



FLS NEWS

The newsletter of the Folklore Society

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June 2018

HEALTH AND HEALING IN LEGEND & TRADITION

This two-day conference on Health and Healing in Legend and Tradition will be held on **Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd September 2018** as the thirteenth Legendary Weekend of the Folklore Society, at the Spa in Scarborough, Yorkshire YO11 2HD. If you're interested in shrew ashes, zanies, plague pits, smallpox goddesses, traditional cures, illness as metaphor, and so much more, we'd welcome you. The conference fee is £50. To book, contact Jeremy Harte, Bourne Hall, Spring Street, Ewell, Surrey KT17 1UF, 020 8394 1734 bhallmuseum@gmail.com

CALL FOR PAPERS: 'FOLKLORE & ANTHROPOLOGY IN CONVERSATION:

Revisiting Frazer, Lang and Tylor'. The fourth joint seminar of the Folklore Society and the Royal Anthropological Institute will be held on Thursday 25 October 2018, 10:00–17:00, at the RAI, 50 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5BT. Please send abstracts of around 300 words by 13 July to thefolkloresociety@gmail.com.

THE KATHARINE BRIGGS LECTURE AND BOOK AWARD 2018

This year's lecture will be held on Wednesday 7 November at 5:30 pm at The Warburg Institute. The speaker will be Prof. Dr Ulrika Wolf-Knuts (Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland): 'What Can We Do Today with Old Records of Folk Belief? On the Example of Devil Lore'. After the lecture, we will announce the winners of this year's Katharine Briggs Award and of our biennial Non-Print Media Award. There will be a wine reception and buffet supper. To reserve a place, please contact thefolkloresociety@gmail.com or telephone 020 7862 8564.

TEETH: Exhibition at The Wellcome Collection, London, until 16 September 2018: 'From folk remedies and tooth fairies to barber-surgeons and professional dentists, "Teeth" tells the tale of our pursuit of a pain-free mouth and the perfect smile': wellcomecollection.org.

SPELLBOUND: Exhibition at The Ashmolean, Oxford, 31 August to 6 January 2019. Exhibition to examine how magical thinking has been practised over the centuries. www.ashmolean.org

THE HAUNTED CITY: Modern Monsters and Urban Legends: a conference of The London Fortean Society: Saturday 30 June 2018, 10:00–17:00, at Conway Hall, London. For more information, visit: forteanlondon.blogspot.com.

HERE BE DRAGONS: The Oxford Fantasy Literature Summer School, 11–13 September 2018, at the English Faculty, University of Oxford. For more information, contact English.office@ell.ox.ac.uk.

LIVING IN A MAGICAL WORLD: Inner Lives, Emotions, Identity and the Supernatural, 1300–1900: St Anne's College, Oxford, 17–19 September 2018. For more information, visit innerlives.org

SOCIETY FOR FOLKLIFE STUDIES: Annual conference 2018, 13–16 September, St Fagans, Cardiff. For more information, visit: www.folklifestudies.org.uk.

FOLK SONG CONFERENCE: EnglishFolk Dance and Song Society, London, 10–11 November 2018. For more information, contact laura@efdss.org.

**EXPLORING FOLKLORE,
at Halsway Manor, 2-4 November 2018**

Following the success of the first “Exploring Folklore” weekend, in 2017, at Halsway Manor, Tom and Barbara Brown are organising a second weekend to explore folklore, this time with a focus on Dartmoor. The event will take place from 2 to 4 November 2018, and booking information can be found at: <https://halswaymanor.org.uk/event/exploring-folklore-dartmoor/>

