

Albion turned electric – the imagined village green

*How Fairport Convention's classic **Liege & Lief** anticipated the nineteen seventies turn to the environment*

ELECTRIC FOLK'S HEYDAY 4



Caption

Four summers ago when Simon Nicol, Dave Pegg and Richard Thompson, alongside Fairport Convention's original singer, the maternally reassuring Judy Dyble, walked onto the stage at London's Barbican, and launched into 'Come All Ye' with its declarative first line manifesto call to fellow minstrels to "rouse the spirit of the Earth and move the rolling sky," I was instantly returned to *Liege & Lief* and *Unhalfbricking*, and the Fairport's 1969 high-tide hour. By the end of that opening song, a long mulled-on thought came bubbling up again: their cry of re-awakening, in my head at least, weaving a version of Fairport's history into the earliest days of 'before-the-fact' pre-green living. On the cusp of the seventies' moment, Fairport Convention brought electric folk to alternative culture's round table; a musical strand in the pre-green sensibility – that lost mix of commune living, rural pasts, self-sufficiency and alternative technology; which would gather momentum through the seventies before disappearing into the morphed real politic of the eighties, to reconvene in changed form as a significant shaft of the early contemporary green world. During the rest of that evening – one half of Boyd's Witchseason weekender, *The All Star Fairport Convention* – as Dyble sang and the band played, and even though the Boyd interview (see page xxx) had

come and gone, the plausibility of such connection lodged itself once again in my mind.

Listening again to *Unhalfbricking*, and particularly *Liege & Lief*, these recordings feel soaked in a rural and distinctly medieval, sensibility. The characters from within the album's songs are always from the other, far, side of the industrial revolution, harkening back to the medieval, when England was Albion and both were rural and agricultural. It is a world abounding with the powers of magic. If, at times, this medieval tableau tapers off, a pre-modern version of living in the past carries on through the music and words. The evocation of the medieval and pre-modern, is in vivid contrast to the baroque psychedelia of late sixties Stones, and Sergeant Pepper Beatles that were still riding high at the beginning of '69. The two albums mark points in a cultural shift the generation they represented, which became more fully evident once the seventies were underway: A musical hinge between the end of the high sixties' years, and the new decade. There is something more conscious of this future, both in theirs and other music made that year. During these twelve intense months, Fairport completed two and released three albums, while also experiencing a sudden and unexpected trauma, which changed the direction of the band; ushering in folk rock, and the accompanying