

Archives of English Language and Tradition: A Once and Future Resource?

J.D.A. Widdowson

ABSTRACT: Why is it that archives throughout England, and particularly those specialising in so-called 'minority subjects', continue to struggle for survival? Cultural tourism is booming, there is an unprecedented demand for information on every topic imaginable, and questions of national identity are high on the agenda. Yet efforts to collect and preserve material on English language and tradition are confined to a handful of institutions. These important collections remain undervalued and under-resourced. Are they destined to be mothballed for years before they are rediscovered and become fully accessible?

England claims to pride itself on its remarkably successful language and its unique historic cultural tradition. It would therefore be reasonable to expect the existence of numerous institutions dedicated to the documentation of these vital aspects of English heritage, especially during the period of monumental change in the past hundred years. In an age when academic institutions are obliged to compete for funding, however, it should come as no surprise that such expectations prove to be vain. Leaving aside such valiant efforts as those of Mass-Observation¹ and other investigations of specific aspects of life and work in England in the twentieth century, there has been no comprehensive, systematic, national survey of English language or tradition which would place either of them fully on record at any given point in recent history. Instead we have to fall back on a range of partial and somewhat random records drawn from a wide variety of sources whose data and collecting methods are inevitably inconsistent and incompatible.

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¹ Launched by Tom Harrison in 1937, Mass-Observation aimed to observe and record at firsthand the lives, thoughts, and opinions of people throughout the country. The archive which developed from this groundbreaking exercise is deposited at the University of Sussex. The work of Mass-Observation still continues, thanks to several thousand volunteers. See C. Nevin, 'Just Looking', *The Guardian Weekend* (19 March 2005), 82-89.

It is clear that over the past two centuries the study of the English language in higher education and other academic institutions has fared far better than the study of tradition, and has enjoyed far more financial support. In most English universities, however, the study of the language continues to take second place to the study of literature, notwithstanding the introduction of linguistics as an academic discipline. Indeed, the dramatic burgeoning of linguistics in higher and further education from the 1960s to the 1980s has been followed by an equally remarkable decline. Nevertheless, substantial surveys have been undertaken on various aspects of the language and the results of these investigations are available in archives and in major corpora such as the British National Corpus, the London-Lund corpus, the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus, and COBUILD, and in such invaluable resources as the *OED* online. The extensive materials in the National Sound Archive, the BBC Archives, and the Millennium Memory Bank also preserve a unique record of English speech and aspects of English culture. Apart from these, however, there has been no national survey of Standard English, Received Pronunciation, slang, occupational usage, or teenage and children's language, for example.

While social varieties of English have been comparatively neglected, regional dialects have received considerable attention, not least, of course, in the nationwide collection of data through the University of Leeds Survey of English Dialects, and the more recent fieldwork in England for the *Atlas Linguarum Europae*, co-ordinated at the University of Sheffield, not to mention numerous smaller scale investigations. The information from most of these studies was deposited in archives such as that of the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies at the University of Leeds, and the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition at Sheffield. Although a substantial amount of the material has been published, much more work remains to be done to capitalise on the wealth of data in these and many other repositories. The initial phase of the long-awaited Survey of Regional English was the first attempt to elicit information on the full range of words and phrases currently known and/or used across the country, including slang, colloquialisms, and dialect, and aimed to add substantially to the stock of available material.

