman is little known outside of the lurcherman’s world. Although many lurchermen are legitimate (such as Pete), and are not active poachers, the tools and knowledge that they have are generally the same as that of the poacher. As Pete suggested to me, the only real difference between a poacher and warrener is that one has permission to catch rabbits and one does not.⁷ For example, the use of nets to aid in catching rabbits are an essential tool used by both the poachers and warreners, and have a long tradition within these activities. Although, as Harold Wyman has stated, “a considerable amount of important information was being denied the lay practitioner” on how to use such equipment.⁸ This information has been generally unavailable for precisely the same reasons that little is known about

the lurcher's history—for the poacher, it is within his best interests to keep the knowledge of his subversive activities as hidden as possible. The warrener, just like the poacher, was extremely wise about the ways of the land and rural life, but generally not very well educated when it came to reading and writing. His mind was on catching rabbits, not writing about them. It is only fairly recently that the techniques used by the lurcherman have started to be documented with any detail, moving beyond the romanticised narratives of poaching from the nineteenth century.⁹ It is because of these factors of subversity and use of folk "know-how" that the lurcherman's dependence upon "esoteric knowledge" is even more crucial compared with many other occupations.

When I asked Pete about the process of gaining the knowledge to be a good lurcherman, he seemed to be clearly aware of the idea of the canon of work technique, not the specific phrase *per se* but the overall concept of learning an occupation:

You can get the basics out of a book in theory, but it is all the little details, all the little wrinkles, the trade secret things that come with experience, that is what you need to know to be successful. That's what comes with experience with almost any trade isn't it. You can't learn the little details that you need to learn without experience, or learning it by watching someone else who has had the experience.¹⁰

After over thirty years of being a lurcherman, Pete's experience has given him the knowledge he needs to be successful. One of the most important areas in which the lurcherman draws from this knowledge is in his use of nets. Although both the "long net" and "purse net" are simple pieces of equipment by design, to develop the techniques to use them successfully can only come from experience.

The long net is perhaps the most popular tool traditionally used by both the professional warrener and the poacher. Wyman considers that "the innovation of the long

net has from time immemorial accounted for the capture of more rabbits, than any other system that man's ingenuity has yet devised."¹¹ There are other ways for the lurcher to catch rabbits, and in some cases it is not practical to work with the long net, but the skills to use one are an important part of the occupational folklife of any lurcher, be he a poacher or warrener. Although the exact origins of the long net are unknown, it is believed that it was probably introduced into Britain by the Normans who were also responsible for bringing the rabbit following their conquest.¹² As the name suggests, the long net is basically a mesh net which is long in length (see figs. 32-33). The maximum length for a long net is usually considered to be one hundred yards. The best length of net is often debated amongst lurchermen and recently it seems that long nets of a shorter length are favoured. Wyman contends that nets of fifty yards are preferable, for the obvious reason of being easier to handle, commenting that "a hundred yards of netting constructed of the same material as a fifty yarder will be double the weight and twice as bulky."¹³ Wyman also notes that two hemp nets of fifty yards can easily be concealed inside a large "poacher's pocket" stitched into a coat.¹⁴ The poacher's pocket is basically a custom made cloth pouch measuring approximately sixteen inches deep and ten inches wide which is stitched into the lining of a thigh length coat allowing the poacher to carry the tools of his trade without detection. When Pete uses a long net, he prefers something even shorter and opts for a net of a maximum twenty-five yards. If working alone, it is easier to use more than one net if a longer length is required, than to deal with the difficulties in handling a net of one hundred yards in length. Nets of one hundred yards were traditionally used by poachers to run along a length of woodland. A lurcher was

then sent out into the field which would act in driving the feeding rabbits towards their holes in the woodland and subsequently into the net. It is generally accepted though, as Ian Niall points out in *The Poachers Handbook*, that a net of this kind “cannot be managed alone.”¹⁵ Hence poaching with a long net was usually undertaken by two men. One would walk along and lay out the net, while the other would come behind him and stake it out. As Pete pointed out to me, to set a net by yourself, you have to lay it on the ground and then go along picking it up (see fig. 34). To do this on a dark windy night, which are the ideal conditions for poaching, the net would get caught in brambles and twigs, it would easily become tangled and cause great difficulty in setting up.¹⁶

As well as the length, the construction of the long net is also an important factor to consider. Traditionally, the nets were made out of hemp. According to Wyman, there were two varieties of hemp used. The manufactured nets were made from a three ply hemp. These were considered rather bulky, and when wet they retained the water too long making them heavier and difficult to use. Wyman also considers that the manufactured nets were also often made eighteen meshes deep. This also added extra weight, as nets of eleven or twelve mesh deep are perfectly deep enough to successfully catch rabbits. During the period that Wyman was learning the art of long netting in Wales, he recalls that many of the poachers made their own long nets. They “sought the lightest and strongest material available, at a price they could afford. Patented hemp proved to be ideal for constructing a web [net] that was strong, light and quick drying.” Twelve patent hemp was used, making a two strand net, which proved to avoid many of the problems of the three ply manufactured nets.¹⁷ It was not unknown for lurchermen to make their own

nets. Although Pete does not do this, members of his family have done so. His uncle Jack Thompson, the professional warrener, who worked with Pete's great grandfather, Peter Matthews, used to make his own long nets, along with his wife Kate (see figs. 35-36). Pete's choice for both long and purse nets, are more modern ones made from spun nylon. He considers that traditional hemp nets did not tangle easily because they were heavy, but they would rot if put away wet, so they had to be hung up and dried every time they got wet. There are lightweight nylon nets available but Pete finds that these get tangled up very easily. The spun nylon nets are heavier like the traditional hemp ones, so they do not tangle, but they are water proof so there is no problem with them rotting if they get wet.¹⁸ Wyman points out that there has been some debate over what colour the net should be, but he has worked with nets dyed green, brown, khaki and grey, and found them all to be successful in catching rabbits.¹⁹ Pete's own nets tended to be green, which is perhaps more due to coincidence than personal choice.

Threaded along the top and bottom of the long net are the long net lines. These can be made of cotton or nylon, but cotton is preferred because of the better grip it has when looped around the pegs. Prior to being set up, the long net is folded while attached to the anchor pins. The first anchor pin is placed in the ground and the net gradually unrolled. If two people are involved (a "runner" and a "pegger"), then the pegs are inserted into the ground and attached to the net as it is unrolled. This can also be done by one person with a shorter net up to about twenty-five yards long. Wyman suggests using ten hazel pegs on a net fifty yards long.²⁰ Pete makes his own pegs/stakes and informed me that hazel is used because when you coppice hazel it is usually nice and straight, as

well as being light weight (see fig. 37).²¹ It has been occasionally argued that for hard or rocky ground steel pegs are required, but Wyman does not agree with this idea. He reasons that steel pegs are not only heavy, but also are likely to make noise when being carried, creating awareness of your presence to your intended game and possibly the local game keeper. Instead, Wyman advocates the use of a "podge," which is a steel spike that is used to make a hole in hard ground for the hazel peg to be inserted.²² Although it seems to be a relatively straightforward process to erect a long net, to know how to set up the net so that it will be at its most effective in catching rabbits is something not evident to those unfamiliar with the activity and is part of the esoteric knowledge of the lurcher, as Pete explained to me:

The net itself is probably about three feet high, but you don't use it at that height. It is a three foot high net, but I only use two foot hazel stakes. By the time you have pushed them into the ground a bit, they are only about eighteen/twenty inches high. So that three foot net is now only about twenty inches high and it is all hanging there really baggy, so when a rabbit hits it he is going to go in and get tangled. You don't want it like a tennis net because they will hit it and bounce off and be gone. Also the net has got a line along the top and along the bottom. You usually have one and a half to two times as much netting as the top and bottom lines are long. In other words, if you have got a twenty-five yard net, it probably has got thirty five yards of netting on it. There again, length ways it has got loads of slack and the rabbits will go in and get tangled up.²³

As this information from Pete indicates, the key point in the construction and set up of the long net is that it must have the necessary slack (what Wyman calls the "kill") to work at its best. To one knowing nothing about long nets, to see one set up which was all slack, one could be mistaken in thinking that it was not erected correctly. Ian Niall even goes as far to suggest that, "The setting of a long net is a thing no aspiring poacher can

master without the instruction of a man who has actually put down a net and succeeded in catching rabbits by this means."²⁴

Aside from the poacher's use of a long net beside a woodland at night, there are other methods of using this essential tool. For the professional warrener, the long net was utilised to its maximum effect when tackling large field warrens, which was a method used by Peter Matthews and Jack Thompson in Norfolk (see fig. 38).²⁵ Many of the areas that these men worked, such as Shouldham Warren or Devil's Bank, which was a large earth work where Marham Airfield is now situated, extended over several acres and were literally a mass of rabbit holes (see map 3, point E). Because the ground being covered was so large, it was necessary for the men to work in sections. First, a section of the warren was quietly surrounded by a one hundred yard long net. This enclosed area was then divided by one or two shorter cross nets. These were used to restrict the movement of bolted rabbits and minimise the chance of them going to ground down another hole within the section. The team's mixture of terriers and lurchers were trained to lay quietly while the long nets were being set up. About six ferrets would then be entered into the warren to bolt the initial crop of rabbits. The dogs were used inside the enclosed area to panic the bolting rabbits into the nets. From experience, the dogs would learn that if they approached a rabbit about to bolt, it would merely retreat back down the hole to safety. As well as chasing the rabbits into the nets, the dogs were also trained to efficiently kill the rabbits with one quick and deadly bite to the head once in the net without damaging it or getting tangled themselves. The dogs were never allowed to jump over the net and try to take hold of a rabbit from the other side, as this would push the rabbit out of the net

and back towards the holes. This kind of long netting work was an almost industrious affair. After the initial rabbits had been bolted, the diggers would then move in to clear out the rest of the warren. While this was taking place, the long net would then be moved to another section and the process repeated. Using this method of working across a large warren in sections with long nets would often take several weeks to complete, but it was a very effective method of rabbit control.

Another method of using the long net is when working along a hedgerow. This is Pete's favourite way to use the long net and is an activity he has done on many occasions.²⁶ In this case, the long net used is of a shorter length, being only about eight or ten yards long. This shorter type of long net is sometimes called a stop net, because of its role in stopping rabbits running the hedge. The net is placed through the hedge at right angles, extending a few yards each side. Ideally, the net should be placed towards the end of the edge so that as much of the hedge can be worked in one period, although this is dependent on where there is a suitable gap in the hedge through which to place the net. Just as with the previous method of using long nets, working a stop net through a hedge calls for the use of a ferret to bolt the rabbits. When rabbits bolt from a burrow which is within a hedge, they have a tendency to run along the length of the hedge and will rarely run out into the open. Therefore, as Pete explains:

If you go along a hedgerow, the rabbits are only going to run up and go down another hole. If with your spade you fill in the holes that you have just done and move along you might miss a few rabbits and think you are losing them to begin with. But when you have got halfway along the hedgerow, if some of the rabbits start to run back to the holes that you have filled, you have confused them, because they will run back to those holes and find those holes are blocked and they will just sit there. They

don't think I'm off over there somewhere, they are confused and can easily be caught by your dog.²⁷

The rabbits which are not caught by the dogs when running back down the hedge are instead simply being driven forward, either towards the stop net where they get tangled, or down holes which are situated further along the hedge. Pete informed me that when you get to the last few holes along a hedge that it is not uncommon to dig down and find four rabbits all packed inside one hole into which they have bolted from those further back.²⁸

Shorter long nets between ten and twenty-five yards in length are also often used when working on various configurations of small burrows. The nets can be placed in the pathway of where it is anticipated the rabbits will attempt to make their escape, or when working with two burrows close together, setup between the two, hopefully stopping any rabbits which try to flee from one burrow to the next one. When I asked Pete about the skills needed when using a long net, his comments highlighted the complexity and specific individual nature of this aspect of the lurcherman's occupational folklore:

One of the main things [is], you need more knowledge if you are going to use long nets... because then you have got to assess every situation differently. You go to a certain place, you see where the holes are, where the next set of holes are, you see where the cover is and predict where should I put that net, which way are they going to run. Sometimes you can be wrong, and then you think next time I'm going to put my net there. But after a while, by doing it differently when you go back to that place, that will have taught you something about some of the other places, when you go somewhere completely different, you get better at assessing how you want to tackle this particular situation. Should I start at this end, or should I start at that end, which way are they going to go. Should I put a net across behind me in case some go back.²⁹

Although the long net can be one of the most effective pieces of equipment in the lurcherman's tool box, it is apparent that the successful use of the net clearly depends upon the level of experience that an individual has working with one. With every situation being different, it becomes essential for the lurcherman to draw upon knowledge gained from past experiences with each use of the long net. Marianne T. Marcus's ethnographic study of the occupational folklife of ICU nurses, highlights the ever-changing situations that also occur within that occupation, during which knowledge gained through past experience can be essential in saving lives. While the work of a lurcherman does not have a human life at stake, it could be argued that just like the nurses, lurchermen also "attempt to establish routines, set priorities, and order their actions in the face of uncertainty" as a means to carrying out their work as successfully as they can.³⁰

The other type of net used by the lurcherman is the purse net. A purse net is basically a net bag which measures approximately twenty-four inches square (see fig. 39). It is constructed of the same hemp or spun nylon mesh as the long net. At one end of the net is a peg that is attached to a draw string. The peg is inserted into the ground and the net placed over the rabbit hole. When a ferret is entered and the rabbit attempts to bolt from the hole, it simply goes into the net and becomes entangled. Although the purse net can be very effective in catching rabbits, and as I will discuss in the following chapter, was Pete's chosen method when I accompanied him rabbiting, there are times when they are best avoided. Pete considers that they can be a hindrance when working near a bramble hedgerow, or in rough undergrowth as found in some woodland because the nets

will snag on every little twig and become caught when you are trying to set them. There is also the problem of purse nets being time consuming to set if you are working in an area with lots of rabbits and therefore many holes.³¹ Hence, it is said that in Peter Matthews' days as a professional warrener, when time was money, that he would want to have the first thirty rabbits in the bag in the time it would have taken to set two hundred purse nets.³² The method of using long nets may have been the favourite for tackling the large field warrens as once found in Norfolk, and still is the best approach to take when dealing with a lot of rabbits, but occasionally, the lurcherman is faced with terrain that is unsuitable for using long nets. It is these times that the purse net becomes an indispensable tool.

Sammy Vaughn's work on a coastal nature reserve in Wales is a good example of the purse net being used as an effective method of rabbit control. Sammy was hired to control rabbits on the reserve because of the damage they were causing to the species of rare coastal plants that were growing there. The terrain of the area consisted of sand dunes, some of which rose to almost twenty feet high. Working ground like this, it would have been impossible for Sammy to use long nets. Because there was no rough undergrowth for the nets to snag on, the purse net was ideally suited for using in such terrain and could be easily set even on the steep slopes of the dunes. Many of these coastal rabbit warrens were fairly large in size consisting of many holes, and Sammy would think nothing of setting at least two hundred purse nets at one time, sometimes with the help of his son, but often times working alone. Because he used so many nets, Sammy came up with a method so not to lose any, which he described to me as follows.

Each purse net would be wrapped up with an elastic band, and Sammy remarked that, "when you put a net down, you put the band over your wrist. I usually had about two hundred nets, and when you picked them up at the end, you would wrap them with the rubber band. If you had one left over, you would be looking for another net and you don't lose any that way." If the bands got too tight for his wrist, Sammy would put them over a spare peg that he carried. Sammy said that he wrote about using this method of using rubber bands with purse nets in *The Countryman's Weekly* and now many people do it as well.³³ Sammy's use of the rubber bands to keep count of his purse nets can be seen as a good example of how the work environment can shape an individual's occupational technique. Pete would have no use for such a technique because his work environment does not cause him to use purse nets on such a large scale. As I have illustrated, even when there were large warrens to be cleared in Norfolk, the terrain predicted the use of the long net for effective rabbit control. Other aspects of Sammy's work also differed to that done by Pete and the professional Norfolk warreners of the past. Unlike Peter Matthews when working areas such as Shouldham Warren, Sammy would only ever enter one ferret into a rabbit warren at a time. He informed me that this was simply because of the terrain. Many of the dunes were over the height of Sammy's head, and because he usually worked alone he would not be able to keep watch on more than one ferret at a time. If Sammy was digging for one ferret, it would be impossible to see another one come out of the warren on the other side of a dune.³⁴

This coastal terrain also caused Sammy to work his lurcher differently to how Pete does.³⁵ The main role of the lurcher for Sammy was for it to mark holes so Sammy

knew which ones to put the ferret down. Because the movements of a free working lurcher were prone to constantly creating “mini avalanches” in the soft sand of the dunes and therefore disturbing the placement of the purse nets, Sammy would then tie his dog to a stake before entering his ferret. He would make sure though that the dog was able to see the netted holes and therefore indicate to him which holes the rabbits were bolting from so Sammy could go and dispatch them in the purse nets. This is in contrast to the important role that Pete’s dogs have in catching the rabbits that turn around and run in the opposite direction when using a long net set through a hedgerow, as described previously. As these various examples have highlighted, terrain is one of the key influencing factors in determining what techniques the lurcherman uses in conducting his work.

The ferret is another important tool used by the lurcherman (see fig. 40). And Pete considers that for catching rabbits, the use of a ferret is essential.³⁶ The use of ferrets to catch rabbits appears to be an ancient method and is mentioned in the writings of the Roman encyclopedist Pliny from the first century AD.³⁷ I have referred to the ferret as a tool, because essentially for the lurcherman that is just what it is. Ian Niall, in *The Poacher’s Handbook*, suggests that you should “make a pet of the ferret” and “get into the way of carrying him in your pocket,” but this is just a romanticised notion of both the poacher and the ferret.³⁸ Although a ferret can be handled and to a certain extent they can be fairly tame creatures, as archeozoologist Juliet Clutton-Brock notes: the ferret “seems incapable of attachment and when not properly fed or when otherwise irritated is apt to give painful evidence of its native ferocity. In a word, it is not a trustworthy pet but is a useful partner in the hunting of rabbits and rats.”³⁹ Any lurcherman who owns ferrets has

them on a purely functional basis, which is to bolt rabbits from underground. A ferret has almost no monetary value and amongst country people, such as lurcherman or other hunters, they are easy to obtain. A hawkman from my village in Norfolk, Trevor "Treacle" Framingham, also known as "The Birdman of Heacham" for his tendency to walk around the village with a hawk perched on his arm, commented to me that you just have to buy a ferret breeder a pint of beer in the pub and the next day he will give you a ferret if you want one (see fig. 41).⁴⁰ As this suggests, they are somewhat expendable creatures and therefore the lurcherman does not name his ferrets or create an attachment to them. His only concern is that they are looked after well enough to stay healthy and do their job.

When working with ferrets, there is no real training involved and the lurcherman is mainly depending on the ferret's natural hunting instinct. An important aspect for the lurcherman to consider when using ferrets is to make sure his dogs are steady to them.