Participants at the first “Exploring Folklore” weekend in October 2017 enjoyed the company of other enthusiasts of folklore in the lovely setting of the Quantocks at Halsway Manor, a modernised early modern manor house which has been the National Centre for Folk Arts since the 1960s, offering residential courses and housing a folk arts library and archive of over 10,000 volumes. The focus of the weekend was on calendar customs and seasonal events: Doc Rowe presented his “Blood, Booze and Bedlam” talk and showed a wonderful selection of his photographs and clips of his film and sound recordings from his archive. Pat Smith and Ned Clamp brought the Llantrisant Marie Lwyd, sang her traditional carols and showed us how to make “callenigs”. Tom and Barbara Brown gave a talk about the Hunting of the Earl of Rone at Combe Martin, revived in the 1970s and now an established, well attended annual event. Mark Norman spoke about Black Dogs and brought 2 Hobby Horses for display and to try on--the Black Dog ‘Obby ‘Oss of Torrington that he rescued a few years ago from a barn, and the Minehead Hobby Horse. We enjoyed the Potterne Christmas Boys performance of their mumming play and we had a go at performing a mummer’s play text. Matt Rose, Halsway

Manor’s Librarian and Archivist, showed us around their collection and put out a display of some treasures. The weekend was supported by The Folklore Society, whose librarian offered a brief introduction to the Society and gave a presentation “What is Folklore?”

CONFERENCE REPORT: ‘WORKING LIFE: Belief, Custom, Ritual, Narrative’.
The Spring Conference of the Folklore Society, 27–9 April at the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading.

As we walked out one morning in Reading to view the fields and to take the air, down by banks of primroses we found a museum, and Oliver Douglas was curator there. He welcomed us to the Museum of English Rural Life, founded in 1951 just in time for the first episode of *The Archers*. Reassured that they would not have to wear smocks, the staff created an English answer to Skansen and other folk life museums, collecting evidence for trades and crafts as well as farming, though not beliefs. So an Essex corn neck was collected as straw craft, not harvest ritual, and a jug decorated with *The Barley Mow* as pottery, not poetry. Nowadays they’d loosened up a bit, and here was the helmet of a London morris group and a staff used to beat the bounds of Berkshire in 2009.

They do these things differently in Ireland, explained Patricia Lysaght in her first presidential address, introducing the National Folklore Survey, an archival monument ranked by Unesco with the Book of Kells. Thousands of transcript volumes bear witness, once again, to the influence of Swedish models, and to the grit of collectors who worked for 23, 31 or 48 years. Though sound recording was usually done in pubs, because that’s where the electricity was, they dressed respectably, while many could play a fine tune on the pipes. Collecting was funded by the Irish state as part of its project of deanglicising, but extended to the North, Scotland and Man, where the team went by cattle boat: the cattle had the best seats. Well, that put us in our place. As did Paul Cowdell’s reflection that folklorists are themselves an occupational group, no more complex than any other as we follow the career

path from student essay to obituary. We make our mentors and peers into legendary characters with nicknames (Dan Ben Amos is Public Folklore Enemy No. 1), reminiscences (Peter Kennedy got a reluctant Gypsy to sing by holding him over his own fire), and party games including Hunt the Authentic Tradition. Reminiscences of Venetia Newall's hats were followed by deadly accurate impersonations of such folklorists as were not actually present. Next came Anne Lawrence-Mathers on the miracles worked by the hand of St. James, which arrived at Reading Abbey in 1133. Used to collecting hard evidence for saintliness, the monks like good ethnographers recorded name, home town and status of everyone who was healed: stories might have a legendary ring, like the girl thrown out by her stepmother, but they were social history. Miracles like the one which provided timber for Bucklebury Cross showed how the learned world of the cloister overlapped with that of the workers. One girl saved from a ghost by the Hand ended up as the abbey washerwoman. Such were the details of working life, which inspired Jeremy Harte to propose an evolution of mill folklore. When watermills were pivoted on a horizontal wheel, they ground slowly in isolated places where customers milled their own grain and might encounter hostile fairies at the lonely spot. More sophisticated machinery required maintenance by a miller who took a toll of grain in payment, so that fabliaux feature him as a thief of other people's labour and a sexual predator on the women who visited him. But when enhanced gearing made it possible for millers to buy grain and sell flour, the ballads condemning them as folk villains died out in the face of their new status as venture capitalists. Decline of a different sort inspired Matthew Cheeseman to reflect on drink and work. Is it really last-time orders for the lunchtime pint? In the Civil Service, drinking never affected people's work because they didn't do any, but a turning point came when some managers fell out the window at 2.00 in the morning. People remember a turning point in which the fun was replaced by discourses of value and responsibility, the Powerpoint on how to claim for booze as sundries was deleted, and