Cultural Tradition Archives

While the archival resources available for the study of the English language are somewhat limited, those for the study of English cultural tradition are confined to a mere handful of repositories and to even fewer higher education institutions. In England, the study of tradition has been bedevilled by mistaken perceptions of the meaning and scope of the f-word, *folklore* which, like the word *dialect*, is all too often associated with the past, the old, the uneducated, the twee and the tweedy, the

eccentric, and the bizarre. Yet the word was coined in 1846 to designate a discipline which was pioneered in England, and which is fully accepted, both culturally and academically, in virtually every part of the world—except in the country where it originated. Such negative attitudes are an unfortunate legacy from the smug and superior imperialist stance that stigmatised those in exotic cultures as ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, ‘pagan’, and ‘barbaric’ and those who were not members of the elite in English culture as ‘the common people’, ‘the lower classes’, and ‘the peasantry’.² It was often assumed by the early scholars that it was these people who had folklore, setting them apart from the educated elite. Unfortunately this is a misconception which is still common today. Indeed, my own introduction to the subject was a startling revelation. When asked if I had any folklore I initially strongly denied it, but once having discovered what the term really meant, it was easy to realise that, as is true of everyone, regardless of their social and educational status, tradition is an essential part of each one of us, just as we are part of tradition. Each of us inherits and transmits a wealth of tradition, much of which is communicated by word of mouth, and which identifies us, and places us firmly within our culture, locating us in both time and space, and grounding our individual personality, attitudes and behaviour—in short, making us who we are.

Early Folklore was Comprehensive

The English pioneers of the study of folklore³ explored the traditions of cultures across the globe,⁴ and in due course turned their attention to their own country,⁵ where they discovered a rich store of customs, beliefs, narratives, music, arts and crafts, and in so doing began to define the boundaries of this rather amorphous and wide-ranging discipline. It is on these foundations that the study of English tradition has been built over the past century and a half. The early scholars were also instrumental in founding and developing the Folklore Society, the oldest

² In the early twentieth century the otherwise often forward-looking Charlotte Burne characterised potential informants as ‘less cultured inhabitants’ and ‘backward folk at home and abroad’. C.S. Burne, *The Handbook of Folklore*, London, Sidgwick and Jackson, for the Folk-Lore Society, 1914, pp. 2, 5.

³ See, for example, R.M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

⁴ See R.M. Dorson, *Peasant Customs and Savage Myths* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

⁵ See, for example, A.A. Gomme, ‘The Collection of English Folklore: Ways and Means’, *Folklore*, 64 (1953), 321-333; M. Murray, ‘England as a Field for Folklore Research’, *Folklore*, 65 (1954), 1-9; P. Opie, ‘England, the Great Undiscovered’, *Folklore*, 65 (1954), 149-164; J.D.A. Widdowson, ‘English Dialects and Folklore: A Neglected Heritage’, *Folklore*, 98.1 (1987), 41-52; J.D.A. Widdowson, ‘English Language and Folklore: A National Resource’, *Folklore*, 101.2 (1990), 209-220; J. Ashton, ‘Beyond Survivalism: Regional Folkloristics in Late-Victorian England’, *Lore and Language*, 15.1-2 (1997), 117-127.

association in the world devoted to the subject. The Society has important archives of its own, including data from a short-lived survey of English folklore, together with an extensive library. Substantial resources are also available at Cecil Sharp House, the headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

The more recently established discipline of oral history overlaps with folklore studies to some extent, notably in the recording of spoken testimony and narrative. In addition to the major holdings in the archives of Qualidata at the University of Essex, oral history recordings are deposited in libraries and other institutions across the country, although not all are fully accessible. Regional collections of material on language, history, and tradition have been gathered together, for example, by the Centre for East Anglian Studies at the University of East Anglia, and the Institute for Cornish Studies, among others. Collections which focus on more specific cultural and/or historical topics include the Liddle Collection documenting the First World War, in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, built up single-handedly by Peter Liddle over some forty years, and the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield, built up with equal single-mindedness by Vanessa Toulmin. Collectively these repositories, together with others scattered around the country, such as the Theo Brown Collection at the University of Exeter, are the only significant archival resources in these fields, apart from those in private hands and/or assembled by individuals, and the material they hold becomes increasingly important as time goes by. Even so, each has its own independent ethos and as yet no overarching catalogue exists which could direct researchers to the wealth of data in these widely dispersed collections. The development of such a catalogue should have priority in future bids for funding, in order to make all this material fully identifiable and accessible. In the twenty-first century we are witnessing a massive explosion of information and an unprecedented thirst to access it, and consequently archives inevitably assume an even greater importance. Yet in England, as elsewhere, their creation, development, maintenance and staffing are wilfully underfunded. Archives across the country are starved of financial support. While funding agencies offer short-term assistance to a few select projects which satisfy the principal criteria of 'value added' and of supposed value for money, the day to day operation of most archives in the longer term is directly threatened by woefully inadequate budgets. In his thought-provoking book, Christopher Kitching rightly characterises archives as 'the very essence of our heritage'.⁶ Yet today they still remain grossly undervalued and understaffed. Public access to so-called 'minority interest' collections, not least those in university libraries, has never been easy, and in many