Pete described to me his own technique of how to do this as follows:

I've never had any problems, there is something about ferrets that dogs don't like that much. It is probably the smell they have, they are a bit weary of them. Also I train the dogs as well, I discourage them, break them to the ferrets. If they go near them, I just say "no" sternly, or smack them on the nose, and make sure they know they are not supposed to. Also what I did is, I had my ferret cage inside the dog pen, twenty-four hours a day, there was just a piece of mesh between the dogs and the ferrets. So both the ferrets and the dogs are so used to each other all the time that there is never a problem. I've never had a ferret bite a dog, or the other way round.⁴¹

When discussing with Pete the role of the ferret within the lurcherman's work of hunting rabbits, he informed me that, "you really don't want the ferret to kill them, you really want the ferret to scare them out. You want them to bolt, that's the easy option."⁴²

In many cases this is what happens, and the rabbits flee from the warren into the nets or are caught by your lurcher. This is the ideal situation, but it is common though, for a rabbit or a number of rabbits to become bottled up in a dead end tunnel. When this occurs, the rabbit will usually have its back to the ferret. According to Pete, a ferret will not try to kill a rabbit by grabbing hold of its back, it instinctively will try to get to the rabbit's head. Ferrets, just as stoats and weasels, kill their prey by piercing the back of its skull with one of their needle sharp long fangs. Even if Pete throws a dead rabbit into his ferret cage, the ferret does not just attack it, it immediately locks onto the head. Therefore, if a rabbit is tightly packed into a tunnel, the ferret will merely scratch at the rabbit's back in an attempt to reach its head.⁴³ When this occurs the only real option for the lurcherman is to dig down and try to find the ferret and hopefully get the rabbit at the same time.

Traditionally, ferrets used in this manner were entered into the warren on a line, which was usually made of rope or leather. This was the method used by Peter Matthews and the other professional warreners of his day. Because rabbits were worth money in those days, the ferret was usually coped (muzzled) so it caused as little damage to the rabbit as possible. Once it appeared that the ferret was not moving, a hole would be dug to find the line and then a trench made to follow the line and locate the ferret and the rabbit. Sammy Vaughn has also used ferrets on a line when working on field warrens, but his method of doing the job was slightly different. From his long experience as a lurcherman working with ferrets, Sammy believes that when using a large male ferret on a line is the only time that you can train a ferret, and he was able to train his ferrets to pull

out a rabbit from the warren. Initially working with lengths of old drainage pipe laid out in his garden, Sammy told me that the secret to doing this is to teach the ferret to pull while on the line. He would place a dead rabbit at the end of the pipe and enter the ferret a yard or so at a time and keep pulling it out. To get the ferret accustomed to this he would have a bowl of milk for it to drink from every time it came out of the pipe. Eventually Sammy would let the ferret get to the rabbit and then tug on the line to indicate to him to come out, hopefully dragging the rabbit out with him. How well this method would actually work when dealing with a rabbit warren is debatable, although Sammy's indication was that he has had good success doing this when he had worked with a liner ferret in the past.⁴⁴ Working a ferret on a line could be problematic though. Because it would involve digging a trench to follow the line, for the lurcherman who usually worked alone it could be a time consuming process. This is why Peter Matthews would often have a team of diggers accompanying him when working on a big warren. The line itself could also cause difficulties as it could easily become wrapped around or snagged on the roots of trees or hedgerows. An area with lots of tunnels above and below each other, such as the dunes Sammy Vaughn worked, could also cause problems when using a line. Pete also expressed to me the problems of using a liner ferret, in an experience he recalled of being out ferreting with a couple of friends one day: "Here near the air field are these landing lights for the aircraft. They always work a ferret on a line, and they were digging down and down to get to this ferret, and it scared the life out of me—the line was wrapped around one of the power cables that went to these aircraft lights."⁴⁵ Although the line getting wrapped around a root is not hazardous compared to

Pete's experience, his example does highlight the unexpected problems that can be encountered when working a ferret on a line.

In recent years the use of the traditional ferret line has been replaced by the electronic locator. This consists of a small collar with a built in sensor powered by a hearing aid battery, which is attached to the ferret, and a locator box measuring approximately 3x4 inches, which is used by the lurcherman to locate where the ferret is underground. The box is powered by a nine volt battery, and makes a clicking sound when the collar is located. On the side of the box is an adjustable switch that allows the user to increase or decrease the strength of the signal put out by the box, to gauge the depth of how far the ferret is below ground. The locator kits come in two models, a standard one which goes down to a depth of eight feet and a more powerful one which can go down to fifteen feet. For working in the relatively flat fields of Norfolk, Pete finds the eight foot model adequate for his needs, although Sammy Vaughn had to use the more powerful one when working in the sand dunes. The introduction of this technology into the work on the lurcherman has made it relatively easy to locate where the ferret is underground, as Pete describes:

You just sweep it back and forth like that, and then you find him. Then do it that way until it keeps on stopping, then the other way and across. Turn the intensity down and you can then pretty much say that's where he is. Now before I start to dig, to make sure he is not on the move, I just leave it there and let it click for a little while. It's obvious that if he has just stayed in the same place for some time, then he's on a rabbit and not wandering around searching for them. If he's moved off, I'll let him have another minute and then find him again. The intensity will tell you roughly how deep he is. So if it reads five feet, you know that you can safely dig down three feet and not break through. Then you put the box down in the hole and turn the intensity really down to make sure you are right. Then when

you get closer you start to go a bit carefully and just break through gently with the spade and the ferret looks up at you.⁴⁶

The basic concept of locating a ferret appears to be straight forward enough—simply find it with the locator and dig down to it. Pete's description though, highlights that the lurcherman needs to draw upon esoteric techniques if he is to do this work efficiently. He does not just simply dig straight down to the ferret. He has to take into consideration that the ferret may move, and therefore has to manipulate the capabilities of the electronic locator to contend with this. These are not things that one would know instinctively how to do. Instead they are based upon the specific knowledge of an occupation which can only come through on the job experience.

There is much debate amongst lurchermen over what kind of ferrets to use and how to get them to work most effectively. There are basically two kinds of ferret, the albino kind which is all white, and the polecat which has a mask like a racoon. Pete told me that he favours the albino kind, simply because they are easier to see amongst the undergrowth and therefore are not liable to wander off as easily as the darker coloured polecat possibly could.⁴⁷ There is also contention over whether one should use male or female ferrets. Pete prefers to use medium size male ferrets, but expressed that some people think a larger male ferret is more likely to kill underground. Then in contrast to this, there are others who prefer to use smaller female ferrets, who say that they are faster, can get in tight places and when using purse nets they can slip through the mesh of the net without disturbing it. But some people argue that a smaller ferret gets tired too quickly. Again though, as Pete informed me, "none of it holds water, none of these little petty arguments, there are so many variables to it. Depending on an individual's

experience, they have all got different points of view of what is best."⁴⁸ One of the major problems that wants to be avoided when ferreting, is what is called a "lay up." This is when a ferret will kill a rabbit underground, eat and then go to sleep. One of the main causes of this used to be that traditionally people would starve their ferrets so they would be more keen to hunt because they were hungry. But Pete believes that they still hunt well even if they are kept well fed.⁴⁹ In contrast to starving ferrets, some other people believed in only feeding their ferrets on bread and milk, so not to give them a taste for flesh, and therefore decrease the likelihood of the ferret laying up, but this usually led to them not living very long.⁵⁰

Before the days of the electronic locator, there are many tales of lurchermen who did not use a line on their ferrets having to wait hours for a ferret to come back out of a warren. Sometimes they would leave the ferret box at the hole with some food in over night and hopefully the next day the ferret would be there asleep. Ian Niall describes various methods to try and bring a ferret out of a warren, including lighting a piece of gorse bush and attempting to smoke him out, or simply pushing a dead rabbit in and out of the hole to try and draw the ferret out with the scent.⁵¹ Although such tales are numerous, Pete has never had a problem with ferrets laying up. Instead, because he keeps his well fed, his biggest problem is having a ferret kill a rabbit underground and then lose interest in it and move on. It is then difficult to try and locate that rabbit underground without the ferret there. Because there is no economic value in rabbits these days, Pete does not usually dig to try and find the rabbit, but he emphasised that he does not lose that many this way.⁵²

Regardless of Ian Niall's suggestion that the you should carry your ferret in your pocket, the lurcher typically carries his ferret in a ferret box (see fig. 42). This is usually a self made item and is constructed around simplicity. Pete's box is fabricated from plywood with a hinged lid and measures approximately 18x10x10 inches. Inside the box there is a main compartment which is big enough to carry two ferrets if needs be. Pete keeps some straw in here to make a soft bedding for a ferret while he is in the box. At one end of the box is a smaller separate compartment in which Pete places his purse nets. Pete has drilled sixteen holes, approximately 0.5 inches in diameter in one side of his box so air is able to circulate for the ferret. A canvas shoulder strap is also attached for carrying the box. One of the problems with a plywood box like this is the weight. As I found out when I carried Pete's box while out rabbiting with him, it can become quite heavy on one's shoulder after a few hours. In response to this, Sammy Vaughn told me that he moved away from using a plywood box, and instead fabricated his out of plastic bread bins, which were extremely light and also resistant to wet weather.⁵³

As I have discussed above, when using ferrets the lurcher's work will inevitably involve the process of digging, especially if he is to effectively control the rabbit population. Because much of the Norfolk landscape consists of soft soil with a high sand or clay content, the tunnels in a rabbit warren in the region can extend quite a few feet below ground. To overcome this, the traditional professional warreners such as Peter Matthews used what was known as a Norfolk long spade, or rabbiting spade. This has a handle between five and six feet in length and a specially shaped blade to enable the

lurcherman to dig holes almost to the depth of the handle, as Pete explains (see figs. 43-44):

The traditional Norfolk rabbiting spade has a strong narrow blade, also the blade is cupped so that you can dig a relatively small hole deep without having to shift too much earth. Because the blade is cupped like that it will actually hold the earth in it when you draw it up out of the hole. If you have a flat bladed spade you have to get under it to lift it out and you have to make a much bigger hole to get anywhere. It is a spade for digging holes basically. It needs to be strong because often in hedgerows and maybe under tree roots you have to dig and come across roots, and chop through a root with it, and sometimes especially in this area you might get a couple of feet of soil and then be on chalk and you have to blast through that a bit.⁵⁴

In many other areas of Great Britain, especially in the North, a spade of this design is not needed because you only have to dig down two or three feet and there is solid granite. According to Pete, the original Norfolk long spade had a metal hook on the end of the handle which was used to hook the ferret line out of the hole that had been dug. When Pete attempted to buy a new rabbiting spade a years ago, he found that the modern ones had the narrow cupped blade as used on the original, but they had a very short handle. He solved this problem by replacing the handle with that from a pitch fork which was almost as long as those found on the original Norfolk spades. It did not concern Pete that there was no hook on the handle because he uses the electronic locator and therefore has no need for one, plus he commented that you had to be careful when you had a hook on the end because it could gouge you in the face when digging.⁵⁵

Again, to highlight a different occupational technique due to the work environment, Sammy Vaughn's approach to digging when he worked on dunes was vastly different to Pete's. Because of the obvious problem of having to deal with loose

sand, Sammy found it impossible to dig a deep narrow hole, as would be done with the Norfolk spade, without the sides caving in. Instead he would inevitably end up with a large crater which caused the removal of a great deal of sand. To save time in filling such holes back in, Sammy would carry with him a sheet of heavy duty plastic. He would unroll the sheet and shovel the sand on to it. Then, when finished, he would just simply tip the sand back in to the hole.⁵⁶

By looking at the material culture of Pete as a lurcherman from McCarl's perspective of the occupational relationship between an individual and his or her tools, some interesting links can be seen. As I have shown, when feasible Pete makes his own tools and equipment. The hazel stakes used to support his long nets, the box used to carry his ferrets, along with his customised Norfolk long spade, are all examples of Pete creating a personalised connection to his work activities as a lurcherman. This process of crafting one's occupational tools also introduces a sense of authenticity into Pete's identity as a lurcherman. By making these tools by his own hand, Pete is reinforcing the self-sufficient ideology which is traditionally connected with the lurcher's role as a hunting dog of the rural poor. Alongside this, these material items also act in historically linking Pete to the occupational traditions of lurchermen that are deeply rooted within his own family and the heritage of the area in which he lives.

When moving beyond the occupational tools of the lurcherman and considering McCarl's suggestion that the most important occupational relationship is with one's fellow workers, the work of the lurcherman presents an interesting challenge to McCarl's statement. The definition of "group" amongst folklorists has been a hotly debated topic,

as Dorothy Noyes has highlighted in her article, "Group," in the special "key words" addition of the *Journal of American Folklore*. As Noyes contests: "Ideas about group are the most powerful and most dangerous in folkloristics."⁵⁷ In applying the concept of "group" to the study of occupational folklife, the folklorist is basically attempting to define a work group. McCarl does not provide a specific definition of this idea of "work group," and instead, the reader of his work is left to assume that the group simply consists of individuals who possess a relationship with each other through the shared experiences of an occupation. In the case of McCarl's study, *The District of Columbia Fire Fighter's Project*, this is straightforward enough and causes few problems, as his work group can be easily identified as the fire fighters from 16 Engine and 8 Engine of the District of Columbia Fire Department in Washington D.C.⁵⁸ The fire fighters assigned to these two Engines physically interact and work together, and therefore can be described as having a relationship within the occupational context. The semantics of the term "group" do not have to be addressed to agree with McCarl in this case. However, in examining this idea of work relationship from the perspective of Pete as a lurcherman, the concept of what is meant by "group" in relation to the idea of work group must be acknowledged.

As the article by Noyes indicates, within folkloristics there are two basic theoretical definitions of what constitutes a group: the macro perspective of Alan Dundes who proposed "that a folk group [or in this case, work group] could be 'any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor,'" or the micro perspective suggested in Dan Ben-Amos's definition of "folklore as 'artistic communication in small groups.'"⁵⁹ It is evident when examining the occupational folklife of the lurcherman that

Dundes's definition of group is problematic. Pete and Sammy are part of a larger para-social rhetorical community of lurchermen created in the exchange of their occupational experiences through letters and telephone conversations, therefore allowing them to fit Dundes's idea of the group sharing "at least one common factor."⁶⁰ However, such a definition of group has very little use when considering McCarl's idea of the importance of fellow worker relationships. Pete and Sammy have never worked together, hence this important relationship with one's fellow workers proposed by McCarl is not present. Instead, it appears that Ben-Amos's suggestion of "a communicative process" taking place within a "small group" is most relevant to McCarl's idea of occupational relationships.⁶¹ Although Ben-Amos is arguing for what constitutes folklore, his description of the group in which folklore takes place, proposes that all participants are in a situation in which they can "confront each other face to face and relate to each other directly."⁶² Whereas this applies to many occupational groups, such as the fire fighters featured in McCarl's study, the work of the lurcherman largely challenges this definition of folk/work group. As I have discussed earlier in this study, the lurcherman usually works alone—that is without a human assistant—but one companion he would never be without is his dog. Obviously there are exceptions to this rule, such as the large scale rabbiting work done by Peter Matthews et al, but generally the lurcherman stands as a solitary figure. This subversive approach to hunting is dependent upon the quarry not being aware of the lurcherman or lurcher's presence. A group of noisy people in a field is not going to result in the catching of many rabbits. As for the poacher, he does not want to bring attention to himself for obvious reasons.

As Clutton-Brock has indicated, archeological evidence suggests that this hunting partnership between man and canine dates back to prehistoric times. During the excavation of a hillside cave in the south of France, H. de Lumley discovered that about 125, 000 years ago Palaeolithic people had constructed shelters inside the cave. One of the key findings within these shelters was that the skull of a wolf had been intentionally placed at the entrance of each one.⁶³ Illuminating on this important discovery, Clutton-Brock writes:

[T]he remarkable kinship and powers of communication that exist between human beings and dogs today have developed as an integral part of the hunting ancestry of ourselves and the wolf. It is a biological link based on social structures and behaviour patterns that are closely similar because they evolved in both species in response to the needs of a hunting team, but which endure today and have become adapted to life in sophisticated, industrial societies.⁶⁴

Lurchermen such as Pete and Sammy Vaughn are examples of how this evolution process has taken place. Not only does the lurcherman have a close working relationship with his dog, but he is dependent upon the ability of the dog for them to be a successful hunting team. Therefore, could this hunting team be considered as a folk/work group which possess relationships between the workers as proposed by McCarl?

While the lurcherman does have a degree of control over his dog, this is kept to a minimum, as the most effective lurcher is one that has the ability to work independently from its owner. As Pete commented to me, "I think if you just give them basic obedience so that they will come when called, lay down and stay when you tell them to, so that you have got some kind of basic control over them, basically the rest of it is up to them."⁶⁵ Pete believes that the lurcherman should not interfere with the dog's natural hunting

ability, as it is more important to teach the dog what you do not what him to do than what you do.⁶⁶ Once a dog has been taught the basic skills of the work, the actions and behaviour of the dog can predict to the lurcherman what is about to happen within the work environment. Pete introduced his current whippet/border collie lurcher, "Blue," to rabbiting with nets and a ferret using the following method:

I sit there with the dog between my knees with my hands just lightly around his chest, just holding him there. As soon as a rabbit bolted, I just let him go. I done this a few times, and then after that I just let him have free run and he was standing back and watching. He knew then that this is where the action is. Even if a leaf blew or moved in the middle of a hedge, he would get up and go look. He'd see something move, or hear something move long before I did. Sometimes the ferret would actually have hold of a rabbit close to the mouth of a hole and the dog's actually gone and stuck his head down and pulled it out with the ferret hanging on the end, but I haven't even heard anything.⁶⁷

As this description indicates, the working relationship that exists between Pete and Blue is largely based upon non-verbal communication. Blue comes to recognise that Pete's setting of the nets and entering the ferret indicates that he is to be ready for any rabbits that may bolt. Likewise, Blue's actions can also be seen as communication between him and Pete which indicates to Pete that a rabbit is about to bolt and be caught by Blue or in the net.

