

Ethnological Research on Food in Ireland

NEITHER ETHNOLOGY NOR ANTHROPOLOGY forms part of the curriculum of any university or other teaching institution in Ireland. In these circumstances, studies of this nature are restricted to a very limited number of institutions and, even in these, they enjoy only an ancillary status. The institutions in question are: The Irish Folklore Commission, Dublin; the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin; and the Ulster Folk Museum, Holywood, Co. Down. As a result of these limitations, the number of persons engaged in ethnological research is extremely small and none of these is in a position to give it his full-time attention.

In regard to ethnological research on food, no specific programme has been or is in operation in any institution and, in fact, very little work has been done on any aspect of this subject. Over the past thirty years, a very considerable corpus of data on traditional foods has been assembled in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission in connection with the general collecting work prosecuted by the Commission. These data do not, however, provide a systematic territorial coverage of the country and are most exhaustive for the area bordering the western seaboard. They have not, as yet, been classified or abstracted from the parent documentation. By means of questionnaires the Commission has also carried out a detailed and countrywide enquiry into certain specific aspects of Irish diet, i.e. milk and milk foods, corn growing, bread, pilchards, taboo on the eating of kidneys and famine food. The archives of the Ulster Folk Museum similarly contain a significant corpus of information on food relating, in particular, to the northern part of the country. The National Museum of Ireland has, over many years, operated a programme of abstracting all references to food in ancient, medieval and modern Irish literary sources.

LITERATURE

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