⁶ C. Kitching, *Archives: The Very Essence of Our Heritage*, (Chichester, Phillimore, for the National Council on Archives, 1996).

cases this is becoming progressively more difficult. Such collections, and the teaching and research programmes often linked to them, are always the most vulnerable,⁷ especially in the face of continuing retrenchment and ‘rationalisation’, not to mention the alarming and currently accelerating trend to merge or close university departments.

Heroic Efforts in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

In the second half of the twentieth century determined independent efforts were made by the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield to establish the interrelated study of language and tradition as an academic discipline in its own right. The first of these, the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies at the University of Leeds, led the way, based initially on the pioneering work of Harold Orton in the Survey of English Dialects, and developing into a fully fledged programme of language and folklore studies under the direction of Stewart Sanderson, assisted by Tony Green who had worked on the material collected in the Folklore Society’s national survey. Although focusing primarily on the British Isles, the work of the Institute was international in scope, attracting students and researchers from Africa, for example, and from many other parts of the world. Over a period of some twenty years the Institute consolidated the high reputation of the university in the field of regional dialect study⁸ and extended it across the full breadth of folklife studies, firmly establishing itself in Britain and overseas as the leading academic department in this subject area in England. It built up a substantial archive and library which supported and were in turn enhanced by its teaching, research, and publication programmes. Its summary closure in 1982, in the first round of the swingeing cuts in university funding, especially in the humanities, which continue to this day, came as a shock to all those who have an interest in the subject. Fortunately, the material in the Institute’s archives was preserved, as happily demonstrated at the conference at the University of Leeds in 2005, celebrating the completion of a major three-year project to catalogue the holdings and make them available, under the new title: The Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture.⁹

⁷ A view emphatically endorsed from personal experience by Hilary Blandford, a member of the National Council of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Minutes of the Society’s Annual General Meeting, 13 November 2004, p. 7, section 16.1.2. Suddenly deprived of their independence, unlikely combinations of often disparate subjects, especially those in the humanities, are obliged to huddle together for warmth against the changes currently sweeping through higher education. Whereas such mergers offer at least limited protection for individual disciplines, other mainstream subjects, including Chemistry and Mathematics, are deemed ‘unsustainable’ or ‘uncompetitive’ and face closure as a result. So what price ‘minority’ subjects in this situation?

⁸ See, for example, *The Linguistic Atlas of England*, ed. by H. Orton, S. Sanderson, and J. Widdowson (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

⁹ Now available at <<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/spcoll/lavc/>>.

