

The University Teaching of European Ethnology in the United Kingdom

THE PLACE OF EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY within the framework of the academic disciplines in the United Kingdom appears to be rather ill-defined. There are historical reasons for this. In the past, ethnological and anthropological studies were largely the preserve of specialists in African, Oriental or other non-European cultures — an academic tradition which still continues; and there is a parallel tradition whereby certain aspects of European ethnology are often studied as a part of some other discipline, such as, for instance, human geography.

In assessing the position today one must make three points at the outset. Firstly, those who represent the subject professionally are still, for the most part, a self-taught generation who have built on the foundations of the older disciplines in which they were nurtured — geography, history, literary and philological studies, archaeology, anthropology and so forth. Secondly, the study of European ethnology has been more important for methods and academic techniques than for details of content, synthesis and interpretation, since the main concern has been to form adequate archives of source material for the study of British ethnology. Thirdly, any consideration of the subject in the United Kingdom must be made within the context of all the countries of the British Isles, since the close personal links between certain individual scholars are reflected also in formal collaborative associations such as Section H of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Society for Folk Life Studies, whose journal and annual conference serve as meeting-grounds for professionals, independent researchers and amateurs throughout the whole area. N. Ireland and Eire, however, are dealt with in detail elsewhere in this journal by Mr. G.B. Thompson.

The position of our subject is epitomised by the fact that there is no chair of British or European ethnology, and no independent first-degree course in the subject, in any British University. This is not merely a matter of nomenclature, although *Folk Life* is the term usually preferred to *Ethnology*. Indeed only one university, the University of Leeds, offers regular courses at both the undergraduate level, as a part of English studies, and also at specialist graduate levels. Apart from Leeds, where there are two teaching posts in Folk Life Studies (one Senior Lectureship and one Lectureship), mention should be made of a Lectureship in Archaeology and Folk Life in the Extra-Mural Department of the University of Keele, which offers occasional popular courses on English folklore and folk life in its Adult Education programme. The only other university at present contemplating teaching is the University of Edinburgh, which has plans, not so far fully worked out or in operation, for occasional teaching by members of its research department, the School of Scottish Studies. It appears that such teaching will probably be directed towards graduate students undertaking research within the broad field of Scottish cultural history and folk traditions: the School is a collecting and research department concerned with oral, material and social traditions, with strong interests in folk music and with also a well-developed place-name archive.

Parallel university research departments in England comprise the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies in the University of Leeds, the Museum of Rural English Life in the University of Reading (specialising in agricultural history, material culture and rural sociology), and the Survey of English Folklore in University College, London. This Survey, which has issued a number of questionnaires, was until recently under the charge of a college Lecturer in English Language, the first staff appointment (a Research Assistant trained in Leeds) being made in 1966. Outside the universities, research of distinction is conducted in the Welsh Folk Museum, the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, and certain regional or civic museums.

In describing the degree structure and courses in Folk Life Studies at the University of Leeds it will be useful to explain that the School of English is one of the largest in any of the unitary universities in Britain. Its interests are wide and varied: apart from the standard diet of English language and literature, students are offered the opportunity of following courses by specialists in American Literature, Commonwealth Literature, Drama, English and General Linguistics, English as a Second Language, English Dialectology, Icelandic, and Celtic, through prescribed schemes of options at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Folk Life Studies find a natural home in this company.

First let us deal with undergraduate teaching.

Candidates for the degree of B.A. with Special Studies in English follow a common first-year curriculum and then opt for one of four main schemes of study. In two of these schemes, weighted towards linguistic rather than literary studies, there is a 2-year option in Folk Life Studies which attracts on average some 12 to 18 students per year.

They follow four survey courses of lectures: (1) an introduction to the theory and principles of the study of oral, material and social traditions; (2) oral literature; (3) custom and belief; (4) ballad and folksong. Naturally the international, and especially European, background to British material is emphasised: valuable special insights have been offered by three successive holders of the second lectureship in the Department, Professor Reidar Th. Christiansen of Norway, Intendent Ingemar Liman and Mr. Wille Brunk of Sweden. In tutorial groups there is special discussion of field-work techniques, registration and classification of material, and other practicalities. Each student has a weekly supervision to discuss his research dissertation, the subject normally being examined by a dissertation based on fieldwork. While many students choose research subjects in folklore, about one third study material culture, crafts or occupations, including the compilation of craft vocabularies and terminologies on *Wörter und Sachen* lines.

The structure of post-graduate degrees in the University is currently under revision. At present there is a one-year Post-Graduate Diploma in Folk Life Studies, devised to give professional training to people contemplating careers in museums, archives, etc., where they will be responsible for folk life collections. Students follow undergraduate courses (1) and (3) and in addition have intensive practical training in archive methods; fieldwork; photography and sound recording; the elements of preservation techniques for museum specimens; and exhibition techniques. They may by permission take one course from the following options both within and without the School of English: Romano-British archaeology; Anglo-Saxon art and archaeology; medieval archaeology; English dialectology; historical geography; social geography; history of art.

A new one-year M.A. in Folk Life Studies has been proposed and, it is hoped, will be offered in 1968-1969. This will be of higher theoretical and academic content, with courses and written examinations in oral literature, custom and belief, and regional ethnology. In addition, there is the usual structure of graduate work for the higher research degrees of M. Phil. and Ph. D., where some course work may be prescribed but the degree is awarded for a thesis. The minimum period for presenting theses is 2 years for the M. Phil. and three years for the Ph. D., but in practice candidates normally exceed the minimum periods.

There are on average about 10 post-graduate students at any one time. Further information about these courses may be obtained from S.F. Sanderson (also Director of the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies).

With regard to careers, full-time specialist openings are very few. Many graduates have become school-teachers in English, both at home and abroad. One is employed in T.V. Three post-graduates are teaching in Commonwealth universities, three in teacher training colleges at home; and four of these have instituted folklore or folk life courses for their students while also teaching English Language or Literature. Perhaps the most promising future sector outside higher education will be the museum service, where increasing attention is being paid to the development of local folk life collections.

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