the boss stopped buying drinks all round. Perhaps the facts don't matter as much as memories of change and loss. Sobered, we retired to a drinks reception enhanced by lovely folk music from Jackie Oates and Tristan Seume.

Saturday morning brought us back to the University's lecture hall to hear Devender Kumar on women's songs from the Haryana region. A dry land, subject to famine and moneylenders, this had its agriculture kept deliberately primitive under the Raj, and women did most of it. How hard it is to face the sun, to kindle fire in rains, to be molested by your brother-in-law, to have your husband fetch a pretty woman from Delhi to bear his child. The men call these meaningless songs, but they claim dignity for women as individuals not family assets. Farming is hard work, but the women still sing of 'our fields'. Hasmik Matikyan followed with an exploration of lullabies, songs for the work (often hard work) of getting babies to sleep. Sometimes the lyrics are sad – 'sleep, little child, your father was killed in the war' – sometimes terrifying – 'sleep or Bobo will take you' – but the children don't understand and will nod off to anything quiet, easy and repetitive. Contributors from the floor introduced one tot who would only respond to Black Sabbath and a survey of global lullabies which all sounded different: so much for neurophysiological constants. Now we needed something rousing, and Ernie Warner was happy to provide it with work songs. A good shantyman was worth ten other sailors because his rhythms synchronised the work group; the best ones could be heard across a force ten gale. The tradition is old, and *Haulin' on the Bowline* must be Tudor at least because it presupposes a ship with just one sail. It's not all jolly tars and ploughboys – lorry-drivers and accountants have their own song lore. There's even one written for airport baggage handlers. Could we join in? We certainly could.

Revived by coffee, we returned to hear Rosalind Kerven's exploration of women at work, based on a survey of 350 folktales. 10% featured spinners, nannies, servants, midwives or other jobs – a higher proportion than witches or princesses: so much for stereotype. In our native Cap o' Rushes, the girl goes out and gets

a job in service, more enterprising than Perrault's Cinderella who worked at home. It took 5½ miles of yarn to make a dress; a good spinner turned out 2 skeins a day, so the 5 skeins of Tom Tit Tot are something impressive. Tracey Norman rose to the challenge with her spinning wheel, not breaking a thread as she regaled us with Wordsworth and Herrick. Meanwhile Mark Norman unravelled the supernatural line that runs from Egyptian Neith through Ariadne and the Baltic goddess who weaves sunbeams. More alarming were the deformed spinners of Mother Holde and the Valkyries who wove with spears and guts. Wool threads were used by witches, while yarnstorming, the work of covering dull buildings in fabric, was carried out by their successors Deadly Knitshade and Purple Purl. Cue for Kate Smith to trace the history of knitting from the first socks in 12th-century Egypt to medieval Europe, where the Virgin took up needles c.1410, and so to the Terrible Knitters of Dent – terrifying in their output, not their Quaker morals. Third Wave feminism informs knitting as resistance, with pussy hats for #MeToo marches and Mumsnet creating anonymous blankets to be sent to bereaved members. After the Manchester Attack, people put up knitted hearts across the city; if you found one you took it home.