The second attempt to create a higher education programme in language and tradition began with the launch of the Survey of (English) Language and Folklore¹⁰ at the University of Sheffield in 1964. The Survey was directly inspired by the work of Herbert Halpert, founder of the Department of Folklore at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and of its Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA). Professor Halpert built this major programme on the premise that students and members of the general public can successfully collect information on language and traditions familiar to them, and that this information can then be deposited in archives to preserve a record of these important aspects of cultural heritage for future generations. The new survey was based on a comprehensive classification system of six principal genres, devised principally by Herbert Halpert:¹¹ language; childlore; custom and belief; narrative; music, dance and drama; material culture, traditional work techniques, arts and crafts. However, it was designed to be considerably broader in scope than Halpert's original model, as it aimed to collect information on the myriad ways in which tradition operates in English culture, in all parts of the country, in all age groups, and across the social spectrum. This was reflected from the outset by the decision to use the term *cultural tradition* to designate the discipline,¹² rather than the more limiting term *traditional culture* or the even more loaded terms *folklore*, *folklife*, and *ethnology*. The term *cultural tradition* has since become an established designation for this broader concept, not only in Britain, but also internationally.¹³ It also serves to emphasise the dynamic and holistic cultural-anthropological model of the Sheffield approach to the subject, which views tradition as the essential thread of continuity in a culture, linking past, present, and future, and defining our cultural

¹⁰ Originally called The Sheffield Survey of Language and Folklore (SLF), it later became The Survey of English Language and Folklore (SELF), emphasising its central focus on material from England.

¹¹ This highly influential system, the *Genre Classification for Individual Student Collections*, was instrumental in the creation and development of the teaching, research, and archival programmes at Memorial University and at the University of Sheffield. Compiled by Herbert Halpert, assisted by his wife, Violetta M. Halpert, it was a revision of Halpert's 1948 Folklore Classification which he used during his appointment at Murray State College in Kentucky. This original version was adapted from a classification devised by Louis C. Jones, but freely incorporating ideas from other leading American folklorists, including Wayland D. Hand, Archer Taylor, Vance Randolph, Harold W. Thompson, and Stith Thompson.

¹² This decision was made after prolonged discussion with colleagues directly involved in the early development of the Survey, and it reflects in particular the incisive input of Paul Smith in the lengthy and demanding debate on how best to circumvent the problems attached to such terms as *folklore* in England, and to emphasise the holistic approach to the operation of tradition in all aspects of culture.

¹³ The Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen, for instance, proclaims its mission as 'Researching, recording, and promoting the cultural traditions of North and North-East Scotland' in the headline of its newsletter, and other publications, including works intended for the general reader, also demonstrate that the term is now well established, as in the title of Gary Law's *The Cultural Traditions Dictionary* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1998), which focuses on traditions and institutions in Ireland.

identity, both collectively and individually. This is the principal characteristic of tradition studies which sets the discipline apart from others in the humanities and the social sciences. As Collingwood and Myres note:

the continuity of a cultural tradition is unconscious; those who live in it need not be explicitly aware of its existence. The continuity of tradition is the continuity of the force by which past experiences affect the future; and this force does not depend on the conscious memory of those experiences.¹⁴

Led by an enthusiastic band of volunteers, first in Sheffield, and later elsewhere in the neighbouring counties, the Survey gradually extended to the whole of the country, through a network of local groups, representatives, and correspondents. It proved popular with the general public, buoyed up by the revival of interest in English tradition in the 1960s and beyond, especially in music, dance, and drama. In the decade following the launch, and notably from 1968 onwards, members of the Survey team were invited to introduce the project at venues across the country, and to encourage volunteers to take part. This led not only to an exponential increase in the amount of material contributed, but also to team members undertaking fieldwork across the full range of the subject, regional dialects, childlore, customs, and traditional drama being particular focuses of attention. The Survey developed rapidly and the trickle of contributed material soon became a flood. In 1972 the collection was formally designated the Archives of Cultural Tradition. In 1973 the university provided separate accommodation for the Survey and the Archives, and in 1976 officially recognised them as a research unit in its own right, with the title Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language (CECTAL), within the Department of English Language. By this time a teaching programme had also been established, beginning with extramural courses, day-schools and workshops, sponsored and encouraged by the university's Department of Extramural Studies, initially in partnership with the Workers' Educational Association and the Education Department of the City of Sheffield. Courses were later also introduced in the undergraduate programme in the Department of English Language, followed by a postgraduate programme leading to the degrees of MA, MPhil and PhD. These developments closely paralleled the structure of the academic programme advocated by Herbert Halpert. The creation of archives from material generated by fieldwork and the systematic collection of data is seen as an essential prerequisite for the teaching programme. Students are not only able to draw on the material in the archives, but also to contribute to and therefore extend it. The Centre grew directly from the Survey and the Archives, as did the