This use of non-verbal communication in Pete's work is something I will explore further in the following chapter. It is apparent though that this a major characteristic of the work relationship between a lurcherman and his dog. Another example of this was given to me by Sammy Vaughn when describing his rabbit control work on the sand dunes of the Welsh coast. Because Sammy often worked on warrens which extend 150 yards long and would have up to two hundred purse nets set, he depended on his dogs to

help him keep track of where the rabbits had bolted into the nets. Therefore, Sammy would have a lurcher on one side of the warren and another lurcher on the other side. As mentioned previously, these dogs would be tied-up to stakes to prevent them from running after a rabbit and causing the loose sand to disturb the purse nets. According to Sammy, the dogs would be sitting down, and if either of them stood up, Sammy knew a rabbit was about to bolt. He could also tell if there was more than one rabbit caught because the dogs would be moving back and forth in the direction of the netted rabbits. As Sammy remarked on his lurchers, "they where my eyes."⁶⁸

Although perhaps the idea of a folk or work group consisting of a human and an animal could be considered as stretching the boundries of what defines such a group within the realm of folkloristics, Jay Mechling has argued for such a case in his article, "'Banana Cannon' and Other Folk Traditions Between Human and Nonhuman Animals."⁶⁹ As Mechling rightly states, up until his own work, everything written by folklorists on the concept of group—be it the idea of the larger group proposed by Dundes, or the small one proposed by Ben-Amos and Elliott Oring in his work on dyads—assumes that only human beings can be members of these groups. By expanding the folkloristic assumption of the dyad to include a human and a pet, Mechling points out that a game of fetch that takes place between himself and his pet Labrador retriever "Sunshine" is "truly interactive:"

I was not always in control of the game. Sometimes Sunshine would fetch the ball but stop on the way back to me some ten feet away. He would begin a slow retriever stalk, then drop the ball in front of him and assume the familiar canine "play bow"—forepaws extended flat on the ground, the body sloping upward toward his erect hindquarters, tail wagging. This is the canine invitation to play. In this case, however, we were already

engaged in a game, so this message to me was that he, too, could exert some power and control in the game.⁷⁰

Comparisons could be made between Sunshine's actions to invoke play and those by the lurchers of Pete and Sammy Vaughn to indicate that a rabbit has bolted into a net. In both cases the dog exhibits non-verbal communication in an attempt to communicate with the human member of the group. Although historically the majority of folklorists have tended to favour the study of oral communicative traditions, in recent years examples of the importance of non-verbal communication within the study of folklore have also started to appear, including McCarl's work on "The Communication of Work Technique" in occupational folklife.⁷¹ In looking at the interaction between humans and animals, it should hopefully become apparent to folklorists that non-verbal communication can often play an important role within a folk group.⁷² The concept of the human and dog dyad also highlights the problem of what Mechling calls "*the equality fallacy*," the assumption often made by folklorists that the members of a group all relate to each other on equal terms. But as Marxist and feminist schools of anthropology have argued, this is often not the case, and many groups are in fact "asymmetrical" rather than "symmetrical."⁷³ Even though there is little argument that the average human being has a greater physical and mental development than a dog, this does not in anyway rule out the possibility of non-verbal communication taking place between the two, as the examples provided earlier suggest. It is therefore through a re-examination of what constitutes both folklore and the folk group, Mechling is able to present a convincing argument in support of the interactive communication that exists between humans and animals, and comes to the conclusion that: "In short, by all the criteria generally used by folklorists to decide if

they are in presence of communication worthy of being called 'folklore,' I see no persuasive reasons why nonhuman animals cannot be included in 'the folk.' It is only a fiat of speciesism, that folklorists define folklore as a unique possession of human animals."⁷⁴ While I acknowledge that such a statement is controversial within the discipline of folkloristics and largely subjective, hence open to criticism, the following chapter of my study will support Mechling's conclusion and is written with the assumption that Pete's dogs are part of his work group.

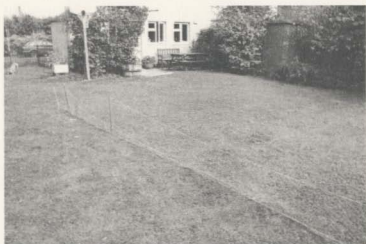


Fig. 32. Long net.

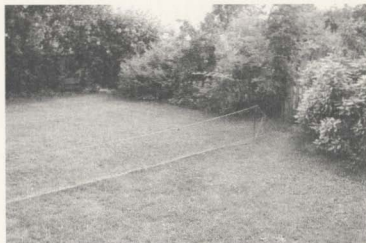


Fig. 33. Long net.



Fig. 34. Pete setting up long net with Luke observing.

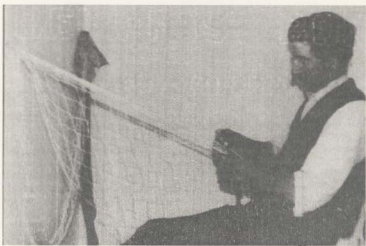


Fig. 35. Jack Thompson making a long net.⁷⁵



Fig. 36. Kate Thompson making a long net.⁷⁶

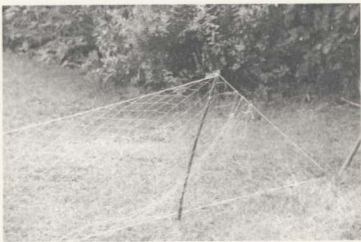


Fig. 37. Long net with hazel stakes.



Fig. 38. Professional warreners from Suffolk, circa early twentieth century, with long spades, ferret boxes, long nets and lurchers.⁷⁷



Fig. 39. Pete with purse net.



Fig. 40. Pete's albino ferret.



Fig. 41. Treacle with his ferret.

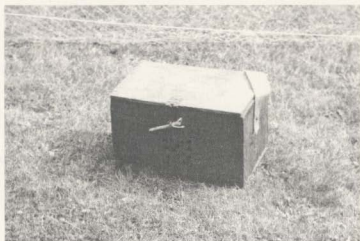


Fig. 42. Pete's ferret box.



Fig. 43. Pete with Norfolk long spade.



Fig. 44. Narrow cupped blade of the long spade.

Notes

¹ Robert McCarl, "The Communication of Work Technique," *Culture & Tradition* 3 (1978): 110.

² Robert McCarl, "Occupational Folklore," *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliott Oring (Logan, Utah: Utah State UP, 1986) 71-2. emphasis in original.

³ McCarl, "Occupational Folklore," 73-4.

⁴ Robert McCarl, "Occupational Folklife: A Theoretical Hypothesis," *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, ed. Robert Byington (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1978) 6.

⁵ McCarl, "Occupational Folklife," 6.

⁶ McCarl, "Occupational Folklife," 7.

⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

⁸ Harold Wyman, *The Great Game: The Life and Times of a Welsh Poacher* (Llandeilo, Dyfed: Fieldfare, 1993) 111.

⁹ From what I have found in the literature on this topic, Frederick Rolfe's biography, Lilius Rider Haggard, ed. *I Walked By Night* (1935, Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1974) was the first book to provide insight into the methods of the lurcherhman. Since then, Harold Wyman has expanded this considerably with his books, *The Art of Long Netting* (details not known) and *The Great Game*. Specialist magazine articles, such as those written by Stag [Pete] Carter, or as found in the subscription only publication *Earth Dog Running Dog*, have also helped to shed light on what has been a little known area of occupational folklife.

¹⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 24 Jan. 2001.

¹¹ Wyman, 111.

¹² Wyman, 111.

¹³ Wyman, 112.

¹⁴ Wyman, 111.

- ¹⁵ Ian Niall, *The Poacher's Handbook* (1950, Cambridge: White Lion, 1992) 33.
- ¹⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 24 Jan. 2001.
- ¹⁷ Wyman, 112-3.
- ¹⁸ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ¹⁹ Wyman, 114.
- ²⁰ Wyman, 113.
- ²¹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ²² Wyman, 113.
- ²³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ²⁴ Niall, 37.
- ²⁵ Pete Carter describes this work in the following articles: Stag Carter, "Ferreting with Long Nets Now and in Past Times," *Shooting News* 28 Feb.-5 Mar. 1992: 4; Stag Carter "A Norfolk Warrener and His Dogs," *Sporting Dog*, n.d. 16-7; and Stag Carter "The Legendary Old Timers and the Norfolk Lurcher," *Sporting Dog*, n.d. 16-7.
- ²⁶ Carter, "Ferreting With Long Nets" 4.
- ²⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.
- ²⁸ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ²⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 24 Jan. 2001.
- ³⁰ Laura R. Marcus and Marianne T. Marcus, "Occupational Folklife," *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: A Sourcebook*, ed. G. H. Schoemaker (Bloomington: Trickster P, 1990) 125-6.
- ³¹ Interview with Pete Carter, July 5, 2000.
- ³² Carter, "Ferreting With Long Nets" 4.
- ³³ Sammy Vaughn, personal interview, 29 July 2000.

³⁴ Sammy Vaughn, personal interview, 29 July 2000.

³⁵ Pete Carter has written about this in the following article: Stag Carter, "Overcoming the Difficulties of a Particular Terrain," *The Countryman's Weekly*, 3-9 Sept. 1993: 8.

³⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

³⁷ Juliet Clutton-Brock, *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals* (1987, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 179.

³⁸ Niall, 24.

³⁹ Clutton-Brock, 183.

⁴⁰ Trevor is known as "Treacle" because of his wild-flowing golden hair. I have known him for approximately twenty years and for the majority of that time he has always kept at least one bird of prey of some description.

⁴¹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴² Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000

⁴⁴ Sammy Vaughn, personal interview, 29 July 2000.

⁴⁵ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

⁴⁸ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁴⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁵⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁵¹ Niall, 27-9

⁵² Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁵³ Sammy Vaughn, personal interview, 29 July 2000. Unfortunately Sammy is no longer able to go rabbiting because of his health, hence he did not have one of his ferret boxes to show me.

⁵⁴ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

⁵⁵ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

⁵⁶ Carter, "Overcoming the Difficulties" 8

⁵⁷ Dorothy Noyes, "Group," *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 449.

⁵⁸ Robert McCarl, *The District of Columbia Firefighters' Project: A Case Study in Occupational Folklife*, Smithsonian Folklife Studies 4 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1985) 13-23.

⁵⁹ Noyes, 452-3. emphasis in original.

⁶⁰ Peter Narváez discusses the formation of a para-social rhetorical community by the audience of a 1950s Newfoundland radio show, who would voice their responses to the show through telephone calls and letters, see: Peter Narváez, "Folk Talk and Hard Facts: The Role of Ted Russell's 'Uncle Mose' On CBC's 'Fishermen's Broadcast,'" *Studies in Newfoundland Folklore: Community and Process*, eds. Gerald Thomas and J. D. A Widdowson (St. John's: Breakwater, 1992) 199-204.

⁶¹ Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (1971): 12.

⁶² Ben-Amos, 13.

⁶³ Clutton-Brock, 3.

⁶⁴ Clutton-Brock, 49.

⁶⁵ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁶⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁶⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

⁶⁸ Sammy Vaughn, personal interview, 29 July 2000.

⁶⁹ Jay Mechling, "'Banana Cannon' and Other Folk Traditions Between Human and Nonhuman Animals," *Western Folklore* 48 (1989): 312.

⁷⁰ Mechling, 313.

⁷¹ Robert McCarl, "The Communication of Work Technique." See also: Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton 1978. 274-82); Simon J. Carmel, "Deaf Folklore," *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand, (New York: Garland, 1996) 197-200; Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "Gestures," *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand (New York: Garland, 1996) 333-335; Adam Kendon, "Gesture," *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, ed. Richard Bauman (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 179-90. et al.

⁷² Mechling, 315.

⁷³ Mechling, 319.

⁷⁴ Mechling, 318.

⁷⁵ Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers," 17.

⁷⁶ Pete Carter, personal collection. This photograph also appears in, Carter, "The Legendary Old Timers," 17.

⁷⁷ David Hancock, *Old Farm Dogs* (Buckinghamshire: Shire, 1999) 19.

Chapter 4

In the Field: An Ethnographic Observation of Pete at Work

In the preceding chapter, I introduced the work of the lurcherman—the tools and occupational methods used, and the environment in which this work takes place. In this chapter, I intend to discuss these ideas further by examining Pete at work, by documenting his canon of work technique—what he does when putting his occupational knowledge into practice in the field. This was done through ethnographic observation of Pete at work rabbiting. In undertaking this part of the study, I was faced with specific challenges which inevitably have had an impact on the field work data that I collected. The first of these was the time constraints which were placed on my field work. When I began this study in the summer of 2000, I conducted extensive interviews with Pete, but because the rabbiting season typically runs from October to March, I was unable to document Pete's work as a lurcherman due to the commitments of my M.A. degree back in St. John's, Newfoundland. It was decided that I would return to Norfolk in early January 2001 for one month to complete the rest of my field work with Pete. I limited this time to only one month simply because I felt that the time restraints of my degree did not allow me the luxury to spend three or four more months doing field work, especially when I had hours of taped interview waiting back in St. John's to transcribe, along with the final writing up of the study to be completed ideally before June 2001.

Other studies in occupational folklife have suggested that extensive periods in the field are necessary to be able to fully document the work culture that is being studied. For their study of Lake Erie fisherman, Timothy C. Lloyd and Patrick B. Mullen conducted

over two years of field work, during which time they “shot about seven hundred slides and almost eleven hundred black-and-white photographs,” and recorded many hours of interviews.¹ Likewise, Robert McCarl’s study of fire fighters in Washington D.C. involved him spending one full year conducting field work, gathering hundreds of hours of tape, along with hundreds of photographs and notes.² In no way could my own field work be as comprehensive as that undertaken in these two examples, but I felt that the nature of my own study would allow me to gather more than enough substantial data to provide a good analysis of Pete’s occupational folklife. By focusing upon the work technique of one person, I had therefore been able to limit how much field work I needed to do, and assumed that I would have numerous opportunities to observe Pete rabbiting during the month I was to be back in Norfolk.

When I finally arrived back in Norfolk to complete the field work, the situation turned out to be quite different to what I had envisaged. Pete informed me that he had not been going rabbiting with his dogs on a regular basis because there did not seem to be many rabbits around to catch. I learned that the year before had also been a bad rabbiting season, which was something Pete had neglected to previously inform me. It was not certain what had caused this decline in the rabbit population. Pete mentioned that on the farm estate he usually goes to they occasionally also use gas to keep control of the rabbits, but he did not believe this to be the main reason. Friends of Pete’s who work other areas had also mentioned to him that they had noticed a decline in the number of rabbits. Myxomatosis had been ruled out because of a lack of evidence. Instead, although this has not been officially confirmed, Pete believes that the most likely culprit for the

decline in rabbits is the disease R.H.D. (rabbit haemorrhagic disease) which causes the rabbits to internally haemorrhage:

It supposedly came from tame rabbit stock in China and worked its way west through Europe. Lot of tame rabbits that people kept for meat in Italy, thousands and thousands died of it. Then they noticed it here first when people were taking tame rabbits to shows, rabbit shows, and they had to have them all injected against it. Lots of rabbits died, and that is how it was getting spread. But it obviously got into the wild population, and wild rabbits in various parts of the country were found to have it. Because they die so quickly, unlike myxomatosis, you don't see them sitting around ill. They just tend to die quickly underground and the rabbits in a particular area seem to disappear. You don't see evidence of the disease with corpses laying around everywhere.³

Although the shortage of rabbits had left Pete somewhat lacking in enthusiasm for him to spend everyday out trying to catch them, his other commitments also did not allow him the time. An important point to remember here, as noted earlier, is that being a lurcher/hunter/rabbit catcher is not Pete's regular job, and he spends many more hours a week giving guitar lessons than he does catching rabbits. As I discovered, when the folklorist decides to study the occupational folklife of an individual who does not partake in that work on a full-time basis, there are fewer opportunities for extensive ethnography. In this situation, fieldwork has to be scheduled; you arrange a time to observe the work being done and then leave again. Inevitably in such cases, aspects of work culture will be missed, an example being that I learned at the end of my field work that Pete would regularly take his dogs out for a late night walk across the fields neighbouring his house, during which they would occasionally run a hare. This was something I was unable to experience. Ironically, even if I had wanted to extend my time doing fieldwork with Pete, unforeseen circumstances would have rendered it impossible. It was only shortly after my

return to Newfoundland on the 11th of February 2001, that the outbreak of foot and mouth disease occurred in Britain. Although the disease was not actually reported in Norfolk, precautions were taken nation-wide. Hence, when I spoke to Pete on the telephone in early April, he told me that he had only been out with his dogs twice since I left, and the dogs had not left his back yard since the report of the disease.

In total, I went out with Pete three times—on three consecutive Wednesdays over the final three weeks of my trip. Although the time was limited, I was left to work with what was available to me. This restriction in time along with other factors went in to influencing how I approached my ethnography of Pete at work rabbiting. Describing the collecting of occupational folklife in urban and industrial settings, Robert H. Byington believes that the best method to document the occupational behaviour “is a functioning sensory system and a pad for notes, descriptions, and diagrams.” He argues that carrying a tape recorder “is usually just excess baggage” and the use of a camera “is inhibiting and can actually cause accidents.” Byington advises that after an established relationship has been formed between the field worker and the occupational group, then “supplementary photographic... documentation can be used sparingly.”⁴ While this may be the best method for the types of repetitive industrial work discussed by Byington, I felt that a different approach was needed for my own study. Instead of using photographic documentation on a supplementary basis, I decided to make extensive use of the camera to record Pete’s work. This was supported with written field notes which I made when I returned home after being out with Pete. The reasons for this were as follows. The work of the lurcherman is uncharted territory within the realm of folkloristics, and I therefore

felt that it was important to document this work photographically, both as a means to illustrate points discussed and for archival purposes. As well, while previous work on the lurcherman would include “posed” photographs, I was unable to locate any examples of the actual work taking place. Another deciding factor to my use of photographic documentation is that Pete’s work is not based upon repetitive tasks unlike many industrial occupations during which the work is repeated over and over in the same context. By recording aspects of the work by camera I wanted to try and capture a sense of the changing dynamic of the lurcherman’s work.

When undertaking my ethnography of Pete, I was concerned with how I was going to try and document the work process in its natural context. Folklorists studying occupational folklife have argued that the participant observation approach is one of the most successful methods of collecting work culture and techniques in a natural context. This basically requires the folklorist to work at the actual job which is being studied so that the data is effectively collected from “the inside.” Bruce E. Nickerson used this method when collecting factory folklore, during which time he worked “as a piece-work machinist” for eighteen months. An important point to note here though is that Nickerson had recently graduated from a four year apprentice program in Mechanical Engineering, as well as having over a decade of experience working within an industrial factory setting.⁵ Practically though, how many folklorists are trained in the skills of such work, or can find the time to be employed on the job for a long duration? As well as the time factor, I was also not skilled sufficiently in the work of the lurcherman to be able to use such an approach. Even more so, when the lurcherman is working alone with just his

dogs, it obviously becomes impossible for the folklorist to just be another worker on the job. Bruce Jackson highlights that “fieldworkers must be aware how their intrusion influences the information provided to them.”⁶ It was inevitable that my presence accompanying Pete while out rabbiting would have an effect on how he approached his work. Although I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible while observing Pete, the fact that there was just him, two dogs, and me, made this difficult. We could not avoid conversation, and Pete would often explain or comment to me what was happening as he went about his work, which would obviously not happen when he is working alone. This aspect of the field work also had an influence on my decision to utilize photographic documentation over notes written actually in the field. I had already discovered the previous summer that Pete was extremely comfortable with me taking his photograph, so I had no fears of being bothersome with a camera during the field work. I found that by taking this approach I could still readily converse with Pete while taking photographs of the work. This would not have been possible if I had tried to concentrate on writing detailed notes in the field. Given all the circumstances discussed above, it is debatable whether the approach used during my ethnography of Pete’s work was the most effective. Regardless, I feel that I have collected and reported my data to the best of my ability. The following ethnography is based upon specific examples of Pete’s work which occurred over the three days that I observed him rabbiting. These were chosen in an attempt to provide a sense of the various situations which Pete encountered during the study.

The drive from my own village of Heacham to Pete’s home in Barton Bendish takes approximately thirty minutes (see map 2). I would usually arrive at Pete’s sometime

between 10:00 and 10:30 am. On arrival Pete would offer me a cup of tea and we would discuss various subjects including music, guitars and, of course, dogs and hunting. After about twenty minutes, we would usually get ready to leave. It was evident that when going rabbiting Pete feels no sense of urgency. A possible reason for this is that, unlike the professional warrener, Pete does not financially depend on this work, time was not money unlike in the days of Peter Matthews. I later came to realise that this relaxed sense of pace was, in fact part, of the work process.