After lunch, the theme of women at work was taken up in David Hopkin's keynote address on lace-makers and their legends. Invented in the 15th century, the craft came with its own foundation legends: pious and sentimental in Catholic Bruges, royalist in Bedfordshire, where St. Catherine mutates into Katherine of Aragon. Lace is an export product, made by the poor for the rich; though it was hard, cheap work it offered women a corporate identity with their own schools, songs and trade processions. In Lille they laid their trays on the floor for St. Anne's Day and went to the pub, where they sang soldier songs, because soldiers don't have to work. And speaking of pubs, Ceri Houlbrook reported her latest findings on ritually concealed finds in these. Some landlords curate their horse skulls and old shoes with glass cases and a label, others celebrate them with ghost stories. Martha of Derby wants her head back, but it's on the

mantelpiece. The Whittington at Highgate has a mummified cat, while the ferret put into a wall at Dunchurch came out forty years later, a lot stiffer. Strange objects like the three bottle necks hanging up at Kirton must not be removed, or bad things will happen. And so to Meredith McGriff with her ethnography of potters on the Michigan/Indiana border. They are mostly men, working alone in the woods, where their Mennonite heritage gives them a feel for natural materials and peaceful ways of living, though if pressed they will say what they think of each other's work. Firing and the use of wood ash as a glaze require continuous feeding of the kiln, so the potters come together and work shifts; they meet again at the annual display, where pots are exchanged, traded, or given as mementoes.

We paused for refreshments and then heard Fiona Mackenzie, archivist of the island of Canna and custodian of a thousand photographs and films and the voices of South Uist as collected by Margaret Fay Shaw, who arrived in 1929 when the island had no amenities (except on Sundays when she fled to a hotel with a bath). Here was a thatching, a family working together; here were the women waulking, eight hours of pounding work and song; here was Peigi Macrae milking Dora the cow. And here was Margaret, aged 101 and talking about her treasured memories, reserved through the National Trust for Scotland for the island forever. Nick Jones followed with a tale of landscape, ritual and power at Tolpuddle. He didn't turn up for the festival weekend in July when the banners process, he came in November, armed with critical readings in phenomenology and not prepared for the out-of-season indifference with which the village regards its socialist heritage. The Martyrs' Tree, axis mundi of trade unionism has a plaque designating it a Great British Tree for HM's Golden Jubilee, which seems ironic somehow. Especially as it's sponsored by National Grid plc. We needed something more radical than that, and Robert McDowall supplied it with his introduction to William Cobbett, a great writer, a good hater, and a thinker who was only logical within the limits of his prejudices. *Rural Rides* paints a picture of the English people in the

manner of Fielding and Smollett, and there was a contemporary tang in its debates over free trade, greedy tax eaters and the overwhelming influence of London. His writings will last forever (except for the passages about turnips) because they express sincere ideas in vivid and vigorous prose.

So the day ended, and though that fierce Cobbettian contempt for cosmopolitanism still rang in our ears we managed to squeeze most of the conference into a pizza house. The next day began with Helen Frisby who had promised to unearth the occupational lore of gravediggers: her colleague Stuart Prior, an insider of the trade with his own personal spade, couldn't be with us, so we were spared some memorable anecdotes about exhumations. Gravediggers learn how to recognise signs that a half-dug grave will collapse, ways of dealing with a floating box when the water holds up the coffin, and what to do about the dreaded sticky, when it's too big for the hole. A marginal and shunned occupation, they tell few ghost stories, having seen too much. The funeral theme continued with Stuart Dunn's exposition of corpse roads. These traditional routes, with built-up resting places for the coffin, were used to carry bodies from outlying chapelries to the mother church; nowadays they're popular as hiking routes and form part of the Folk Horror Revival. Overlaying map information with GIS shows that they follow the best practicable route, while fieldwork shows them wandering somewhat at the beginning but then as the old lore demands running straight as a lance towards the village centre. From this mythicised past we returned to a colourful present with Mu Peng's introduction to funerals in rural China. An 'artist for closing' supplies the needs of the dead – a paper house with complete furnished rooms, an image pavilion for the photo, and a paper cover for the coffin, all to be burnt; geomancers prepare the tomb and there is a band, eight pallbearers (they are the eight immortals), and priests – Buddhist or Daoist, it doesn't matter which. All of this was revived after the Cultural Revolution from people who remembered how to do it. Daughter's families pay for the paper house, sons for the musicians and friends for

other things, so the whole village contributes to a good send-off. Impressed and rather envious, we went for a final coffee break in the company of the museum's friendly plastic cow.