¹⁴ R.G. Collingwood, and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 252.

material culture collection which developed into the Centre's Traditional Heritage Museum, showcasing life and work in the Sheffield area, 1850-1970. In the early days the fieldwork and collecting programme was energised and expanded by Paul Smith, whose guidance, unfailing support, and championship of the Centre not only helped its development from the outset, but also continued to play a major role in its work.

In order to provide essential support for the teaching programme it was necessary to create a specialist library of books and journals to supplement the comparatively few titles then available in the university's main library. The Centre's library developed into one of the most extensive collections in the subject area in England outside London. Its principal focus was on publications across the broad fields of language and cultural tradition, kept up to date by books donated by reviewers of new publications in the Centre's international journal, *Lore and Language*. It also included substantial holdings in anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, and literature, along with such special collections as those of the former Sheffield Theosophical Society library, and the extensive published materials on onomastics which supported the Centre's Names Project.

The ethos of the Centre therefore comprised six interrelated and interdependent elements: a fieldwork and collecting programme; multimedia archives; a programme of teaching and research; a specialist library; a publication programme; and a museum. These elements were fully integrated to form a resource unique in English universities, which proved very popular with students, and which built a high reputation for itself both nationally and internationally. However, its development was a continual struggle from the beginning, notwithstanding its demonstrated success in recruiting students and securing external funding. Although supported by successive vice-chancellors, registrars, and other senior members of the university's administration, it suffered from the 'minority subject' label and, like the Institute at Leeds, was particularly vulnerable when, under pressure from financial cutbacks, universities short-sightedly espouse a 'back to basics' policy which strongly favours mainstream subjects, especially in those institutions in which science and technology are not only paramount but also attract high levels of funding. As the closure of the Leeds Institute demonstrates, the humanities and social sciences are soft targets at such times, and even more so nowadays when so-called cost centres in universities have to compete and pay their way in the politically imposed idiocy of the global market. The notion of a community of scholars seeking excellence in their chosen subject area, and who are devoted to that subject as valuable and worthwhile in its own right, is lost in a frantic and demeaning scramble for funding on which the very existence of departments, and indeed of universities, currently depends.

The Centre, however, always had a secret weapon in its arsenal: the enthusiastic support not only of its students but also of thousands of voluntary contributors, representatives, and correspondents throughout the country who over the years gave freely of their time, energy, and expertise to build up the unparalleled resources of the archives and the museum. Boosted by their support, the work of the Centre expanded substantially in the 1980s and 1990s. With the active encouragement of the Head of the Department of English Language and Linguistics, Professor Norman Blake, a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English cultural tradition and folklore studies introduced in the Department of English Language¹⁵ in the 1970s enabled students to undertake academic research across the full range of these disciplines, the resulting field data and analysis in research projects and theses adding significantly to the archives. In addition to the longstanding programme of extramural courses in these subjects, the Division of Adult Continuing Education, in collaboration with the Centre, introduced a Certificate course and MA modules which further extended the educational outreach and fed material into the archives. During these two decades the archives outgrew their accommodation and moved into larger premises in 1982, where for several years the Centre had the brief luxury of an appropriate staffing infrastructure, courtesy of the Manpower Services Commission's Community Programme. Six years later, however, not only was this programme suddenly terminated nationally but the Centre was also summarily decanted into much smaller and less suitable accommodation. Unsurprisingly, it took more than two years to overcome the crisis precipitated by these two events, and again it was the volunteers and students who came to the rescue by helping the Director and the part-time secretarial staff to keep the show on the road.