The clothing that Pete would wear when going rabbiting was entirely based upon practicality. Pete would have on a pair of jeans, a durable military style sweater, and thick wool socks. Over the top of this, he would wear a padded, sleeveless vest style body warmer, and then his waxed cotton coat. Pete considers that the Barbour style waxed cotton coat is probably the best thing to wear for such work. The coats are both thorn proof and water proof, and by turning your back to it, you can easily push your way through a thorn or rough hedge. As Pete remarked, "they become like an old friend one of those coats, you have them for years, they are pretty much the best."⁷ It is possible to buy trousers made from the same material but Pete does not have any. Waxed caps are also available, and are favorable over wool hats which snag on everything, although Pete wore a wool hat himself because they do provide better warmth. Pete had a pair of rubber Wellington boots which I assumed he would wear when rabbiting, but he told me that he never wears them because "your feet sweat in them. then they get wet on the inside and your feet get cold." Instead, Pete prefers a strong pair of leather boots which he water proofs with wax. Although you cannot stand in water in them like the rubber boot, they

are water proof to quite a high degree and a lot more comfortable.⁸ After putting on his coat, Pete put the ferret locator box and the collar in his pocket.

Pete would then go into his back yard to get the rest of his equipment ready. At this point I noticed the first example of the non-verbal communication between Pete and his dogs. Although Pete does use verbal commands with his dogs, he does not talk to them in the manner often associated with pet dogs and their owners. There was no call of “walkies” or the equivalent. In fact, Pete did not say a word to the dogs at this point. It was evident though that his actions signaled to the dogs that they were about to go out. When Pete got his rabbiting spade out of the shed, both the dogs, especially Blue, showed evidence of excitement indicated by their whining and jumping around. This excitement increased when Pete removed the dog’s collars from the other shed. Like many aspects of Pete’s material culture, he had made these collars himself. They were constructed of leather in which Pete had burnt his name and phone number. Pete would only ever put these collars on the dogs when they were going out, for the simple reason that if needs be, he could easily grab hold of a dog, and if by a remote chance that one of the dogs was to go missing, at least Pete could be identified as the owner. When putting the collars on the dogs, it was obvious that they knew the routine and quickly quietened down again and sat still (see fig. 45).

Pete would then gather the rest of his equipment together (see fig. 46). As well as the spade, he also had a machete in a sheath with a nylon sash attached to carry it. Pete would use this if he needed to clear away undergrowth. The ferret box was also in the shed with the spade and Pete put four purse nets in the ferret box. Since my visit to Pete

in the summer, one of his ferrets had died and Pete had not gotten around to replace it. So the single ferret was then taken from his cage and placed into the ferret box. I noticed that Pete was always a bit careful when picking up his ferret, and would pick it up from behind the neck with a quick movement. He suggested that it is better to be a bit cautious just in case, as a bite from a ferret can be very nasty since they have needle sharp teeth which “over lock.” To illustrate this, Pete recalled a story about his great grandfather Peter Matthews, who used to sometimes trade or sell dogs and ferrets down at his local pub. The story goes that one night Peter had a ferret down the pub and it suddenly bit into his hand and locked on. He could not get it off so his only option was to strangle the ferret, which in anger he discarded under the table in the pub much to the amusement of the men who were drinking with him.

Once Pete had all his tools ready for the job, he loaded everything into his Ford Escort for the journey to the estate where he rabbitied. Even Pete’s car seemed to be adapted for his work as a lurcherman. The rear seat had been removed so that his dogs and the equipment could be easily transported. It was interesting to see Blue go straight into the front seat when Pete let the dogs into the car. Because Pete usually works alone, this is Blue’s regular spot for riding in the car. After Pete sternly called him into the back a couple of times, Blue reluctantly did as he was told. At times though, he would still try to climb into the front seat with me during the journey. This seemed to be the routine which developed during the three times that I went out with Pete. In analysing Blue’s reaction to this situation it is possible to see that he was upset because I was taking his

seat in the car—hence highlighting the complex relationship that is able to exist between a human and a dog.

The area where Pete goes rabbiting is the Wallington Hall farm estate (see map 3, point F). This is a six hundred acre arable farming estate situated approximately ten miles from Pete's home. The landscape consists of mainly flat open plowed fields surrounded by hedgerows and small wooded areas and was typical of the farming land found in Norfolk (see figs. 47-49). This was Pete's third season of rabbiting on the estate, and as I mentioned earlier, it was not a very successful one. Although the effects of R.H.D. could have been one of the major causes in the shortage of rabbits, Pete also has to contend with the other methods of rabbit control that are used alongside his own. In recent years, it has become all too easy for farmers to quickly and efficiently remove rabbits from their land with the use of gas. The holes of a warren are simply filled in and Cymag powder which produces cyanide gas is placed down the warren killing the rabbits. Pete also told me that on this particular estate, the farmer sometimes shoots rabbits at night, during which they drive around in a Land Rover with two men standing in the back, one working the spot lamp to dazzle and immobilize the rabbits and the other shooting them with a shot gun. Because such methods are so effective at controlling rabbits, the work for the professional warrener ceases to exist. Another factor in the diminishing of the warrener's work is the decline in the popularity of eating rabbit in Great Britain since the myxomatosis outbreak of the 1950s. Although Pete does help to control the rabbits on the estate, especially in the areas that are not so easily accessible, the farmer is more likely to see that he is offering a favour to the present day lurcherman by letting him work his

land, rather than the lurcherman offering him a service of rabbit control. Therefore, as Pete informed me, this usually amounts to the lurcherman having to contact farmers asking if they can do some rabbiting on their land, rather than the farmer seeking out the services of the lurcherman. Regardless of how valuable the work of the lurcherman is to the landowner, Pete considers that it is important to always be professional in the manner that you approach your work. He believes that you should always keep your dogs under control and respect the land that you are working on by always leaving an area as you found it, such as filling in any holes that have been dug. As Pete suggested to me, you want to leave enough evidence to show that you are actually doing some successful work on the land and going about this professionally. You are then more likely to be given regular access to work in an area.

On the days I accompanied him, Pete parked his car near the riding school that was also on the farm, and we walked down the farm track which provided access to the south section of the estate which is where Pete would usually work. Pete appeared to have very good control over his dogs and was easily able to stop them from chasing the many pheasants which were around the estate, or on one occasion a deer, with a simple command of “no” or “come here.” I did notice though that the dogs did like to roam around and hunt, especially Luke, the young whippet who has not had much experience rabbiting with ferrets. Blue had a tendency to stay close by to Pete because he knew that is where the main action of the work would be. Pete did not seem too concerned when either of the dogs would go off on their own, and when they were out of sight he would simply call them back with his silent dog whistle (see figs. 50-51). This is a metal tube

shaped whistle which is adjustable by screwing the end in and out. By screwing the end fully in, the whistle becomes inaudible to the human ear but is still easily heard by the acute hearing range of dogs, as I witnessed on more than one occasion. Within the realms of verbal versus non-verbal communication, the whistle could be seen to fall in-between the two, and is perhaps best described as a non-verbal, but audible verbal gesture to the working dog. Obviously the equivalent between two humans, such as whistling to a work colleague to get their attention, would be clearly audible and therefore classified as a basic form of verbal communication.

Due to the shortage in rabbits on the estate, Pete's previous experiences of going rabbiting this season had been very uneventful. On a few occasions he had taken the long net and failed to catch anything. This resulted in Pete adapting his work technique in an attempt to work the area more efficiently. Because of the rabbit shortage, Pete felt the extensive use of nets was counter-productive, with more time spent setting up the nets than actually using them to catch anything. Instead, he decided that the best approach to take would be to use a couple of purse nets and enter the ferret and rely upon the dogs to catch any rabbits that bolted out of any un-netted holes. This way Pete could quickly and easily move on to another hole without the trouble of taking down a long net or picking up ten or more purse nets. He would simply put the two or three purse nets into his pocket, the ferret back into its box and continue on.

From his previous experiences of working on this estate, Pete had developed knowledge of where many of the best rabbit holes were and this therefore influenced the areas on the estate where he would go. The first hole that Pete came to was in a small

grassy area situated next to a small wood. The first thing that Pete would do is check for evidence of rabbits, such as droppings, freshly disturbed earth around the hole, or a track leading to it. Pete pointed out to me a faint but noticeable track in the frosty grass where it had been slightly compressed by the rabbits. He suggested though that this is not always evidence that rabbits live in that hole, as for some unknown reason they have a tendency to sometimes just play around in a hole and scratch away at the entrance, but live in a completely different one. It is therefore important to also try and get an indication from your dog if rabbits are possibly present. In this case, Blue showed some interest in his sniffing around the hole, but according to Pete not enough to clearly indicate that a rabbit was home. Pete decided though that he would try the hole out.

Before entering the ferret he checked around for any other holes that were close by. About fifteen yards from the original hole, Pete spotted what is called a "bolt" hole (see fig. 52). This he informed me acts like an escape hatch for the rabbits, and are not always clearly visible because they are dug from the inside. Being in grass, this one was quite easy to find for the experienced lurcherman, but as I later observed, they can be easily missed, especially when in wooded terrain. Pete decided that he would put a purse net over the bolt hole and enter the ferret, as in his experience, if there is a bolt hole present, that is the hole the rabbit would try and leave the warren from. If a rabbit did bolt from the other hole he would rely on Blue to try and catch it. Pete set the net making sure it was evenly centred over the hole. The next step was to put the locator collar on the ferret which Pete did while holding the ferret behind the head in the accustomed manner (see fig. 53). When handling the ferret, I noticed that Pete never has the ferret facing him

as a precaution should the ferret unexpectedly decide to try and bite him. He then carefully lifted the purse net up enough to enter the ferret into the hole and placed the net back into position (see fig. 54). The ferret was only in the hole a couple of minutes and came out again which Pete took as an indication that no rabbits were in these holes. As this example demonstrates, Pete would not just stop at the first rabbit hole he came to and merely enter his ferret down it in hope of finding a rabbit. He would attempt to survey the whole situation and make decisions on how to approach each case by drawing upon his knowledge of experience developed from his many years as a lurcherman.

About thirty yards away from where Pete had entered the ferret was a large earth pile covered with old logs, tree branches and brambles (see fig. 55). Pete's whippet Luke was getting extremely excited around the pile, whining and clearly trying to get to something in the middle of it. Pete went over and explored the pile and pointed out there was quite a large hole down in the middle (see fig. 56). Most likely from Luke's reaction, there was a rabbit in the hole, but Pete suggested that by the size of the hole it could also have possibly been a fox. Although Pete was certain that something was down the hole, he decided against putting the ferret down. He said with an earth pile like that the holes can go down very deep and with all the wood and brambles covering it, it would be next to impossible to try and dig down if the ferret became stuck. While the ferret has very little monetary value, Pete appreciated its value as an essential part of his work, and was not prepared to take the unnecessary risk of losing his ferret just for the chance that he could catch a rabbit.

The next area of the estate that Pete went to was an old drainage pit where he had been successful in catching rabbits in the past (see fig. 57). The pit connected to a drainage ditch which ran along the edge of a field. Wrapping around the back and one side of the pit was a hedgerow with a few trees. The rabbit holes were situated along the front side along with some longish grass and undergrowth. There were four holes along this side of the pit and, as Pete was investigating them, Blue seemed very eager that there was rabbits around, keenly sniffing around the holes. Pete had brought four purse nets with him so he set these over the holes and entered the ferret (see figs. 58-60).

After what seemed like thirty seconds, the ferret had a rabbit close to the entrance of the hole. Pete pointed out to me that the ferret's tail had bushed out, which Pete said is a sign he is "fired up." Pete warned that you should never try to pickup a ferret when it is like that as there is a good chance he will bite you. We heard a thumping underground which Pete said was either the rabbit giving its warning signal, which it does by thumping one of its back feet, or that a tussle was going on between the rabbit and ferret. Blue had taken up position near the hole and was marking with a pointing stance as usually seen exhibited by breeds of gun dog, such as Pointers or Spaniels. It was interesting to see that the less experienced whippet was imitating Blue's behaviour and had also taken up the marking stance, but he was nowhere near the hole (see figs. 60-61). Although in this case Pete knew where the ferret was, the dog's method of marking in this way could be seen as a form of non-verbal communication, and acts as a signal to Pete that activity is taking place underground. The ferret then disappeared further down the hole, so Pete got out the locator to see where it was (see fig. 63). The ferret seemed to be about eighteen inches

from the hole so Pete started to dig down to him leaving the locator on down near the hole in case the ferret moved (see fig. 64). As Pete was getting close to breaking through into the tunnel, the ferret moved and the locator stopped clicking. Because he was almost into the tunnel Pete decided to dig through into the tunnel to see if the rabbit was there. When he got down into the tunnel, there was nothing there indicating that the ferret had dragged the rabbit further along. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the behaviour of ferrets can be very unpredictable as Pete's experience reiterates.

Usually, Pete would place another purse net over the hole he had just dug in case a rabbit attempted to bolt from it. Because Pete did not have a spare net with him, he was forced to improvise and instead placed the ferret box over the hole to cover it (see fig. 65). Pete then attempted to find the ferret again with the locator. After a couple of minutes of sweeping the locator, Pete was able to pinpoint the ferret. I noticed that when locating, Pete starts by using wide sweeps and then narrows these down when he gets closer to the ferret. Often when Pete was using the locator, Blue would come beside Pete and appear to sense that the ferret was there. According to Pete, the senses of a dog are acute enough that they are able to hear the movements of a ferret or rabbit underground (see fig. 66). Pete then attempted to dig for the ferret again. Once Pete has located the ferret and starts to dig, he is basically working against the clock because he wants to dig down and find the ferret before it moves again. It is therefore essential to have the locator box clicking all the time one is digging to save valuable time if the ferret decides to move. Although the blade of Pete's rabbiting spade is relatively small, the cupped shape enables him to remove quite a large amount of earth at one time, and it seemed that it

would only take him a few minutes to dig a hole approximately one foot in diameter and two feet deep. When Pete was digging, Blue would typically get right close to the hole, oftentimes looking right into it in case a rabbit tried to bolt (see fig. 67). Again, just as Pete was getting close to the ferret, it moved another couple of feet. He quickly found where it was with the locator and started to dig again. This time after he had just started to dig, the ferret moved again and appeared at one of the netted holes. Pete removed the ferret and you could see fur and blood from the rabbit in its claws where it had been scratching at the rabbit (see fig. 68). Pete said obviously the rabbit was dead underground somewhere, but now with the ferret out it would be hard to find, so he put the ferret in the box, collected the nets and filled in the holes he had dug.

It was not until Pete decided to go into the wooded areas of the estate that he had any success with catching a rabbit. This occurred on the second time that we went out. From the start, it seemed that we would have more luck this time. As we were walking from the car towards the wood, Luke managed to bolt two rabbits within the space of a few minutes. The first one was just sitting in the middle of a small enclosed paddock, and when Luke came up to the gateway the rabbit bolted towards some trees at the far side of the paddock. It had disappeared through the fence before Luke could even try to get past the gate. Then, about one hundred yards further on, Luke bolted another rabbit out from a hedge. This one he chased after into a field where it went down a hole situated within a dense hedge. Pete did go and investigate the hedge but felt that if he had to dig there it would be very difficult because of all the roots (see fig. 69). The terrain in the wooded area where Pete went this time, was quite different to that found in the open around the

fields. It was a lot rougher with the many tree roots, and there were ditches running alongside many parts of the wood. There also seemed to be a lot more rabbit holes, possibly because of the rough terrain creating ideal hiding places for the rabbits to have their holes. There were holes in banks and ditches, underneath old tree stumps, dug into earth mounds and just simply dug amongst the trees (see figs. 70-73). The coverage of leaves, branches and general foliage on the ground also meant that unless you knew where to look, these holes were often well hidden.

The first holes that Pete went to were situated in a small clearing within the wood. There appeared to be about five or six holes all quite close together which suggested that the tunnels all interlocked underground. Although the terrain made it more difficult to see evidence of rabbits using these holes, Blue showed keen interest in the area, especially around quite a large hole which he was trying to put his head down. Pete therefore decided to try entering the ferret. Because the holes were all fairly close together, Pete did not use any purse nets and instead would let the ferret have free run of the warren. After putting on the locator collar, Pete entered the ferret into the large hole which Blue had been interested in. He then went and sat back on the ferret box. It was obvious that Blue was experienced at this and he went and sat down next to Pete. Pete got Luke to sit between his legs and put his arms loosely around his chest in an attempt to train him how to work with ferrets in the same way (see fig. 74). Blue would occasionally go over to the holes and have a sniff to see what was going on. The ferret had crossed in and out of the holes a couple of times, when suddenly a rabbit shot out from a bolt hole situated about twenty yards in front of Pete (see fig. 75). This all happened very quickly and it seemed

that the dogs took off like lightening after the rabbit and had incredible acceleration. The rabbit had been far enough ahead though to escape. After a few minutes, Blue and Luke came back and Pete praised them for their attempt by vocally saying "good boy" a couple of times to each one along with some degree of patting and stroking. After this, Pete decided to try the holes again and re-entered the ferret but this time he came out quickly and did not show much interest in the holes the second time around.

It was not until later on, during the second time being out rabbiting with Pete, that I was able to observe the dogs catching a rabbit. After trying out a few more holes which revealed no sign of a rabbit, it seemed that Pete was getting slightly disheartened about the lack of rabbits. Although he had experienced bad seasons before, he remarked to me that it is disappointing when you go out and return home with nothing, especially when you have had seasons when you could easily catch thirty rabbits in one day. I had not given up yet though and I suggested to Pete that we try two or three more holes before calling it a day. This was still a new experience to me, plus I was also hoping that Pete would catch at least one rabbit to discuss in my study, so obviously my enthusiasm was greater than Pete's, but he agreed that we should see if we could find any more promising looking holes.

Pete decided to head across the woodland to the far side of it, which ran along the edge of a large plowed field. Here, the woodland was less dense with more clearings available. We came across a disused drainage ditch that had one time ran into the adjoining field. Over the years, it appeared to have began to gradually become filled in and was nowhere near as deep or steep sided as many of the ditches on the estate. There

were two rabbit holes visible in one side of the ditch, so Pete decided to try them out. This time, he decided to use a purse net on one of the holes and enter the ferret in the other. I think the rabbit that had bolted earlier had given Pete some encouragement that there were still a few rabbits around, and he therefore felt that there was a chance that there could be one down this hole. Blue did not show much interest here though and after a few minutes the ferret appeared again with not sign of a rabbit. Pete put the purse net in his pocket and got hold of the ferret and put him back in the box.

We walked on only about fifty or sixty yards further and came to a small clearing along the edge of the wood where Pete informed me that he had caught a few rabbits in the past. There were approximately four or five holes in this area and Pete decided to use purse nets on two of them which faced each other, the idea being that sometimes a rabbit will hop out of one hole and go quickly down the next closest. But just as many aspects of this work, this is just one possibility and many times the opposite is true also. After netting the two holes Pete entered the ferret and sat down on the ferret box which we had placed about ten yards from the nearest hole. He told me that it is important to stay back and be quiet during these moments because if a rabbit goes to leave a hole and he sees you he will usually not bolt. Although, Pete has also experienced the complete opposite of this and, on the odd occasion, has been about to net a hole or enter a ferret when suddenly a rabbit has shot out of the hole right under his legs. Pete sat back on the ferret box, holding Luke in the usual manner, with Blue standing close by (see fig. 76). After a few minutes of waiting patiently, Blue appeared to indicate that something was happening underground. There was a hole fifteen yards across from where Pete was

sitting which Blue focused on. He got up and moved a bit closer, his back legs trembling with excitement and anticipation that a rabbit would bolt (see fig. 77). This was another example of the non-verbal communication that existed between Pete and his dogs, and as Pete later told me, when Blue behaves in this manner, it is a sign that Pete should be ready to dispatch a rabbit should one bolt into one of the nets. In this example though, the hole was an un-netted one and Pete knew that if the rabbit bolted he would have to rely on the dogs to catch it.