Then we returned to Jo Hickey-Hall's insights into fairies at work. A capricious people, sometimes they help build churches on a new site, at others stop the bulldozers of developers in their tracks. Fairy workers might help the farmer or, if affronted, destroy the crop. Here was a snatch of film with Pat Noone of Galway talking about respect, see that farm, they ploughed out the fort with EU money but disease took the cows and now the farm is gone. In the old stories fairies had a voice and servants had none, today it's the other way round: but the silent people are still seen, and more and more sightings are being reported to Jo's website. There was fieldwork behind Maureen James' research into toadmen, too. Up until the 1950s amazing things were still being done with horses by aloof, silent men in Peterborough, Stamford and March. How? 'I daren't tell my own son', said one, 'what I know goes to the churchyard with me'; but there were others who after a few pints would tell the stories to any young lad impressionable enough to listen. The capture of the walking toad, the screaming bone that floats upstream, the skirmish with the devil are now well known to informants and folklorists alike, which rather takes the edge off further collecting. Hungry for more stories, we welcomed Tommy Kuusela of Uppsala and his tales of the Swedish forests. Charcoal-burners had a lonely life so they welcomed the company of women, even half-naked supernatural women sporting a horse's tail, cloven feet, and a back hollow as rotten wood. To the learned, this was bestiality and should be punished as a crime against nature, but the folk thought that sleeping with the skogsrå was to bond with nature, not to flout it. Many stories, some familiar from British fairy lore, were told about the forest spirit in middle and south Sweden; further north they were told of other kinds of being.

After lunch we gathered in the museum galleries for a tour led by the effortlessly knowledgeable Ollie Douglas, who had somehow managed to put together a display of items

from back of house which reflected what we'd been hearing all weekend. The sun was just a-glimmering and the small birds sang on every bush, but we had work to do so we parted, to meet again next year.

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST WITCHCRAFT (Museum of Cambridge, to March 2018)

Exhibition Review – Jeremy Harte

This display in the old Cambridge Folk Museum brings together horse's bones buried beneath floors, rolling pins filled with salt, and witch bottles ranging from a bulbous grinning bellarmine to the thin glass phials used later on. They have concealed shoes, as every museum does, but there are also some oddities including broken eggshells and a cache of old iron. A photo of Enid Porter looking quizzical presides over the exhibition, but even with her folkloric collections to support them, the curators have occasionally drawn on standard social history artefacts like brooms and scissors which aren't magical but might have been used that way. 'Share your own spooky tales with us', urged the witch-ball-shaped tags on the table, and many visitors had, both adults and children. Engaging in unstructured fieldwork (i.e. eavesdropping) I realised how much the tradition dominant of the ghost story has taken over our ideas of the supernatural: when people talked about spookiness it meant unexpected sounds and lights in old houses, it meant the return of shadowy figures from the past, but it didn't mean witches. It seems that socially at least, the holed stones and witch balls have done their work.

FOLKLORE & ANTHROPOLOGY IN CONVERSATION III

Gracefully our host David Shankland welcomed us to the Royal Anthropological Institute – the principal guest Patricia Lysaght responded courteously on behalf of the Folklore Society – and with magnificent gesture, Giovanni Kezich opened the third annual conference of Folklore and Anthropology in Conversation, October 2017, introducing the wonders recorded at his European-funded museum in Trento. Beneath the Notting Hill sort of carnival lay the Nice type

with floats, and beneath that the Breughelesque feast of inversion, and below all these a ritual winter masquerade, which you could still see in mountain villages, with their goats and bears, cone headdresses, and the play of the mock marriage.