In 1986 the Centre's longstanding links with the Memorial University of Newfoundland were formalised by the two vice-chancellors through the creation of the Institute for Folklore Studies in Britain and Canada, with its British headquarters at the Centre. At Sheffield the Institute had its own separate archives and library. In 1989 the Friends organisation supporting the Centre also became formalised under the title Traditional Heritage. Among its many other support activities, Traditional Heritage was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the museum through a contractual agreement with the university. Thanks to the efforts of the Friends, the museum was awarded full registration status under the national scheme for museums in 2002.

In 1996, again as a result of continuing cutbacks in higher education funding which put pressure on the Department of English Language and Linguistics to focus specifically on mainstream elements in its course

¹⁵ Later designated the Department of English Language and Linguistics.

structure, departmental funds were no longer available to support the Centre. After lengthy negotiations, the Centre found a new home in the Division of Adult Continuing Education with which it had always enjoyed a close working relationship. This arrangement worked well for three years until the Division was radically downsized following changes in government funding for extramural departments nationwide. During this period, however, the importance of the archives, library, and museum as a unique resource for teaching and research became fully recognised by the university, as reflected in the unit being designated the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition (NATCECT) in 1997. This recognition was instrumental in the decision to reincorporate the Centre into the newly established School of English in 1999.

The Collection by 1997–1999

At that time, the wealth of material in the archives, library, and museum offered unparalleled opportunities for exploitation in both teaching and research. The Centre had the advantage of continuing its fieldwork and research for more than twenty years after the ill-advised closure of the Institute at Leeds. Consequently, its archives were among the most extensive and substantial in this subject area in England. Central to the holdings were the many thousands of items contributed to the Survey of (English) Language and Folklore, a sample of some 700 of which was available on a computer database, searchable by subject, and by personal and place name keywords. There were also over 800 theses and research projects, providing firsthand data and analysis of language and tradition in the second half of the twentieth century. Some 3,000 audiotapes and videotapes were held in the archives, along with numerous cine films, 8,000 slides, and over 3,000 photographs. The principal individual collections included:

1. The Dave Bathe Collection of Derbyshire Traditional Dance and Drama.
2. The Richard Blakeborough and John Fairfax-Blakeborough Collection of Yorkshire Folklore.
3. The Nigel Kelsey Collection of London Children's Play and Games.
4. The Charlotte Norman Derbyshire Welldressing Collection.
5. The Sykes/Baron Broadside Ballad Collection.
6. The Russell Wortley Collection of Traditional Dance, Music and Custom.
7. The Edgar M. Wagner Collection of European Dance and Topographical Films.

8. The Mary and Nigel Hudleston Collection of Yorkshire and Irish Traditional Song, Drama, Custom, and other Folklore Genres.

Other major collections included several thousand greetings cards, data on the full range of childlore, material illustrative of changing traditions, fashions and tastes in the celebration of seasonal customs, birthdays, anniversaries, etc., and extensive holdings of documents relating to industries in the Sheffield area. Among these latter were documents concerning local cutlery manufacturers such as George Wostenholm, Lecleres' silversmiths and engravers, and other Sheffield trades and crafts, referring specifically to displays and artefacts in the Centre's museum. These provided essential context for several of the museum's collections, especially with regard to the economic history, work practices, design, and marketing of local firms and their products. This material offered rare opportunities for the retrospective study of handcrafted trades in Sheffield and for the fuller interpretation of the museum's collections. In addition, the archives held major collections of printed and manuscript material, pamphlets, ephemera, and an unrivalled ongoing collection of more than 12,000 excerpts and cuttings from newspapers and magazines, covering the full spectrum of topics in language and tradition. Copies of the fieldwork notebooks from the Leeds University Survey of English Dialects, the fieldwork notebooks and tape-recordings of the English and Welsh onomasiological section of the *Atlas Linguarum Europae* project, and the questionnaire responses from the Survey of Yorkshire Dialect and the Survey of Sheffield Usage were also on file, together with the computer-held materials from the English Dialect Lexicon Databases project, the Traditional Linguistic Genres project, and field recordings of English dialects donated by the American dialectologists W. Nelson Francis and Charles F. Houck, among others.