The ferret clearly had located a rabbit underground, then suddenly we heard a slight squeal as the ferret caught the rabbit right at the entrance to the hole. Both Blue and Luke were instantly at the hole. This happened in what seemed like a split second and it was difficult to see exactly what took place. It appeared that Blue tugged on the rabbit to get it out of the hole, and then Luke also grabbed hold of it, and for a few seconds both dogs were pulling at the rabbit (see fig. 78). This was one of the apparent problems of using two dogs, especially where Luke is inexperienced in working with ferrets. Pete called the dogs off, and Blue immediately let go, Luke seemed a bit more keen to keep hold of the rabbit, but he brought it to Pete after being called a couple of times. By both dogs pulling on the rabbit, they had slightly torn the underside of its stomach, but Pete said they had not done any damage to render the rabbit inedible. Pete checked the rabbit over, looking at the eyes for signs of myxomatosis but he said it looked fine (see fig. 79). Pete was clearly pleased with the catch and it appeared to renew his interest in the day's rabbiting (see figs. 80-81). Before returning home, Pete wanted to try a couple more holes along this side of the wood. He put the ferret back into the box and collected the

two purse nets which he had set. Instead of carrying the rabbit with him, Pete laid it over the branch of a tree to collect on our return (see fig. 82). He informed me that he had put it in the tree, because if not a fox could have taken it by the time that we got back. Although we tried two more holes further along the wood, none of them failed to show any sign of a rabbit. By this point it was already well into the afternoon, so Pete decided that we should call it a day (see fig. 83).

When we arrived back at Pete's, he first put his tools away and made sure the dogs had water for a drink. He then had to prepare the rabbit for eating which he did in the back yard. The first thing that Pete had to do was to chop off the back feet (see fig. 84). He was then able to pull the skin down towards the head, which as he told me, is like removing the rabbit's jersey (see fig. 85). The next stage was to empty the bladder which Pete did with a quick slice with his knife (see fig. 86). He then gutted the rabbit, removing the organs by hand and showing me what each one was (see fig. 87). After removing all the waste from the rabbit, Pete made cuts for the joints he wanted to cook with (see fig. 88). He only uses the rabbit's thighs and rear saddle as he said this is where you get the most meat from a rabbit. It was clearly evident that Pete had done this many times before, and after a few minutes, he had the joints cut from the rabbit ready to take inside and cook. In keeping with his thrifty nature, Pete did not waste the other parts of the rabbit and gave the organs to his ferret and the rest to his dogs.

Once inside the kitchen, Pete then washed the four joints in a bowl, cleaning off pieces of fat and gristle with a knife (see fig. 89). After he had washed the joints Pete dried them off with a paper towel and then started to prepare the other ingredients (see

fig. 90). As celebrity chef, Jennifer Patterson from the *Two Fat Ladies* television show has pointed out, the popularity of eating rabbit in Britain has declined quite dramatically over the last fifty years: "people have been turned against rabbit because they ate it badly cooked as children or because of the horror of myxomatosis."⁹ Pete's main recipe for cooking a rabbit is usually a curry (see appendix 1). Pete revealed to me that he started to make rabbit curries to persuade his family to eat rabbit. He suggested the when the meat is taken off of the bone and cut into cubes and used in a curry, then it is no different than chicken and you cannot really tell the difference. It was then only after other members of the family started to realise how nice rabbit was that Pete was able to start making other things such as casseroles. Pete informed me that a if you have a young rabbit, when the meat is nice and tender, one of the best ways to cook this is to simply fry the joints in a pan as you would a breast of chicken. He has found though, especially when using the meat of older rabbits, that curries and casseroles are the most fool-proof way of cooking them.¹⁰

In this instance, as Pete was limited for time, he decided that he would make a casserole instead of a curry. Pete first browned off the rabbit joints in a pan with some onions (see figs. 91-92). When this was done, he placed the joints and onions into a casserole dish (see fig. 93). To this, Pete added the following vegetables, which he had chopped up into large bite size pieces: parsnip, carrot, yellow pepper and potato. Pete remembered that there was some left over stewed plums in the fridge, so in keeping with his thrifty nature, he also added these to the casserole to make good use of them (see fig. 94). A stock cube was then added to provide some liquid to the casserole, and Pete

seasoned it with a few dried chilies and some salt and pepper, before placing it in the oven to cook (for more rabbit recipes, see appendix 2). When I asked Pete about the recipes he uses for rabbit, he said that he has developed them with trial and error over the years and has never used a written recipe. As the ingredients for the casserole pointed out, he simply uses what he has available at the time. Just like Pete's work techniques used to catch the rabbit, his cooking of the animal is also largely based upon his folk knowledge of how to do things most efficiently which, as I have highlighted throughout this study, is something Pete has gained through his many years of experience as a lurcherman, catching, skinning and cooking rabbits.

Unfortunately, the rabbit caught during the second time we went out was the only one Pete was able to catch during the course of my field work. However, the events of my third time out with Pete are also worth mentioning. Following the catching of the rabbit the week before, Pete decided he would try the same area again. Although, as expected during such a poor rabbiting season, there did not appear to be any signs of rabbits around the area this time. Pete tried entering the ferret into the same hole, but after few minutes it came out showing no indication of having found a rabbit. After exploring the wooded area of the estate for while and not finding any signs of rabbits being present, Pete thought he would return to the drainage pit where we had been close to catching a rabbit during the first time out.

Once over at the pit, Pete started to look for signs of rabbits, such as an indication of any tracks to the rabbit holes, or scratching or droppings around the hole entrances. As well as looking for visual signs of rabbits, Pete was also relying on his dogs to give an

indication if they picked up the scent of a rabbit in the area. While Pete was examining the holes, Blue was sniffing around them as well but he did not show enough interest to suggest to Pete that a rabbit was present. Having no luck here, Pete then went around to the other side of the pit which was an area he had not tried while I had been accompanying him. On this side of the pit, there was a steep bank extending down about five feet. The bank was covered with bushes and brambles amongst which were a few rabbit holes. When examining these holes, the dogs showed immediate interest and they were climbing down the bank through the bushes and brambles to get access to the lower holes (see figs. 95-96). I noticed that although the whippet type lurcher has what appears to be a very thin coat, this does not stop the dog from entering into thick undergrowth and Blue was pushing his way through the bushes and brambles without any evidence of this causing him any harm. Obviously though, the dog knows his limitations and a lurcher such as Blue does not have a coat as durable as that found on breeds such as the Border or Lakeland terrier which are able to withstand very rugged terrain and harsh weather conditions as found in Northern England.

Both Blue and Luke's enthusiasm to get down to these holes was a clear indication to Pete that there was at least one rabbit present in them. Because some of these holes were towards the bottom of the bank, Pete was concerned that if he entered the ferret into one of these holes it could end up going down six feet deep or more and, with all the roots from the bushes and brambles, it would difficult to dig down to the ferret. There were a couple of holes closer to the top of the bank which were in less dense undergrowth, so Pete decided to enter the ferret into these. As he was retrieving the ferret

from the box, a rabbit bolted out of one of the lower holes and ran along the bushes for a few feet and went into another hole in the middle of a thick bramble bush. Blue heard the rabbit and quickly tried to get down amongst the bushes, but they were too thick to allow him to get close enough to the rabbit. As this example highlights, there are certain cases when it is impossible to gain access to all of the holes. The thick undergrowth makes it difficult to use nets and in situations like this. The lurcherman ideally wants the rabbits to bolt out of the holes away from the bushes so that the dogs can catch them. This does not always happen though, as illustrated above, and the lurcherman accepts that there will always be rabbits that get away.

When Pete entered the ferret, there was no sign of any movement for a few minutes and then suddenly another rabbit bolted from one of the lower holes. This time it ran through the bushes and made its escape along a hedgerow which was at one end of the pit. Pete was amused at the irony of the situation, and pointed out that it is typical that when you need the long net you do not have it with you. He indicated that a short piece of long net in the hedgerow would have been ideal method in this particular situation. To prove his point, another rabbit bolted and escaped along the exact same route as the previous one. The dogs were very excited at this point and were trying desperately to get through the bushes to the rabbits, but the undergrowth was just too thick. Pete later commented that he should have known the rabbits would bolt along the hedgerow, as his previous experience of working in this area had shown him that this was the escape route they typically used. Because of the general shortage in rabbits, Pete had neglected to bring any short lengths of long net to set through a hedgerow, but as he was reminded,

the natural world is never predictable, and ideally the lurcherman should always be prepared to tackle any work situation he may come across, something that is not always possible when he works alone and is limited to the amount of equipment he can carry.

After these two rabbits had bolted, Pete got out the locator to try and find the ferret (see fig. 97). Initially there was no sign of him, so Pete started to extend his search further out into the field away from the pit. After a few minutes of using the locator box, he picked up the signal of the ferret's collar which appeared to be about fifteen feet away from the hole where the ferret had been entered (see fig. 98). The strength of the signal indicated that the ferret was approximately five feet down. Pete wanted to make sure that the ferret was going to stay in one position before digging down. He left the locator clicking in the location of the ferret for a couple of minutes and there seemed to be no movement. Pete took his Norfolk rabbiting spade and started to dig through the heavy clay soil down to the ferret (see figs. 99-101). It appeared as though the ferret had probably trapped a rabbit into a dead end tunnel, so there was a good chance that Pete would be able to dig down to the ferret and also get the rabbit. After Pete had dug down about two feet, the locator suddenly stopped clicking, indicating that the ferret had moved. Pete then tried to locate it again around the hole that he was digging but there was no sign, so he started to move out into a wider area but still failed to locate anything. The ferret then appeared coming out of the hole down which Pete had entered him. Although he had some dirt in his claws, Pete was not sure that he had been scratching at a rabbit, but if he had, it too had escaped the lurcherman's pot this time. After putting the ferret back into his box, Pete then filled in the hole he had started to dig leaving the area just as

he found it, which as noted earlier, is a practice he always follows. By this time, it was late afternoon so Pete decided we should head home. Once again, we returned from our day's rabbiting empty handed. Although I would obviously have liked Pete to have caught more than one rabbit during my ethnographic observation of him at work, I was confident that I had been able to document the dynamic nature of Pete's work as a lurcherman through the various different situations which we encountered while in the field.

Through the undertaking of an ethnographic observation of work technique, as I have done here with Pete, the folklorist is able to define the "shaping principle"—which according to Byington is "characterized primarily by the flow of technique through the work place."¹¹ In other words, the shaping principle is based upon the rhythms of the job—how each separate activity undertaken during the completion of the work is linked together; this provides an encompassing picture of the work environment and how this functions to form technique. As McCarl determines, "Technique is the *shaping principle* of an occupation."¹² To give an example of this process, Byington points out how the "slowness and sluggishness" perceived in the undertaking of work techniques by tug boat crews on the Mississippi River was in fact a direct result of the crews synchronizing the way they would undertake their work in line with the slow rhythms of the large tug boats drifting slowly across the river. As he remarks: "Quick movement accomplished nothing.... [and the] highly complex techniques... had been slowed down and stretched out to match the work flow."¹³

Examining the shaping principle of Pete's work highlights the way that the lurcherman's technique is linked to the environment in which the work takes place. Pete generally works at a slow pace, with occasional short periods of faster work when required, but just like the tug boat crews, the unhurried manner of Pete's work does not indicate a lack of efficiency. It is important to remember that the work of the lurcherman takes place within the natural world. For Pete, as the modern day lurcherman, the work could be seen as a means of escape from the rapid pace and technological advancements of a contemporary society. As the slow pace of the work suggests, it is a contemplative activity, which provides Pete the opportunity to spend some time alone with his dogs. His work as a lurcherman allows Pete to become part of the landscape which surrounds him—to be at one with the natural world. As he explains: "it's a kind of very deep fulfilling experience that you can't describe. It's just so natural, you feel part of the natural order of things, especially hunting with dogs. It is just like having your own wildlife show in front of your very eyes and you are part of it. It is a total natural thing to do. It kind of fulfils something that is not fulfilled in any other way."¹⁴ This appears to be a sentiment expressed by many individuals who partake in various forms of hunting. Heidi Dahles came across a similar account during her work with Dutch poachers. As one of the men described to her: "I am part of nature. I am familiar with all the sounds and smells. I know all plants and insects. By sniffing at the leaves on the ground I can tell if a wild boar has passed my way."¹⁵ As these comments suggest, one of the key principles which determines the human hunter to be both successful in working alongside an animal

companion, as well as hunting and catching the quarry, is the “shared ability to read [and interpret] a landscape.”¹⁶

It is this link to nature which governs the pace of the lurcherman’s work. It is delicate work—rabbits are small creatures and Pete has to look for the subtle signs of their presence. As such the lurcherman needs to have an understanding of the natural world, the landscape in which he works, the behavioural patterns of rabbits, and the hunting instincts of the dog. As I experienced myself, the layperson without this understanding would miss many of subtle features of this work which are essential to its undertaking. As evident in my ethnography of Pete at work, this form of hunting is perhaps the most natural method available to man. Whereas the armed hunter comes to dominate nature through the use of technology in the form of guns, the lurcherman appears to take a secondary role within the hunting sphere. As Pete remarked, “it is like having your own wildlife show.” A large part of the lurcherman’s work involves patiently waiting for nature to run its course, and merely observing the natural world at work. As I discovered, oftentimes the hunting of rabbits occurs underground, which is a part of Pete’s work over which he has little control. Since the ferret is a wild creature, there are times it will eat your prey, or kill it and leave it underground. Although the use of the electronic locator is an attempt to gain some control over the ferret, Pete’s experiences suggest that this is not easily achieved. To try and locate a ferret that is moving around underground is next to impossible. The ferret decides to return from the warren when it pleases itself and there is little that the lurcherman can do to predict this. As well, Pete’s dependency on his dogs when undertaking the work also places him in a secondary role.

It is only when there is human involvement that the pace of the work increases, such as when Pete is required to dig down to a ferret, or dispatch of a rabbit caught in a net. As these points exemplify, the successful lurcherman must be a patient individual, willing to accept the unpredictable elements of his work and the inexplicable nature of the natural environment in which it takes place.



Fig. 45. Pete putting collar on Luke.



Fig. 46. Pete in the field with his equipment.



Fig. 47. Hedgerow.



Fig. 48. Wooded area.



Fig. 49. Wooded area.



Fig. 50. Pete blowing dog whistle.



Fig. 51. Luke and Blue coming to whistle call.



Fig. 52. Bolt hole.



Fig. 53. Pete attaching locator collar to ferret.



Fig. 54. Entering the ferret in the hole.



Fig. 55. Wood pile.



Fig. 56. Pete exploring wood pile.



Fig. 57. Drainage pit.



Fig. 58. Pete preparing purse net.



Fig. 59. Ferret about to enter a hole.



Fig. 60. Ferret entering hole.



Fig. 61. Blue marking hole.



Fig. 62. Luke marking.



Fig. 63. Pete using locator.



Fig. 64. Pete digging for ferret.



Fig. 65. Ferret box placed over hole.



Fig. 66. Blue in the field.



Fig. 67. Pete digging with Blue observing.



Fig. 68. Ferret's claws showing signs of its dealings with a rabbit.



Fig. 69. Pete and dogs exploring hedgerow.



Fig. 70. Rabbit hole.



Fig. 71. Rabbit hole.



Fig. 72. Rabbit hole.



Fig. 73. Rabbit hole.



Fig. 74. Pete and dogs waiting for a rabbit to bolt.



Fig. 75. Ferret at work.



Fig. 76. Pete and the dogs patiently waiting.



Fig. 77. Blue anticipating the rabbit's movement.



Fig. 78. Luke and Blue with the catch.



Fig. 79. Pete checking the rabbit over.



Fig. 80. Pete with rabbit and dogs.



Fig. 81. Pete demonstrating the strength of a ferret's jaws.



Fig. 82. Pete leaves the rabbit in a tree.



Fig. 83. Pete's car loaded up ready to return home.



Fig. 84. Cutting off the rabbit's back feet.



Fig. 85. Skinning the rabbit.



Fig. 86. Emptying the rabbit's bladder.



Fig. 87. Gutting the rabbit.



Fig. 88. Cutting the saddle joints.



Fig. 89. Cleaning off the rabbit joints.



Fig. 90. The joints ready for cooking.

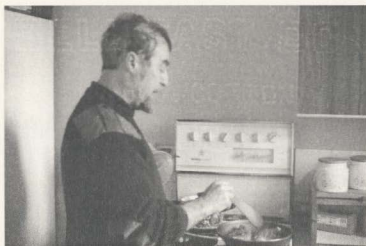


Fig. 91. Pete browning the joints.



Fig. 92. Browning the joints.

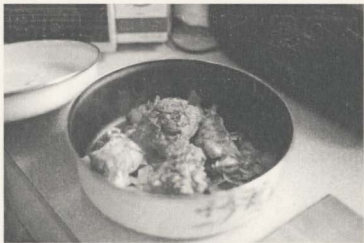


Fig. 93. Joints in the casserole dish with onions.



Fig. 94. Mixing the ingredients together before putting the casserole in the oven.



Fig. 95. Pete and dogs exploring rabbit holes around the pit.



Fig. 96. Blue climbing down to the holes.



Fig. 97. Pete trying to locate the ferret.



Fig. 98. Pete and Blue pinpoint where the ferret is.



Fig. 99. Pete starts to dig.



Fig. 100. Pete digging with Blue observing.



Fig. 101. Narrow hole dug using the rabbiting spade.

Notes

¹ Timothy C. Lloyd and Patrick B. Mullen, *Lake Erie Fisherman: Work, Tradition, and Identity* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1990) xi, xxi.

² Robert McCarl, *The District of Columbia Fire Fighter's Project: A Case Study in Occupational Folklife*, Smithsonian Folklife Studies 4 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1985) 15-25.

³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 24 Jan. 2001.

⁴ Robert H. Byington, "Strategies for Collecting Occupational Folklife in Contemporary Urban/Industrial Contexts," *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, ed. Robert H. Byington (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1978) 53.

⁵ Bruce E. Nickerson, "Factory Folklore," *Handbook Of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983) 122. See also: Byington, 53; and Kenneth E. Goldstein, *A Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore* (Hatboro: Folklore Associates, 1964) 70.

⁶ Bruce Jackson, *Fieldwork* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1987) 66.

⁷ Pete Carter, personal interview, 24 Jan. 2001.

⁸ Pete Carter, personal interview, 24 Jan. 2001.

⁹ Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Two Fat Ladies* (London: Ebury P, 1996) 127.

¹⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 7 Aug. 2000.

¹¹ Byington, 51.

¹² Robert McCarl, "Occupational Folklife: A Theoretical Hypothesis," *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, ed. Robert H. Byington (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1978) 7.

¹³ Byington, 51.

¹⁴ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

¹⁵ Heidi Dahles, "Performing Manliness: On the Meaning of Poaching in Dutch Society," *Ethnologia Europaea* 21 (1991): 23.

¹⁶ Robert McCarl, personal communication, 23 July 2001.

Chapter 5

The Art of Lurcher Breeding: Concepts of a Folk Science

The final aspect of the lurcherman's occupational folklife which I want to discuss is the art of lurcher breeding. For those individuals who work with hunting dogs, the breeding of the dog is something which is taken very seriously. As I discovered during my research, the hunting dog is bred first and foremost for the purpose of functionality—working ability over aesthetics. Inevitably, this leads to the hunter striving to create a dog that is ideally suited to his or her individual requirements. The main deciding factors in such a process are two-fold—the type of quarry that is to be hunted, and the terrain on which this will take place.