Was it something to do with the Lupercalia? Or the Fratres Arvales? That's how folklorists used to think, as Paul Cowdell explained in his introduction to Violet Alford, stalwart of the Folklore and English Folk Dance & Song Societies for 50 years. She was a good fieldworker, learning Basque so she could record Pyrenean dance, where she accepted change as long as it came from the people themselves; it delighted her to see Charlie Chaplin join the Bull of Roussillon; but she fulminated against fakelore, and pity the poor visitor who described her sandals as *très folkloriques*. Ah, the days of rescuing unwritten culture are dead – or are they? Marielle Risse reported on Dhofar in southern Oman, where they speak the oral language Jibbali. There's only one dictionary, which was based on fables and the longer teaching stories. International folktales have local detail – grazing rights and leopards – and women appear as positive characters, which fits Dhofari better than the Arabs. The admired traits are endurance, forbearance, and getting out of trouble without fighting. The djinn are like strangers who should be treated with courtesy and left alone; every man she knew recalled at least one inexplicable encounter with them.

We paused to digest these revelations, along with the excellent sandwiches provided for lunch, and then heard Matthew Ryan-East on Joseph Jacobs, the eclectic scholar 'willing to receive light from all sides' who was interested in progress while respecting diversity. Artistic, national and racial character was formed by character; and he listed Jewish trades as a way of seeing what had shaped the thought of his people. Inborn or not, racial character could be modified by filling children's minds with bright trains of images, which led him to retell bowdlerised folktales. Max Carocci followed with a close reading of the Anthropological Index, now online. He'd found 8,023 articles

from the last sixty years with ‘folklore’ in the title or keywords: 29% from Eastern Europe descending through the Americas, rest of Europe, and Asia to 7% Africa. Literature, language and ethnomusicology were popular, and the index covered demonology, mumming, witchcraft, weather and much more.

Then after coffee Leslie Sass took us to the cave – not stable – where the infant Christ is laid in Orthodox icons. That’s like Zeus in the Dictaeon cave, or Hermes, or Romulus and Remus. Mithras was born from a rock. He’s something to do with bulls, as was Zeus the abductor of Europa, and the Cretan labyrinth. Eleithya of Amnisos brought up newborns from the underworld in her sacred cave. Then there were the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the Thesmophoria, and Delphi. We were impressed by so many connections, and ready for Florentina Geller on Carnival and the further career of baby Jesus in Bulgaria. At first the communists banned ritual masks until in the 60s these were no longer retrograde Christianity and became vestiges of Bulgarian identity instead. Later the mask expert, like other members of the Institute of Folklore Studies turned out to have been a government spy. In the folk Bible, the Virgin and child escape the Massacre of the Innocents wearing kukeri masks, or the kukeri are Herod’s henchmen. Winter customs are linked to the story of Christmas, Spring ones to that of Easter. Much talk followed on survivals, adoptions and borrowings, and we agreed to return for more discussion another year.

CHIMNEY SWEEPS’ LORE

Rosemary Power

A recent conversation with a chimney sweep, raised on the north-east coast of Scotland with west-coast roots, brought up the following.

I mentioned that a traditional chimney sweeping practice in county Donegal was to put a small pine tree down the chimney. He said that in west coast Scotland the practice was to wrap a stone in heather and lower it slowly – and this is still preferred to nylon brushes in places. He had also heard on two occasions of people putting a hen down the chimney, its attempts to escape

presumably causing the abrasion. The creature was then slaughtered, if necessary, plucked, and cooked for Sunday dinner. He had also heard of seaweed being used, and posited that the salt helped with the abrasion – he was not certain if the seaweed was wrapped.

A big house he knew of in England had another method. As late as the 1930s a child recalled being sent up the chimney by her grandmother to sweep it. It had rungs inside which allowed access to different parts. Another building, a Scottish railwayman’s cottage, had its original range and the chimney led out into a compartment where food could be smoked before going up the chimney.

He had only once, by email, been asked to bring good luck to a wedding.