The Centre's library, comprising over 40,000 books, journals, and other publications on language, tradition, history, literature, and the social sciences in general, was a unique resource which complemented and extended the holdings in the university's main library. Special collections within the library included the Geoffrey Bullough Collection of nineteenth century fiction (assembled by Professor Bullough expressly for the study of dialogue), the R.M. Wilson Memorial Collection (placenames, personal names, family history, genealogy, Middle English), the B.J. Timmer Collection (Old and Middle English, Old Norse, Germanic languages), the Sheffield Theosophical Society Collection, and the Russell Wortley Collection (traditional dance, music, and custom).

The library of the British headquarters of the Institute for Folklore Studies in Britain and Canada, based in the Centre, included a

representative collection of books and journals on Canadian language, tradition, and history, as well as other publications on folklore and tradition studies in general. The Institute incorporated archives comprising a range of material on Canadian topics. This included some 500 tape-recordings, copies of tape tables of contents and transcriptions from the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, and an extensive card index of words and phrases which were drawn on in the preparation of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*.¹⁶

The appointment of a new Director in 2001 ended years of uncertainty during which the post had been effectively an honorary one, and reaffirmed the support for the Centre both in the School of English and in the university as a whole. It was therefore particularly regrettable that new priorities and constraints which became evident in 2004 threatened both the integrity and ultimately the future of the unit as a whole. When plans were drawn up to transfer the School of English to new accommodation, no provision was made to rehouse the Centre's library and archives. It was therefore decided to transfer the archives to the University Library, ostensibly on the grounds of greater accessibility, safety, and conservation. A substantial proportion of the collection of books and journals was therefore moved, and integrated into the Library's general collections.

Bearing in mind the fate of the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies, it is clear that history is repeating itself. In congratulating those who have succeeded in raising the Phoenix of the Archive of Vernacular Culture from the ashes of the Leeds Institute, it is important to recognise that the archives were only one aspect of its work. The termination of the teaching programme which had trained so many scholars in this field, including such leading academics as Professor Graham Seal, founder of the Western Australian Folklore Archive in the Centre for Australian Studies at Curtin University of Technology, was a body blow to the discipline in England. In his provocative and heartfelt appraisal of the work of the Institute, *The Imperilled Inheritance*, Part I,¹⁷ Craig Fees focuses on dialect studies. As yet, there has been no similar appraisal of the Institute's pioneering programme in folklife studies.

Now in 2011

While many universities across the country maintain programmes in English language and linguistics, including the study of accents, dialects

¹⁶ *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, ed. by G.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin, and J.D.A. Widdowson (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

¹⁷ C. Fees, *The Imperilled Inheritance: Dialect and Folklife Studies at the University of Leeds 1946-1962*, Part 1: Harold Orton and the English Dialect Society, Folklore Society Library Publications No. 6 (London: Folklore Society Library, 1991).

and other aspects of variation, Leeds and Sheffield stand alone in their teaching, research, and archives in tradition studies. At the present time when cultural tourism is booming and there is unprecedented interest in English traditions and their contribution to national identity, it is perverse, to say the least, to close or to threaten the closure or dismemberment of the only institutions in higher education which specialise in the study and interpretation of these central aspects of our heritage. Courageous and single-minded efforts such as those of Harold Orton and Stewart Sanderson at Leeds to create an interdependent programme of teaching, research, and archives in these subject areas seem destined to be one-off phenomena.