Mary Hufford came across an example of this during her work on fox-hunting in the New Jersey Pine Barrens region. Hunters in this area, along with the neighbouring states of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland tend to favour what is known as the “Maryland hound.”¹ As Hufford points out, “the Maryland hound is a regional hound type, bred to run on the Atlantic coastal plain.”² Because the hunters from the region are generally more concerned with merely listening to the hounds cry or “tongue,” rather than actually catching the fox, they typically desire a hound suited to such a task. The five key residing qualities required in such a hound are as follows: it should be “fox straight” and not run any other quarry; the hound “must follow the line” of the fox’s scent on the ground, not in the air; the hound should always and only “tongue” when it smells the fox, and no other quarry; the hound must “pack up” and work well as a team with the other hounds; and all the hounds should be matched evenly so that a single hound does

not consistently take the lead.³ Due to the “various nuances” found within the Atlantic coastal plain, “subregional” variants of the Maryland hound have developed. In Maryland, the hounds are required to hunt red foxes across the open fields of the state. This calls for a fast young pack of hounds which are suited to such hunting conditions. This is contrasted with the Pine Barrens region which is a terrain of “pushcover, ganderbrush, and swampland,” through which the hounds hunt the slower gray fox. In these conditions, speed can be a hindrance to the hounds. The ground cover also makes it difficult for the hunters to see visible signs of a fox, so they require hounds with a good nose that can pick up the scent of a fox that is hours old. Therefore, the best hounds suited to such conditions are the older slower hounds which also tend to have experienced noses.⁴

In the breeding of the Maryland hound, the hunters seek to produce dogs which will feature the requirements needed for the specific area in which they hunt. Although the function of the hound is of key importance, the role of aesthetics also becomes a consideration for the hunters. As Hufford recounts, the aspects of functionality and aesthetics become intertwined in the consideration of what makes a good dog. Hunters from the Pine Barrens consider that specific physical features of the dog, such as “ear length, conformation, and tail type” can be linked to behavioural traits. A dog with longer ears is said to have a “heavier, ‘ringing’” note which implies that the dog will have “the ability to stick to the trail and pack up.” It is also believed that longer ears suggest a gentler disposition, and therefore, a hound that is less likely to kill a fox.⁵ Another example of this was expressed by hunter John Earlin, who avoided hounds with “short

ears, long hair, and a curled, thick, or flagged tail." These are considered to be characteristics of the Walker hound, a Kentucky breed with a reputation of being "far more aggressive than the Maryland hound... asocial if not downright antisocial... [and] disinclined to pack up."⁶ In her examination of the breeding of the Maryland hound, Hufford highlights the folkloric nature of crafting the hunting dog, with the concepts of breeding being "highly responsive to local conditions and changing historical circumstances."⁷ She goes on to argue that "Like tale types, house types, and other forms of cultural expression, hunting dog breeds are amorphous, and vernacular variants are continually emerging and receding."⁸

The breeding of the lurcher appears as a prime example of this form of folk crafting at work. As I noted in Chapter 2, the lurcher is produced through the process of cross-breeding a running dog with another breed of dog, the idea being to try and create a dog that has "speed, stamina, brains, courage, nose, soundness and a weather-proof coat," which are the ideal characteristics of the lurcher.⁹ It is through this process of cross-breeding that the concept of lurcher breeding can be seen to move beyond the dimensions of breeding discussed by Hufford on the Maryland hound, largely because with the lurcher the variations are almost endless. So, the most obvious question to ask is: what type of cross-breeding is considered to produce the ideal lurcher? When I put this question to Pete, it became apparent to me that in the world of lurcher breeding there is no real right and wrong answer, only what works best for you. Traditionally, the favourite cross was the greyhound-Border collie, which was considered to produce a lurcher with many, if not all of the qualities listed above. As Pete noted though, there have been many

arguments amongst lurchermen over what cross creates the ideal lurcher. The modern-day collie is often considered to be “a bit more hyped-up and nervy than the old ones used to be, and is probably smaller than they used to be because some of them were used for cattle and sheep, and now they are almost exclusively used for sheep.”¹⁰ In response to this, many lurchermen have come to prefer other crosses in their quest for the dog most perfectly suited to their hunting needs.

There are always exceptions to the rule though, and I quickly realised that whatever one lurchermen says, nine times out of ten, the next one you talk to will provide you with a completely contradictory opinion. For instance, in the past Pete has owned a greyhound-Border collie cross which he considered to be “fast and very intelligent, very trainable... [and a] very, very good all round dog.”¹¹ In contrast, another lurcherman I spoke to, John Stanway who lives near Manchester on the borders of the Peak District in Northern England, deems the collie cross to be too submissive, and only suited to being a rabbiting dog (see map 1). Expressing his strong opinion on this, John remarked: “Bloody collies, I think they are a waste of time. Chasing sheep is fine, and that’s where it ends, chasing damn sheep. You want real hunting dogs, versatile dogs, dogs that can turn their hands to many things.”¹² It is important to note here, that the region in which John lives features terrain which is much more rugged than the flat lands of Norfolk. As well, John also requires his dogs to tackle a much wider variety of quarry which includes rabbit, hare, rats, and the many foxes which he encounters in the hills of the Peak District. Therefore, as I will discuss later, John prefers to cross some terrier blood into his lurchers.

Whether the greyhound-collie cross has been surpassed as the ideal lurcher is obviously a matter of personal opinion and not something that can be decided in the pages of this study. Nonetheless, the collie cross is generally considered to be the archetypal lurcher, and is the cross that many people typically associate with the lurcher as a dog type. At this point, there is little danger of the greyhound-collie cross lurcher disappearing, as it is still the dog of choice for the ardent traditionalist lurcherman, especially those who want a good all-round dog. However, in recent years, the modern day lurcherman has tended to favour the more specialist dog, one which he considers will perform at its peak for the work he requires the dog to do. For hare coursing on open land, especially for those who partake in the activity illegally, the greyhound-saluki cross has become the favourite. As Pete informed me, "this cross for coursing hares has now overshadowed all others, they are unbeatable."¹³ As I discussed previously in Chapter 2, the competitive nature of hare coursing often involves the gambling of large amounts of money, therefore it makes perfect sense to try and use the best dog available. The greyhound is considered to be the fastest dog available over a shorter distance, while the saluki is considered as the fastest dog over a long distance and is generally known to have endless stamina. Crossing these two breeds of running dog produces a lurcher that will hopefully provide the best qualities from both of these breeds—a dog that if it does not pick up the hare in the first one hundred yards (as a greyhound desires to) is able to just keep running down the hare until it eventually comes to a standstill from exhaustion. When pressed, hares can run at speeds up to 35-45 miles per hour, and on open arable farm land, they can easily run a dog over a distance of one mile.¹⁴ And as Pete remarked,

for a dog "to run a hare to a standstill is quite a feat."¹⁵ While the greyhound-saluki cross is considered the essential dog for the lurcher who wishes to do serious hare coursing, it has very little use for other types of hunting. This type of lurcher is bred for running and running only, and has the reputation of having low intelligence and being very disobedient.¹⁶

One of the more popular lurcher crosses to emerge is the Bedlington terrier crossed with a greyhound or whippet (see fig. 102). Both of these crosses are considered to be good all-round dogs. On these crosses, Walsh writes: "The greyhound-Bedlington or whippet-Bedlington lurcher has been used for a great many years along the Border and also in Wales where many Gypsies bred this cross. The whippet-Bedlington is often too small to be a consistent hare dog, but there are few better all-rounders than the greyhound-Bedlington."¹⁷ They combine the running dog's speed with the "thick skin" terrier qualities of the Bedlington, and are generally considered to have a good nose and able to hunt and find game well.¹⁸ The agility of the smaller whippet cross which usually stands between seventeen and nineteen inches has made it a very popular lurcher for rabbiting and working with ferrets and nets.¹⁹ Pete pointed out that while such crosses can produce excellent workers, "they don't quite have the intelligence or the trainability that the collie cross has, although they can be trained well if you put the effort in."²⁰ As this comment suggests, Pete's experience with good working collies and collie cross lurchers over the years has shaped his preference for collie blood in his lurchers, as evident in his current whippet-collie lurcher, Blue. Mainly working with ferrets and nets. Pete wants a very trainable dog, a quality that he associates with the collie, a breed he

believes is just “born to be trained.” Once again though, Pete acknowledges that this is his own personal opinion and has heard other people swear by the Bedlington cross, but he has not had much experience with them himself. So instead, he tends to stick with what he knows, which is the collie cross.²¹

While the collie cross, saluki cross, and Bedlington cross are perhaps the most common lurcher types found today, this has not stopped lurchermen experimenting with other breeds in the process of trying to produce the perfect dog. Along with those listed above, Walsh notes that Alsations, deerhounds, Labradors, various terriers, and even foxhounds have all been crossed with either greyhounds or whippets in the breeding of lurchers.²² As Pete indicated to me, the fact that such a variety of crosses have been used in the breeding of lurchers suggests that “people are still striving for the perfect all-rounder that will take rats, rabbits, fox, everything. But you are asking a lot from one kind of dog, and I think that if you want a so called ‘all-rounder’ then you have to accept the fact that he is not going to be brilliant at everything.”²³ Although it is clearly debatable whether the perfect all-round lurcher is capable of existing, I hoped that the course of my research would bring me closer to finding out. In my quest of searching for this mythic “super dog,” Pete suggested I go and visit John Stanway, a lurcherman from Northern England. Having been involved with lurchers and terriers for close to forty years, John has had much experience in breeding in an attempt to produce the ideal working dog.

While on my return from a whirlwind trip up to Scotland, I decided to pay a visit to John in his home town of Stockport, a working class industrial town nestled between

the city of Manchester and rugged hills and dales of the Peak District. When I met with John and a fellow lurcherman Derek Clarkin, who currently owns three lurchers and fourteen Jack Russell terriers, I discovered a different kind of lurcher culture to that found in rural Norfolk (see fig. 103). As John and Derek informed me, when they were growing up in the area “most summer holidays were spent ratting down at the local refuse tip.” Many of the children would be seen walking down the road with a dog or two, either a lurcher or some kind of mongrel, which they would have on a piece of string.²⁴

Whereas in the arable regions of Norfolk the lurcher has historically been an important form of pest control and a provider of food for the agricultural worker, in the more industrialized setting, there appears to be a greater sporting aspect associated with this form of hunting. Because of the rugged terrain, fox is also a popular quarry, hence lurchermen in this region require a harder, more versatile dog to that which is needed in Norfolk for rabbits and hares. Therefore, as I mentioned earlier, John Stanway prefers a lurcher which includes some terrier blood, and he currently has two lurcher bitches which have been bred with this criteria in mind. The older dog “Jenny” was the result of crossing a whippet with one of Derek’s Jack Russell bitches (see fig. 104). Although Jenny has kept much of the whippet’s sleek conformation, there is some evidence of the Jack Russell blood in the physical features of her head, most obviously in the colour of her coat, but especially in her behavioural instinct. Commenting on this, John remarked: “Although in view she is in whippet clothes, she behaves like a terrier, it is predominant in her. All her hunting intelligence comes from her mother, of that there is no doubt. She is her mother incarnate, her temperament is very similar.”²⁵ Jenny is a good example of

how successful cross-breeding is able to produce an extremely versatile dog. When I queried John about the concept of creating the ideal "super dog" through the process of lurcher breeding, his response was that he believed if it is possible to create such a dog, Jenny is it, she "is as close as I'm ever going to get."²⁶ John has had the experience of working with Jenny in many different circumstances, and she has proven to be successful on almost all accounts. He informed me that "before she was five, she had killed over four thousand rats, and had caught probably even more rabbits. She kills rats like a dream, squirrels, mice, moles, stoats and weasels," and works well when rabbiting using nets and ferrets.²⁷ Although Jenny does not possess the maximum speed of the hare coursing lurchers used in Norfolk, she makes up for this with the whippet's ability of early pace, allowing her to be a successful hare catcher in the confined areas of the hill country, where if a hare is not caught in the first twenty five yards or so, it has disappeared over a stone wall or through a fence.

It could be argued that Jenny's versatility is best highlighted in her ability to tackle foxes (see fig. 105). In total she has killed thirty two foxes, and with her terrier instincts she is not afraid to go to ground after a fox, during which she has been known to kill them underground and drag them out.²⁸ While Jenny has proven to be an extremely useful all-round lurcher, John is the first to acknowledge that a dog of her size is not able to work fox on a regular basis. John expressed this sentiment when recalling an incident during which Jenny and her daughter, John's younger dog "Jay," disturbed a fox while they were out ferreting for rabbits:

She killed four foxes in January [2000], and I don't think she has ever got over it to be honest with you, I think it has absolutely knackered her, and

the last one gave her a right bashing.... The dogs just found the fox in some scrub while we were ferreting, it was over two walls and two fences and gone in the distance. Then in a moment I heard puppy squeal. I thought she had run into something, but you couldn't see twenty metres for fog. So I picked up all the gear and struggled over the walls and fences and followed on. Knowing the ground, the foxes run a predictable route towards a big earth to escape the dog, which they usually do. Then the puppy came to hand and both legs were bitten, you could see the blood on her white legs and she reeked of him. I thought Christ, puppy's had a go here. But the old girl wasn't there, so I walked on a bit further maybe fifty yards and she came out of the fog, and she was bleeding everywhere—her face was a red ruin, her legs a red ruin, her back was bitten, she had had a right bashing, I thought Jesus Christ. So I looked at her, they weren't deep, but deep enough so I sent her back on. We didn't walk far and it was laying in the field dead. She had certainly killed it, but she had a rough time doing it.²⁹

As John explained to me, while he considers Jenny to be the most versatile dog he has ever owned, the terrier temperament she inherited from her mother does have some drawbacks. Like many terriers, a lurcher of Jenny's type can turn out to be a fearless dog. For ratting, where the dog is in little danger of serious injuries, this merely makes it a more efficient killer, but as the above narrative suggests, when tackling foxes the dog becomes much more prone to injury. Terriers almost exclusively work a fox underground in a face to face situation, and therefore they only really receive bites around the face, many of which they are often able to avoid. But as John pointed out, when a lurcher tackles a fox above ground "it is like two big cats" fighting and the fox can manoeuvre and bite the dog all over. While in its head, the dog may think it is able to tackle the quarry, it may not be physically equipped for such a task. Jenny weighs approximately thirty-two pounds, and John noted that some of the foxes she has killed weighed up to eighteen pounds, which is considered to be very heavy quarry for a lurcher bitch of Jenny's size. While she is obviously capable of killing such foxes, John

suggested that the ideal lurcher for working fox on a regular basis should weigh around fifty-five pounds. A dog of this size is able to quickly kill a fox by breaking its neck with one or two powerful shakes, suffering very minor if any injuries in the process.³⁰ Another problem John has encountered with Jenny is that her aggressive terrier nature has given her a tendency to fight with other bitches if she gets the chance. John has also had a similar problem with Jenny's dislike of cats, as he commented. "If she thinks I'm not watching she will attack cats. She will see the cat, and she will see me and walk on, but if she sees the cat and I have got my head somewhere else, she will attack the cat, because she doesn't like cats."³¹

This discussion of Jenny highlights the complex nature of lurcher breeding. Even though John considers her to be his ideal all-round lurcher, Jenny is not perfect and like many dogs has her faults. For a lurcherman such as John who requires an all-round dog, the process of breeding lurchers comes to rest upon a fine line. In attempting to produce a lurcher that would work on a variety of quarry, including fox if needs be, but without such an aggressive nature, John decided he would try to find a suitable dog to breed with Jenny. Theoretically, the concept of dog breeding is based upon the science of eugenics, and is arguably the greatest example of this scientific process to exist in the world today, as Malcolm B. Willis contends:

The multiple uses of the dog have resulted, over the centuries, in a myriad assortment of breeds which, by accident or design, have been found suitable for some specific task. Indeed it can be argued that the dog, more than any other species, is the supreme example of what can be achieved by genetic selection. No other species shows such differentiation of size and shape, character or range of activities. It is, one might say, the geneticists' dream....³²

Studies such as Willis's *Genetics of the Dog*, and *Inheritance in Dogs* by Öjvind Winge have emphasised the underlying scientific nature of dog breeding.³³ In browsing through these works, the reader is confronted with page after page of mathematical equations, complex diagrams of cell divisions, and tables of inherent percentages taken from breeding experiments, all of which are discussed using the complex technical terminology of the scientist. All of this information means very little and is merely baffling to the average breeder of working dogs. Instead, the lurcherman's concept of breeding is based upon what could be classified as a "folk science." This is developed from an unwritten set of rules which are created through an individual's experience. Or, to borrow Paul Oliver's term, when breeding dogs the lurcherman draws upon his "vernacular know-how"—a combination of "knowledge," "awareness," "understanding," and "intuition."³⁴

This idea of vernacular know-how was expressed to me by lurcherman/terrierman Derek Clarkin, who has bred the same line of working Jack Russell terriers for twenty-six years (see fig. 106). Derek's main requirement in his terriers is that they are good workers, although he also suggested that he likes to "keep some smartness in them," which he achieves "with a good head and a correct mouth" and by keeping a good confirmation about his dogs.³⁵ When I asked Derek if had been difficult to breed a line of terriers with these qualities for so many years, he explained:

No, not for me it hasn't, I've found it pretty good. I've used my eye, you see, and my judgement. Other people breed very close, well I don't do that. I've looked at these terriers and I've had it in my mind that they would work, and I have not been far wrong, they have all worked. That's what you have got to look at. A lot of people breed very close, but I have never been into that. I found that sometimes if you breed too close they

become too fiery, which I'm not keen on. Mine are laid back you see. Some terriers, you would come here now with John's dogs and there would be a battle royal going on. You see, mine will just walk away from that, but they will work."³⁶

In his search for a suitable breeding dog, John Stanway also depended upon his vernacular know-how when making the decision of which dog to use. John's major concern in finding a dog was that it must be a proven worker. He told me that over the years he has probably had the choice of approximately thirty dogs with which he could have bred Jenny, but in his opinion he did not find one which he considered to be a good working versatile dog.³⁷ As John informed me, one of the difficulties of lurcher breeding today is that many of the dogs around are the result of what he terms as "Heinz 57 breeding."³⁸ Basically, this is when lurchers are just bred together without any real thought and over the generations it becomes unclear what blood lines are actually in the dogs. In many cases, the gene-pool becomes so wide that there is no consistency in the dogs and the breeding can turn out anything—there may be some slow, heavy dogs, some may look like greyhounds and others like collies.³⁹ But there is always the exception to the rule, and because you are dealing with such a genetic mix, there is always the chance that a truly great dog will turn out. The problem that then arises in this situation is, as John continued, that you are not going to be able to reproduce the characteristics of that dog again.⁴⁰ This "hit and miss" aspect of the breeding is perhaps the major draw back that one is confronted with when working with cross-bred lurchers. It is a consequence the lurcherman acknowledges and accepts though, and one that is generally felt to be all worth while when that once in a life time dog eventually comes along.

