

Dear Andrew Gowers MP,

I am appalled by the idea of extending the current copyright laws from their present 50 years to a proposed 95 years. As someone passionately interested in making available to the public old recordings of our oral history I know this will result in large multinational companies owning copyright on historical material which they have no interest in re-issuing due to their lack of commercial viability, but which are a vital part of our heritage.

Please, I implore you, do not let this happen! Far too much important archive material is already in the hands of disinterested commercial enterprize, and this would double what they can sit upon, rendering it effectively useless to the public at large.

Steve Gardham
Chairman, The Yorkshire Garland Group.

The Yorkshire Garland Group is a Lottery Heritage funded group formed to set up a website to make available to the public Yorkshire Songs, i.e., all songs written about Yorkshire people, places and events, and all traditional songs collected in Yorkshire.

The situation at the moment is that large multinational music corporations have over the years bought the rights to almost all music produced over the last century and beyond, with no intention to republish the vast majority of it or make it available to the general public at large or to researchers. Any attempt to move the boundaries back from the 50 year copyright period would almost double the amount of material they are able to sit upon.

It is the view of my organisation and several others I am a member of that were this to happen certain types of research in music would become almost impossible. It is our view that any music material, after a period of 50 years, has outlived its initial commercial impact and should then enter the public domain freely available to students, scholars, archivists and the general public. This would also tidy up the very grey area of folk songs and who, if any, own the rights to these, because they are all over 50 years old. In our view any material older than 50 years should be regarded as part of the country's heritage, and free to be preserved and indeed revived by those organisations who take an interest in such things.

Copyright Exceptions – fair use / fair dealing

In using songs, a fair use of any recording would be a single verse or stanza of the user's own choice from any given song, without requirement to seek permission, as long as the source is fully acknowledged by the user. This would not hurt any sales of recordings the original performers had, in fact, it would serve as free publicity for their recording.

Re-publishing 'out-of-copyright' material on the Internet.

In the spirit of free access to information, for which there seems to be a very healthy crusade going on at the moment, this is surely to be encouraged by any well-meaning society. There are many websites like ours springing up trying to make available to everyone, researchers, students, scholars and those with a passing interest, material that is an important part of our heritage. Music is arguably the most important factor in this and any extension of the copyright period would seriously damage not only future work in this field but a great deal of good work that has been done. I can not see how the copyright period can be extended backwards retrospectively any further period without causing chaos. Books / websites already published, performances of previously out-of-copyright material already performed would suddenly be subject to breach of copyright. This would open up a legal minefield.