In the late nineteenth century, the same single-mindedness characterised Joseph Wright's monumental *English Dialect Dictionary*. With dogged persistence over many years he built up a unique archive of material, which included a wealth of traditional lore as well as dialect. When no-one was prepared to publish the results, he remained undaunted, and published it himself by subscription.¹⁸ This monumental collection remains a cornerstone of dialect study even today. It created a future for itself. The rediscovery of the archives of the Leeds Institute, now accessible again at last, breathes new life into what remains of a once thriving academic programme. The future of the few similar initiatives elsewhere is unfortunately an open question. Is their inheritance also inevitably imperilled?

More Retreating at the University of Sheffield

At the University of Sheffield,

transfer and partial disposal of the library and archives immediately compromised the integrity of the Centre and its programme. There was no longer a focal point for its work, as originally envisaged and established, to continue. Over the past few years, the teaching and research programmes have steadily diminished, and while some courses relevant to the study of cultural tradition are still offered, the Centre itself seems to have quietly faded away, although apparently no official announcement has yet been made.¹⁹

In these circumstances it is unsurprising that in 2011 the University of Sheffield decided to close the Centre's Traditional Heritage Museum. This decision was made not only because of the substantial cost of refurbishing the building to the required standards for public access, but

¹⁸ *The English Dialect Dictionary*, ed. by J. Wright [limited subscription edition of 150 copies, 30 parts bound in 18, each fascicule signed personally by Joseph Wright], (London: Henry Frowde, 1898-1905), (Prefatory Note in Part I, A-BALLOT, dated 8 June 1896). A note on the foot of the title page of Part I reads: 'THE ENGLISH DIALECT DICTIONARY is printed at the expense of JOSEPH WRIGHT, M.A. of 6 Norham Road, Oxford.'

¹⁹ Editorial, *Our Heritage*, 27 (2011), 2.

also because ‘operating a public heritage museum no longer fitted with the University’s strategic priorities.’²⁰

The museum’s registration status was rescinded in 2008, as the university was unwilling to support a bid for accreditation, the next stage in the national scheme, because of the long-term financial implications. In spite of popular support and a major public campaign to keep the museum open, the university was not prepared to seek external funding for the refurbishment. The future of the museum’s unique collections, including its archives, gathered together over almost fifty years, therefore remains uncertain.

In the present era of global recession, it is inevitable that financial cutbacks affect every aspect of a country’s economy, including of course public services. In Britain, as elsewhere, this is reflected in widespread retrenchment in the higher education sector, as witnessed in the wholesale amalgamation and closure of courses across the full range of academic subjects. In this situation, it is indeed fortunate that major archives, such as those of the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies have been preserved and made accessible. The Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, like many university libraries in Britain, the USA, Canada, and Australia, together with national, state, county, and other libraries, archives, and repositories in these countries, has demonstrated the importance of such collections, embracing new technology to make catalogues of the material available via websites and by the digitisation of sound recordings. It is to be hoped that in due course the archives of the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, along with numerous other collections, both public and private, will be made available in a similar way as a vital resource for reference and research.

Yet, the New ‘Survey of English Tradition’

In the meantime, opportunities exist for the creation and development of new initiatives, whether public or private, to take up the challenge of continuing fieldwork and research in these fields. A research and collection project, the Survey of English Tradition, launched at the beginning of the millennium, aims to monitor and document continuity and change in language and cultural tradition throughout England, following in the pioneering footsteps of the previous initiatives at Leeds and Sheffield. Like them, thanks to the widespread public interest in the subject, the Survey will add significantly to knowledge of language and tradition in present-day multicultural England. It has already generated the embryonic Archives of English Tradition, which in 2004 developed into the Centre for English Traditional Heritage. This initiative has its

²⁰ Editorial, *Our Heritage*, 27 (2011), 3.

own website <www.centre-for-english-traditional-heritage.org/home.html>, which incorporates the ejournal *Tradition Today*, and issues a newsletter, *trad*. The Centre relies on voluntary help and contributions and, like its predecessors, its mission is to gather material on all aspects of language and tradition throughout the British Isles, and to ensure that information on these essential aspects of the heritage is preserved for future generations to rediscover.

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