In an attempt to try and avoid some of these problems which can appear when breeding from cross-bred lurchers, some lurchermen prefer to always breed the genuine half-bred/straight lurcher cross every time. This method is believed by some to be the most consistent when breeding lurchers. Pete explained that, usually pure bred working dogs are very interbred, and come from blood lines in which the best workers have been bred with each other, a situation which he suggests is often present in pure greyhounds which are bred for racing and the pure working collie which is bred for sheep herding. Often “when you cross two very interbred breeds together, the first generation has something known as ‘hybrid vigour’—they seem to have a very robust and rigorous constitution. Because of the years of inbreeding both breeds, it seems to work. But then, when you cross the dogs which came from this breeding again and again, the qualities fade.”⁴¹ Inbreeding is a hotly debated topic amongst dog breeders. It is, as Willis contends, “a very powerful tool but like all powerful things it can be dangerous in the wrong hands.” While it can have an important role in breeding pure lines, and is the only real way to fix a dog’s type, if the process is not approached carefully, inbreeding can lead to various genetic defects. Reiterating his point, Willis argues: “If one is going to inbreed one must have good stock and good knowledge of what was behind them.”⁴² Typically, the traditional lurcherman has tended to consider inbreeding to be “a bit taboo,” and he would carefully look for a good working dog that was not related before undertaking any breeding.⁴³ Unfortunately, as will be discussed shortly, the ever increasing interest in breeding dogs purely for show purposes has made it increasingly difficult for the working dog breeder to find dogs with these essential reliable qualities.

Ideally, John's choice to breed another lurcher would have been to use Jenny's parents if they were still alive, especially the mother, as he remarked: "Without hesitation, that would have been my road to follow, the half breed every time."⁴⁴ With this option no longer being available, and John unable to find any other pure breeds which he deemed suitable, he decided to attempt breeding Jenny with another cross-bred lurcher. From the start, John was the first to admit that there were no guarantees when using this breeding method, and in having such a fine dog in Jenny he stated: "My view was that I would lose more than I could possibly gain."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, he eventually decided on breeding Jenny with Pete's whippet-collie cross, Blue: "So I took a chance on Carter's dog, thinking that the collie influence might just quieten her temperament a bit, make her better with other bitches, and just generally quieten her [down] a bit."⁴⁶ John's decision on using Blue was based upon his vernacular know-how of the physical and working qualities that he wanted in a dog, which he hoped to combine with those of Jenny. Blue is a slightly bigger dog than Jenny, which John saw as an opportunity to produce a dog that is better able to physically withstand working foxes. He also has a good confirmation which contains an emphasis on his whippet blood over that of the collie. Most importantly, he has proved to be an excellent worker on rabbits when using nets and ferrets, and has also displayed the capabilities of a hare dog on shorter runs. John's only concern was that Pete had never tested Blue on any quarry that would bite back hard, such as a fox, although he considered that Jenny had enough courage for two anyway.⁴⁷

It was inevitable that John was not going to reproduce all the qualities he wanted from both of the dogs, and the result, John's younger lurcher Jay, is a good example of the uncertain outcome from breeding two cross-bred, "Heinz 57" lurchers together. When commenting on Jay's qualities, John remarked: "physically, she is absolutely perfect for me, [and] she is a wonderful rabbit catcher, and a good hunter... but any aggression in any quarry, forget it. It was only a few weeks back she let two rats run past her while her mother killed them. Didn't even look interested because she had been bitten a few times and she doesn't like it."⁴⁸ Ironically, as John's remarks reveal, his desire to breed out some of Jenny's aggressive temperament was over achieved and he has ended up with a lurcher that is more passive than he ideally would have wanted. Being an experienced lurcherman, John was fully aware of the possible consequences of such a breeding attempt and was prepared to accept the outcome. Although Jay is not John's idea of an ideal lurcher, he has been very successful in working her to her strengths and she has developed into an excellent rabbiting dog (see fig. 107). Hence, as I discovered, like many lurchermen, John is still in search of the perfect lurcher, that once in a lifetime "super dog," and he still lives with the chance that his next breeding attempt may just be the one to produce such an animal.

Since the formation of the Kennel Club in Great Britain in 1873, there has been an ever growing interest in the breeding of dogs for show purposes. This has tended to place an emphasis on breeding dogs solely for aesthetic qualities. Over the years, as breeders have strived to perfect the visual appearance of dog breeds in line with the strict kennel club classifications, it has been argued that the original characteristics of many breeds

have been grossly exaggerated. At the same time, other aspects of the dog, such as temperament and working ability have been given secondary consideration at best, but often times have been completely ignored in the quest to perfect form. As Pete revealed to me:

All the show breeding, they breed them for the markings on them to be exactly right, in other words they breed them for what they look like [aesthetics], and then some breed standards are ludicrous. The Alsatian didn't have its legs stood right out behind it. They have been bred so they will stand like that, instead of having their back legs under them, and now they have got terrible trouble with their hips. Bull dogs, the breed standards have said they have got to have flatter and flatter faces, now the tongue is too long for the palate. And also they can't breath, you walk them half a mile and they will keel over and die of a heart attack or something; it's crazy. Because it is based on breeding for that [aesthetics] alone, they forget about breeding for temperament as well. Purely for looks, that's why show breeding has basically ruined most breeds, because they have decided what they are supposed to look like. The dogs are not judged on any criteria of whether they can do the job they were intended to do.⁴⁹

As Pete's remarks suggest, in recent years there has been a growing resentment and conflict between those who work dogs and the owners of show/pet dogs. As I spoke to numerous working dog men throughout the course of my research, one of the reoccurring topics that came up was the increasing difficulty that exists today when trying to find a good working line of dogs. Derek Clarkin expressed this view when discussing his line of working Jack Russell terriers:

A lot of these dogs have lost their working ability sadly you see. This is not the dog's fault, this is man. Even Jack Russells, a lot of them now go into pet homes and they are short legged and bent legged and all sorts. That's the breed which I think has been spoiled. But I have tried to maintain mine, like they were in about 1920 or before, straight legged and a working ability all the time. That is just me you see. But I wouldn't think there are many men who keep good Jack Russell type terriers. They seem to be few and far between.⁵⁰

Ironically, even the lurcher has become part of the Kennel Club classifications and dog shows, itself a concept that seems ridiculous considering the subversive cross-bred origins of the dog. While I was attending the Royal Norfolk Show, a major agricultural fair which takes place in the county every June, I happened to meet an owner of so called "show lurchers." She was a middle-aged woman with pleasant manners. It was obvious, however, that she had little knowledge of the lurcher's folk origins. When commenting upon the two lurchers which she held tightly on their store bought leashes, she expressed her surprise that although the two dogs where mother and daughter, they failed to look anything like each other, a fact that is hardly surprising considering the mixed blood that had undoubtedly been bred into them over the generations. The conflict that exists between the working dog and show dog cultures can be interpreted as the classic dichotomy between counter-hegemonic and the hegemonic forces.

John Fiske, in his book *Understanding Popular Culture* provides a useful example of such a process taking place through the hegemonic control over the fashion of jeans. As a means of counter-hegemonic resistance, youth culture began to deface their expensive branded jeans—ripping them, fading them, placing patches on them, embroidering them, and painting them, in an attempt to remove themselves from the cultural norms. In reaction to this, the hegemonic force of the jeans manufacturers quickly began to exploit the popularity of the defacement to their products by reproducing it in the factory. As Fiske highlights: "This process of adopting the signs of resistance incorporates them into the dominant system and thus attempts to rob them of any oppositional meanings. This approach claims that incorporation robs subordinate

groups of any oppositional language they may produce: it deprives them of the means to speak their opposition and thus ultimately, of their opposition itself."⁵¹ Or as Dick Hebdige proposes drawing upon Gramscian theory, the hegemonic force exists as a "moving equilibrium," ever changing and adapting to encompass the behaviour and culture of the subordinate groups as a means to contain control over these groups.⁵² The adopting of working dog breeds into the hegemonic Kennel Club and dog show culture is simply an attempt to incorporate "them into the dominant system." Along side this, the concepts of show breeding on a purely aesthetic basis, attempt to remove the working abilities from the breed, and hence "any oppositional language" that the owners of working dogs may have—as without the working qualities in the dogs, the lurcherman's culture, along with its counter-hegemonic role, ceases to exist. As this suggests, the creation of the show lurcher could be seen as merely another attempt in a long line of many to rid society of this subversive breed of dog, taking along with it, the rich folk tradition in which the lurcher is rooted.



Fig. 102. Bedlington-whippet lurcher.³³



Fig. 103. Lurchermen, Derek Clarkin and John Stanway.



Fig. 104. Jenny, a Jack Russell-whippet lurcher



Fig. 105. Jenny with her first fox.⁵⁴



Fig. 106. Derek with two of his prime working terriers.

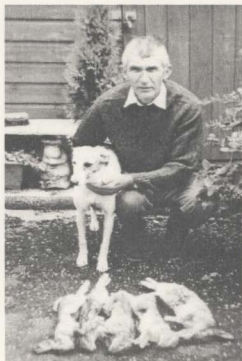


Fig. 107. Jay, an excellent rabbiting dog.⁵⁵

Notes

¹ Mary Hufford, *Chaseworld: Foxhunting and Storytelling in New Jersey's Pine Barrens* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992) 105.

² Hufford, 107.

³ Hufford, 106.

⁴ Hufford, 107.

⁵ Hufford, 107.

⁶ Hufford, 107-8.

⁷ Hufford, 104-5.

⁸ Hufford, 105.

⁹ E. G. Walsh, *Lurchers and Longdogs* (Saul, Gloucestershire: Standfast P, 1978) 26.

¹⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

¹¹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

¹² John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.

¹³ Pete Carter, personal interview 5 July 2000.

¹⁴ Stephen Tapper, *The Brown Hare* (Buckinghamshire: Shire, 1987) 3. For a discussion and analysis of hare lore, see, George Ewart Evans, and David Thomson, *The Leaping Hare* (London: Faber, 1972).

¹⁵ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

¹⁶ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

¹⁷ Walsh, 40.

¹⁸ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

- ¹⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ²⁰ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ²¹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ²² Walsh, 38-56.
- ²³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ²⁴ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ²⁵ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ²⁶ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ²⁷ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ²⁸ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ²⁹ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³⁰ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³¹ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³² Malcolm B. Willis, *Genetics of the Dog* (London: Witherby, 1989) xix.
- ³³ Willis; Öjvind Winge, *Inheritance in Dogs* (New York: Comstock, 1950).
- ³⁴ Paul Oliver, "Vernacular Know-How," *Material Culture* 18.3 (1986): 113.
- ³⁵ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³⁶ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³⁷ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³⁸ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ³⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.

- ⁴⁰ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁴¹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁴² Willis, 331.
- ⁴³ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁴⁴ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁴⁵ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁴⁶ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁴⁷ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁴⁸ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁴⁹ Pete Carter, personal interview, 5 July 2000.
- ⁵⁰ John Stanway and Derek Clarkin, personal interview, 27 July 2000.
- ⁵¹ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989) 15, 18.
- ⁵² Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1977; London: Routledge, 1988) 15-16.
- ⁵³ Pete Carter, personal collection.
- ⁵⁴ Pete Carter, personal collection. Photograph courtesy of John Stanway.
- ⁵⁵ Pete Carter, personal collection. Photograph courtesy of John Stanway.

Conclusion

The Lurcherman's Future: An Occupation Hanging in the Balance

Although I came to this study with a sense that the occupational folklife of the lurcherman was a tradition in decline, it was only after I began to examine the topic in-depth that I realised the extent of this possible decline. In the space of merely fifty years, the lurcherman's work has shifted from being a full time professional occupation to what is now at best just a pastime. As the history of Pete's own area has shown, at one time the lurcherman and his dog were commonplace in rural Norfolk. However, such figures as the professional warrener Peter Matthews, or the professional poacher Frederick Rolfe no longer exist. Gone with these men are many of the traditional informal skills connected with their trade. Instead, what remains is the modern day lurcherman, as exemplified in my study of Pete—an individual attempting to cling to a tradition in the face of its demise.

Pete's role as the modern day lurcherman suggests some interesting implications. Pete grew up in the 1950s, during what can be seen as the transitional phase of the lurcherman's occupation, the shift from a profession to a pastime. His family and regional heritage contained a rich tradition of lurchers and lurchermen which inevitably had become part of the region's oral history and Pete's family folklore. As well as being exposed to these factors, as a young boy Pete was also fortunate enough to have experienced first-hand the occupational folklife of Joby Rye, the last of the professional warreners in the area. However, when the time came for Pete to get his first lurcher and enter into this culture of warreners and lurchermen, the option to follow in the traditions

of his great-grandfather Peter Matthews, and Joby Rye, and become a lurcherman as a full time occupation was no longer a viable one. Instead, Pete became the recreational lurcherman, a role that was still able to link him to his local and family heritage even though the occupation as a form of full time employment ceased to exist.

It appears that as Pete's experience as a lurcherman developed, his knowledge on the subject functioned to turn him into a tradition bearer. I would argue though that Pete is largely the bearer of an encompassing tradition of the lurcherman identity rather than many of the specific work techniques. While there are numerous examples in Pete's occupational folklife which can be linked back to the earlier traditions of the lurcherman, his methods used when undertaking the work are often very different. As I have revealed in my examination of Pete's work, he has had to create his *own* canon of work technique to deal with the various technological, social, and ecological changes that have affected the lurcherman's work over the last fifty years. Perhaps the most obvious of these changes has been the general decline in the rabbit population since myxomatosis, and in recent years possibly due to R.H.D. Whereas Peter Matthews would work almost exclusively with long nets when clearing rabbits from the large Norfolk warrens, Pete currently almost never uses the long net because he finds it counter productive when there are so few rabbits around.

While Pete's identity as a lurcherman is linked to his role as a tradition bearer, it is evident that he is clearly aware of the changes that have occurred within this occupation. When discussing the occupational folklife of the lurcherman during my interviews with him, and in the articles he has written, Pete often harkens back to "*the*

good old days" of the earlier generations of lurchermen. As Jack Santino has argued: "Every industry's workers seem to have a conception of a golden age, a time before the present when things were different and somehow better."¹ In their evaluation of the "golden age" narrative during their study of Lake Erie fishermen, Timothy C. Lloyd and Patrick B. Mullen point out that two of the central themes which feature in these stories of past work experiences, are a linking of the occupation with associations of childhood and familial connections. Lloyd and Mullen argue "that we must recognize that these... ['golden age' narratives] are [a form] of romanticizing the past to a certain extent."² Pete's own narratives about the "golden age" of lurchermen often feature these themes of childhood and family connections to the work and his early experiences with it. But while Pete is perhaps romanticising occasionally, there is no denying that the occupation of the lurcherman has been affected by dramatic changes, and at this point is clearly to be seen hanging in the balance. However, it is difficult to predict what the future holds. The subversive and counter hegemonic associations with the lurcherman and his dog have functioned to continue their existence for centuries past. Traditional cultures can persist—they simply change form in adapting to their new surroundings.

My study fills a gap in occupational folklife scholarship. Until now, the traditions, informal skills, and work techniques of the lurcherman were unknown to the folklorist. As I have shown though, there is much of interest in this topic which offers a new perspective on approaches to occupational folklife. Although it is an occupation with deep rooted traditions, these have been adapted to the various changes which have occurred within this work over the last fifty years. This raises questions over the roles of

identity and the function of tradition bearers when they are met with rapid cultural change. As I have suggested with my study of Pete, these spheres have to be adaptable if they are to continue. By focusing upon the key role of the lurcher dog within the work process, my study has furthered the idea of folk traditions between humans and nonhuman animals, as explored in the pioneering work of Jay Mechling. Just as Mechling's own work, this aspect of my study re-evaluates the definition of "group" within folkloristics, along with the ever important role of non-verbal communication. The contribution of my work is that it attempts to break new ground by combining the ideas introduced by Mechling with the theoretical approaches to studying occupational folklife laid out by Robert McCarl.

The main opportunity for future research derived from this study is found within the topic of working animals. This is an area in which great potential exists through the application of ideas used in occupational folklife scholarship. Folklorists must be prepared to accept that in many cases the role of the animal within the work environment is at least as significant as the human. To emphasise this point, shepherd James Hogg wrote in about 1800, "without the shepherd's dog the whole mountainous land in Scotland would not be worth a sixpence."³ Often the Border collie sheep dog is required to work with large flocks of sheep, herding and driving them independently from the shepherd who may be two or more fields away. As my own study of the lurcherman has highlighted, the role of the hunting dog also offers many possibilities within this field of study.⁴ The number of topics that are available to the folklorist who wants to study working animals is both fascinating and almost endless. L. Braden's work on bullock-

drivers in Australia is a good example of a historic study of an occupation that has been replaced through mechanization.⁵ There is also the role of the working horse, which has been extensively utilized throughout history. This has been explored by Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence in her study of "human-horse interaction," which includes a chapter on mounted Police in the United States, along with Keith Chivers extensive study of the Shire horse.⁶ Perhaps the two most interesting examples of occupational folklife involving human and nonhuman animals I have come across, involves the use of birds. The first of these is the traditional use of canaries in mines to detect carbon monoxide.⁷ The second of these is an ancient Chinese tradition of using cormorants to catch fish, an occupational technique which is still in use today, as described by Alasdair Clayre:

To this day some of the fishermen on the Li River in Guangxi still live by this ancient trade.... In the prow of every boat, tethered by one leg and with a tight string around its neck, is the cormorant. A dozen or more boats congregate at a bend in the river, and as darkness falls the fishermen light their lamps. Then, forming a ring in the river, they focus the lamps on a circle of water, which fills with swarming fish. Each fisherman releases his bird, and urges it on with differently pitched cries, to plunge under water, grip a fish in its beak and return to the boat with it repeatedly. One cormorant can feed a fisherman and his family.⁸

Clearly, and as this thesis has displayed, there is great potential in studying the occupational folklife of humans working with their nonhuman peers.

Notes

¹ Jack Santino, "Characteristics of Occupational Narrative," *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, ed. Robert H. Byington (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1978) 62. emphasis in original.

² Timothy C. Lloyd and Patrick B. Mullen, *Lake Erie Fishermen: Work, Tradition, and Identity* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1990) 80-81.

³ Quoted in M. L. Ryder, *Sheep and Man*, (London: Duckworth, 1983) 506. Other literature on the use of sheep dogs, includes: A. L. J. Gosset, ed., *Shepherds of Britain: Scenes from Shepherd Life* (London: Constable, 1911); W. J. Malden, *British Sheep and Shepherding* (London: MacDonald & Martin, 1920); Edward Norris Wentworth, *America's Sheep Trials* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State College P, 1948).

⁴ Readers interested in the work of other types of hunting dogs are urged to seek out the following books: Jocelyn M. Lucas, *Hunt and Working Terriers* (1931; Rhyl, Wales: Tideline, 1995; Richard Clapham, *Foxhunting on the Lakeland Fells* (1920; Rhyl, Wales: 1989).

⁵ L. Braden, *Bullockies* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1969).

⁶ Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Hoofbeats and Society: Studies in Human-Horse Interactions* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985); Keith Chivers, *The Shire Horse: A History of the Breed, the Society and the Men* (London: J. A. Allen, 1976); see also, George Ewart Evans, *Horse Power and Magic* (London: Faber, 1979); Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992).

⁷ Examples of this are noted in: W. J. Dick, *Mine Rescue Work in Canada* (Ottawa: Commission of Conservation, 1912) 21; J. S. Haldane, and C. Gordon Douglas, "Testing for Carbon Monoxide in Connexion with Fires and Explosions in Mines," *Transactions of the Institution of Mining Engineers* 38 (1909-1910): 267-280; James T. Beard, *Mine Gases and Ventilation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1920) 106-108.

⁸ Alasdair Clayre, *The Heart of the Dragon* (Boston: Houghton, 1985) 112-113.

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Appendix 1

Pete Carter's Rabbit Curry Recipe in His Own Words

Rabbit Curry. I have the rabbit meat cut up in inch, inch and a half cubes. I get a large pot. Put a little oil in the bottom or butter if you prefer. And just sweat down some onion and garlic. Then put the rabbit meat in and brown that and seal it. Then I start adding other things: a can of tomatoes with the juice, a can of pineapple chunks in natural unsweetened juice, not the sticky stuff, and that kind of gives it a little bit of a sweet and sour kind of tang to it, you know. You can then add anything you have got: root vegetables, carrots, parsnips. If you want to make it go further, you can even add a can of some kind of beans if you want. The root vegetables, you cut them fairly chunky so they stay in lumps. Swede as well, it goes really well. Potato as well. I have often put half a cupful of lentils in there, which will actually thicken it up with out having to reduce it down and it will soak up the juice and the flavour. A stock cube.

And I used to use the curry powder, but now I use the curry paste which is great. The thing is, if you use curry powder, this is important, and you put the oil and the onion, garlic and the meat, put the curry powder in next. Stir it round. The powder will take up the oil and it will be a very dry paste and you can actually burn it if not careful. So you actually cook the powder. If you cook the powder much later on just in the liquid, it kind of tastes powdery, like if you dabbed your finger in the powder and ate it. But the jars of curry paste, you don't have that problem because the spices are already cooked in the oil in kind of a paste form, and even if at the last minute the curry is not hot enough or tasty enough, you can put some more in. You can't do that with powder, it doesn't taste right.

A good thing to put in it as well, I like to put banana in it, as kind of a Kashmiri kind of curry. Sometimes I put dessicated coconut, or those blocks of coconut. Banana is really at the last minute, so big chunks of banana just heat through. Also if you put mushrooms in, you can leave cup mushrooms whole and they will hold together for quite a long time. But then again, it is best to put them in later on or they will disappear. But a woman, who is a cordon bleu cook, she said try putting a banana in your curries early on; mash them up and put it in to make part of the sauce, to sweeten and thicken the sauce. That works nicely too, you can try all those things. Then you just turn it down and let it plop away very slowly with the lid on. I usually give mine two hours minimum. Whether it takes that long or not I don't really know, but I make them early in the afternoon, and I just leave them until Maggie comes home from work as long as it takes. If it looks a bit watery, take the lid off and let it reduce for a while, works great. But it is all trial and error. I used to do really good ones all the time. They are not always the same. And then I sort of have periods when I forget and lose the plot a little bit, and they don't work out quite as well as they used to. I don't really know where I have gone wrong, and then I hit the button again and it will be ok.

I just follow the method, and often put peppers in as well. Cut them up fairly chunky. Put them in at the same time as the onion and garlic early on. Sometimes some of these things disappear you know. We grow chilies in the greenhouse now, and whenever Maggie makes a casserole, she always puts chilies in or a bit of cayenne pepper, so we are always heating things up a little bit you know. So they are always very tasty. And the idea of putting a couple of bits of belly pork into the rabbit casserole is to

give it a bit of fat again. The same with the curry, you need a good lump of butter. Actually forget the oil, use butter, or a cooking margarine. A curry needs that kind of buttery taste, a little bit of a slight buttery taste to it. I've done it with vegetable oil and it makes them a bit blander and smoother. I mean, the main cooking oil in India is stuff called gee, which is clarified butter. They boil the butter, let it set and cover it over, and it will keep for quite a while. And that is their main cooking fat anyway. So that's why genuine Indian curries have that taste to them. All these things are a bit trial and error, you know. You try them and you end up making it taste like you want to, you know. You try them and you end up making it taste like you want to.

Appendix 2

More Rabbit Recipes

Rabbit in the Dairy

8 rabbit joints	salt and black pepper
3 rashers unsmoked, back bacon, chopped	1/2 pint milk
1 small onion, finely chopped	1/4 oz cornflour
2 sprigs parsley	chopped parsley to garnish

Set oven to 325°F. Dust the rabbit joints with a little seasoned flour and place in an ovenproof casserole with the bacon, onion, parsley and seasoning. Bring the milk to the boil and pour over. Cover and cook for 2 hours or until rabbit is tender. Place the rabbit joints on a warm serving dish. Discard the parsley and pour the milk mixture into a saucepan, adding a little extra milk if necessary. Blend the cornflour with a little water, then stir into the milk. Bring to the boil and stir until the sauce has thickened a little. Pour the sauce over the rabbit and serve garnished with chopped parsley, and accompanied by carrots and boiled potatoes. Serves 4.

From, Dorothy Baldock, comp., *Favourite Norfolk Recipes* (Sevenoaks, Kent: Salmon, n.d.) 27.

Rabbit Casserole with Herb Dumplings

8 rabbit joints
8 rashers streaky bacon, chopped
1 onion, chopped
2 sticks celery, trimmed and chopped
2 carrots, peeled and sliced
3 sprigs parsley, 1 sprig thyme and a bayleaf, tied with string
1 pint chicken stock
salt and black pepper

Set oven to 325°F. Fry the bacon lightly and place in a casserole. Dust the rabbit joints with seasoned flour and fry, browning lightly on all sides. Place the onion, celery and carrots in the casserole and put the rabbit joints on top. Add the herbs. Pour the stock into the frying pan and bring to a boil, stirring. Season, then pour into casserole. Cover and cook for about 1 1/2 to 2 hours or until the rabbit joints are tender.

Herb Dumplings:

3 oz self-raising flour	1 1/2 oz suet
pinch of salt	1 dessertspoon snipped chives

pinch of dry mustard

1 tsp chopped parsley

Mix the flour, salt, mustard, suet and herbs together, and add sufficient cold water to form a soft dough. Form into 12 balls and place in the casserole, about 30 minutes before the end of the cooking time. Cover and cook until the dumplings are well risen. Serve with boiled potatoes and runner beans. Serves 4.

From, Dorothy Baldock, comp., *Favourite Norfolk Recipes* (Sevenoaks, Kent: Salmon, n.d.) 40.

Breckland Rabbit

1 rabbit, jointed

2 oz (50g) butter

12 cloves

1 medium onion

12 allspice berries

pinch of grated nutmeg

3/4 pint (450 ml) chicken stock

2 tsp Worcestershire sauce

8 oz (225g) clarified butter

Soak rabbit joints in cold water for 2 hours. Drain and dry well, and put into a casserole. Add 2 oz (50g) butter. Stick cloves into the onion and add to the casserole with spices and stock. Cover and cook at 150°C (300°F) for 3 hours. Cool in the cooking-liquid for 1 hour. Remove meat from bones, and mince or chop finely. Mix with the sauce. Melt 8 oz (225g) butter and drain off colourless liquid, leaving the clarified butter. Add half of this to the rabbit and mash well. Moisten with 4-5 Tbsp cooking-liquid. Press into a straight-sided dish and cover with remaining butter. Chill until butter is firm, and serve on toast. Serves 6-8.

From, Mary Norwak. *A Taste of Norfolk: A Collection of Regional Recipes* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1999) 23.

Rabbit with Chocolate

900g-1.5kg (2-3 lb) rabbit, cut into 8 serving pieces

55g (2 oz) lard

115g (4 oz) salt pork, finely diced

25g (1 oz) plain flour

salt and freshly ground pepper

12 shallots, peeled

1/2 glass dry red wine

120ml (4fl oz) water

1 bayleaf

1 handful parsley, chopped

generous pinch of thyme

55g (2 oz) blanched almonds

55g (2 oz) pine nuts

1 1/2 tsp unsweetened plain chocolate, finely grated

In a heavy-based lidded pan melt the lard and fry the pork until crisp and browned.

Remove to kitchen paper to drain. Mix together the flour and salt and pepper and coat the rabbit pieces, brown them carefully in the fat in the pan and remove to a plate. Fry the shallots in the fat and remove to the plate with the rabbit. De-glaze the pan with wine and water, return the pork and rabbit, add the bayleaf and herbs. Reduce to a low heat, cover and cook gently for 30 minutes. Grind the almonds and pine nuts in a blender or pestle and mortar, and mix with the grated chocolate. Add this and the onions to the rabbit, stir thoroughly and add a little more wine if dry. Cover again and cook for a further 30 minutes or until rabbit is tender. Serve at once.

From, Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Two Fat Ladies: Full Throttle* (London: Ebury P, 1998) 129.

Rabbit Isabel

1 young rabbit per person, fillets and leg meat removed	
25g (1 oz) plain flour	1 slice good bacon per two rabbit fillets
salt and freshly ground pepper	sorrel or sage leaves
1/4 tsp dry mustard	115g (4 oz) butter
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper	1 onion, finely chopped
1 egg white	glass of white wine

Make seasoned flour with salt, pepper, dry mustard and cayenne pepper. In a food processor finely mince the leg meat, add the egg white and seasoning and blend to a paste. Flatten the fillets and flour lightly. Lay a piece of bacon cut to fit on one fillet, spread a layer of the mousseline of rabbit and egg white onto the bacon and lay your sorrel or sage leaves on top of this. Place the other rabbit fillet on top to make a parcel. In a heavy-lidded frying pan melt the butter and gently fry the onion, add the rabbit parcel and brown, turning carefully. Season, pour in white wine, cover and cook gently for 10 minutes turning the parcel halfway through. Check that the rabbit is tender, and serve with garlic-purée potatoes and a green vegetable.

From, Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Two Fat Ladies: Full Throttle* (London: Ebury P, 1998) 128.

Baked Rabbit

1 rabbit, cut up and jointed	1/2 tsp paprika
25g (1 oz) plain flour	300ml (1/2 pint) dry white wine
2 Tbsp olive oil	1 Tbsp tomato purée
2 thick bacon slices, cubed	salt and freshly ground pepper
1 large onion, thickly sliced	1 bayleaf
1 large clove of garlic, finely chopped	

For the Marinade:

1 cup red wine	2 sticks celery, chopped
1 cup red wine vinegar	sprig of thyme
1 clove of garlic, chopped	sprig of parsley

Place the jointed rabbit in the marinade and leave overnight, preferably, or for several hours. Remove the rabbit pieces, dry with kitchen paper and dust lightly with flour. Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and fry the rabbit pieces until light golden brown and place in a casserole. Sauté the bacon and onion in the frying pan, add the garlic and paprika and cook a little longer. Add wine, tomato purée, salt, pepper and bayleaf, bring to the boil and simmer for about 5 minutes. Pour over the rabbit and cook in a preheated moderate oven at 180°C (350°F) for about 1 1/2 hours or until the rabbit is tender.

From, Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Two Fat Ladies: Full Throttle* (London: Ebury P, 1998) 130.

Rabbit with Mustard

1 rabbit, quartered	2 shallots, finely chopped
1 Tbsp olive oil	225g (8oz) button mushrooms, sliced
115g (4 oz) unsalted butter	4 Tbsp brandy
salt and freshly ground pepper	300ml (1/2 pint) double cream
4-6 Tbsp Dijon mustard	a bunch of parsley, finely chopped

Heat the oil and butter in a large pan and lightly brown the rabbit joints. Remove them from the pan, season with salt and pepper, and smear all over with mustard. Sauté the shallots for 5 minutes, then stir in the mushrooms. Return the rabbit pieces to the pan, pour over the brandy and ignite. When the flames have burnt out, stir in the cream and bring to boiling point. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes until the sauce is thick and the meat tender. Adjust seasoning and sprinkle over the parsley. Serve hot.

From, Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Two Fat Ladies* (London: Ebury P, 1996) 145.

Elizabethan Rabbit

1 rabbit, jointed	a faggot of herbs
plain flour for dusting	2 apples, peeled and chopped
55g (2 oz) lard or dripping	115g (4 oz) grapes, halved and seeded
3 Jerusalem artichokes, sliced	55g (2 oz) raisins
2 onions, finely chopped	grated rind and juice of 1/2 orange
55g (2 oz) mushrooms, sliced	150ml (1/4 pint) stock

300ml (1/2 pint) red wine

salt and freshly ground pepper

Flour the rabbit joints and brown them well in lard or dripping in a casserole. Remove. Fry the artichokes, onions, carrots and mushrooms in the casserole for a few minutes. Pour over the wine and reduce slightly. Return the rabbit pieces and add all the other ingredients. Cook in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F) for 2 hours.

From, Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Two Fat Ladies* (London: Ebury P, 1996) 142.

Pot-Roasted Rabbit with Rosemary, Thyme, Sage and Lemon

1 rabbit

1 lemon

salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 heaped Tbsp chopped rosemary

1 heaped Tbsp chopped thyme

1 Tbsp olive oil

1 small and 1 big knob of butter

8 sage leaves

1/2 clove of garlic, thinly sliced

1 large glass of white wine

For this you'll need a pan or casserole dish that will go on the hob and into the oven. The rabbit should be cut into 4 legs and 4 saddle pieces—your butcher will do this for you, or you can buy it already cut up in the supermarket. Peel the lemon with a peeler (just to remove the fragrant yellow skin) and roughly slice the peel. Squeeze a little lemon juice over the rabbit joints, just enough to moisten them. Season the pieces generously with salt and pepper and roll them in the rosemary and thyme. Heat the oil in a hot pan, add the rabbit pieces and any remaining rosemary and thyme, and fry them fast for about 5 minutes or until the rabbit is golden brown; about half-way through this process, add the lemon zest, a small knob of butter and the sage leaves (this should make the sage leaves go crispy). Add the garlic and fry for another minute to soften but not colour. Add the white wine, which should sizzle nicely. Finish this in the oven for about 10 minutes at 200°C (400°F). Remove from the oven, add a big knob of butter and sloosh it around for a bit. Then allow it to rest for a couple minutes—the wine and butter should create a lovely mild sauce. Serves 2.

From, Jamie Oliver, *The Naked Chef* (London: Penguin, 1999) 129.

Pappardelle with Rabbit, Herbs and Cream

2 good handfuls of fresh thyme, leaves picked

salt and freshly ground black pepper

olive oil

rind of 2 lemons, peeled

4 legs of rabbit

1 small red onion, peeled and finely chopped

3 good glasses of red wine

1 x 285ml carton of double cream

fresh pappardelle pasta

1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped 1 good handful of grated Parmesan cheese

Smash your thyme with a little pinch of salt in a pestle and mortar and scrunch together with a couple of lugs of olive oil and the lemon rind. Massage this on to the legs of rabbit and set aside for 15 minutes to 1 hour. In a hot pan that you can put a tight-fitting lid on to later, fry the rabbit until lightly golden. Then add the marinade, garlic and onion and continue cooking until slightly softened. Add the white wine, place on the lid and simmer very slowly for about 1 hour until tender. Continue checking to make sure that the liquid in the pan does not dry up (adding a little water if necessary). When the rabbit is cooked, allow to cool slightly then use 2 forks to remove all the meat from the bones. Put the meat back into the pan with the cooking juices, add the cream and reheat. Cook you pappardelle in salted boiling water until al dente. Drain the pasta and toss with the creamy meat sauce. Remove from the heat, correct the seasoning and add the Parmesan, toss again and serve. Serves 4.

From, Jamie Oliver, *The Return of the Naked Chef* (London: Penguin, 2000) 105.

Rabbit Fricassée

1 young rabbit	1/2 small turnip, sliced
2 oz butter	1 or 2 strips celery, shredded
1 1/2 oz flour	bouquet garni (parsley, thyme, bay-leaf)
white stock	1 blade of mace
1/2 pint milk	6 white peppercorns
2 onions, sliced	salt and pepper to taste
1 carrot, sliced	

Cut the rabbit into neat joints, and after rinsing in warm water place them in a stewpan, and add just sufficient white stock to cover. Bring to boiling point, add the prepared vegetables, peppercorns and a little salt, cover closely, and cook gently for about 1 1/4 hours, or until the rabbit is tender, adding a little milk from time to time, to replace the stock. Meanwhile melt the butter, add the flour, stir and cook gently without browning, and put aside until wanted. When ready, take up the rabbit and keep it hot, strain and add 3/4 of a pint of the stock to the blended flour and butter, stir until boiling, and simmer gently for about 10 minutes. Pass the vegetables through a fine sieve, and stir the purée into the sauce. Season to taste, replace the rabbit, make thoroughly hot, then serve.

From, *Mrs. Beeton's Family Cookery* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.) 411.

Curried Rabbit

1 rabbit	3/4 pint stock
4 or 5 oz cooked rice	1 Tbsp curry powder
3 oz butter or fat	1 Tbsp flour
2 onions	juice of a lemon
1 apple	salt to taste

Wash the rabbit, dry it thoroughly, and divide it into small joints; slice the apple and the onions. Heat the butter or fat in a stewpan, fry the rabbit until lightly browned, remove it, put in the onions, and when they have acquired a deep brown colour add the curry powder and the flour, and fry for about 10 minutes. Now put in the stock, and when boiling replace the rabbit, add the apple, salt to taste, cover, and simmer gently from 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 hours. Before serving, add the lemon juice and seasoning if necessary. Pile the rabbit in the centre of a hot dish, strain the sauce over, and serve the rice separately.

From, *Mrs. Beeton's Family Cookery* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.) 411.

Rabbit Ragoût

1 rabbit	1 carrot cut into dice
4 oz streaky bacon	1/2 small turnip cut into dice
2 oz butter or clarified dripping	6 peppercorns
1 1/2 oz flour	salt and pepper to taste
1 onion cut into dice	1 pint boiling stock or water

Wash and dry the rabbit thoroughly, and cut the bacon into 1-inch squares. Heat the butter or dripping in a stewpan, fry the rabbit until the entire surface is nicely browned, then remove and keep it hot. Fry the onion slightly, put in the flour, stir and cook slowly until well browned, and add the stock or water. Boil gently for about 10 minutes, add salt to taste, put in the carrot and the turnip, and the bacon and the peppercorns. Replace the rabbit in the stewpan, cover closely, and cook very gently for about 2 hours, or until the rabbit is tender. Serve on a hot dish, with the sauce strained over, and garnished with the dice of turnip and carrot, previously boiled separately.

From, *Mrs. Beeton's Family Cookery* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.) 413.

Rabbit Stew, Rich

1 rabbit	18 button onions
1/4 lb streaky bacon	a bouquet-garni (parsley, thyme, bay-leaf)
1 pint good stock	2 cloves
1 glass claret (optional)	6 peppercorns
2 oz butter	salt and pepper to taste
1 1/2 oz flour	

Divide the rabbit into small joints, cut the bacon into dice, and peel the onions. Heat the butter in a stewpan, fry the onions and bacon until brown, and remove to a plate. Now put in the rabbit, and when it has acquired a little colour sprinkle in the flour, and continue the frying until both rabbit and flour are well browned. Replace the onions and bacon, add the hot stock, bouquet-garni, cloves, peppercorns, and salt to taste, cover closely, and stew gently for about 1 hour, or until the rabbit is tender; about 15 minutes before serving add the claret (if used), and when the sauce again reaches simmering-point put in the liver, previously washed and cut into small pieces, and let cook for about 10 minutes. Pile the rabbit in the centre of a hot dish, season the sauce to taste and strain it over, garnish the base with groups of bacon-dice and onions, and serve at once.

From, *Mrs. Beeton's Family Cookery* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.) 414.