FIRE-BRANDS IN SHETLAND LORE

J. B. Smith

The following is from John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, Lerwick: Johnson and Greig, 1899, p. 140: ‘Persons intent on witching a neighbour endeavoured to obtain the loan of some domestic utensil, especially about the time when a cow was expected to calve. But a wise woman would lend nothing at such a time. If a suspected person called, and even asked for a “drink o’ *blaand*” [drink made from buttermilk], the guidwife would seize a *lowin taand* (live coal), and chase the uncanny visitor out the door, throwing the fire after her, while she exclaimed: “Twee-tee-see-dee: du ill-vaumed trooker [thou malignant huzzy]!”’.

English Dialect Dictionary has a slightly different version of this against *trooker*: ‘When a woman suspected of witchcraft entered a house the inmates – on her leaving – would throw a firebrand after her, at the same time saying, “Twee-tee-see-de, doo ill-vam’d trooker”’. This is attributed to ‘[J.S.]’, which presumably stands for ‘John Spence’.

In Shetland lore, a firebrand could also be a *guest*, that is, an object considered as an omen of the approach of a stranger. On p. 222, John Spence gives the saying *It’s ill ta drook* [soak, drench] *a laughin guest*. He continues: ‘A brand standing by itself in the fire was called a guest;

a smoking brand betokened an unwelcome guest, while a bright brand meant a friend. The coming of an unwelcome guest might be prevented by pouring water on the brand, but care was needed lest the act should bring misfortune on a friend, who might fall into a mire or burn’.

The following extract from George Stewart’s *Shetland Fireside Tales*, 1877, 1892, rpt. Lerwick: Shetland Times, 2012, ch. 16, p. 122 illustrates the matter:

“‘Bit bairns, dere’s a gaist”, continued Bawby, pointing to a half-consumed brand standing upright on the hearth, “wha can dis be, I winder? Oh, I’ll wager you it’s Auld Sibbie Rendal; weel I keen sorra bit o’ her I’m wantin’ ta see. Lord bliss dee, Eppie, as du’s neist da door, an’ gie her a dip in da water dat’s i’ da tub yonder upo’ da flüir”.

“Yae, dat sall I”, said Eppie Jarmson, as she rose and took the representative of the unwelcome Sibbie in the tongs and dipped it in the tub of water, so that the original might get a thorough drenching of rain when she set out on her visit to Bawby o’ Brigstanes’.

See also *SND guest*, quoting Jakob Jakobsen, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language*, 1928: ‘*Gest* Half-burnt brand, standing right on its end, without any support, when the fire wastes away; this is considered as a fore-telling of a guest’s arrival at the house; if when touched with the fingers or tongs, the brand, “guest”, blazed up, then it was said: “dis is gaun to be a welcome guest”’.

HARRY POTTER: A HISTORY OF MAGIC (British Library, October 2017 to February 2018)

Exhibition Review Jeremy Harte

Meticulous planning, wonderful collections and a sense of fun: the British Library deserves the throngs of visitors who have booked this celebration of Harry’s 20th anniversary. There are treats for fans, including the original reader’s report from the eight-year-old daughter of Bloomsbury’s chief executive – ‘The excitement in this book made me feel warm inside’ – but there are also real magic memorabilia, enough to win approval from the most demanding

specialist. Visually, it’s a hybrid of Gothic cloister and Oxbridge library, with just a touch of kitsch: a Renaissance portrait of Dumbledore sets the tone. There are nine rooms, drawing on the Hogwarts curriculum to cover Herbology, Divination, Charms, Astronomy, Magical Creatures and so on, each with its own playful chandelier of cauldrons or fortune-telling teacups overhead. When you enter a room, it begins with some framing texts within the Harry Potter universe which then match up with artefacts from the historical world. Given that Rowling has read almost everything on magic, and transmuted much of it into the books, there is no shortage of correspondences between the two, from Nicholas Flamel’s tombstone (genuine, if not necessarily alchemical) to catch-penny pamphlets on basilisks. The exhibition is laid out well for families, and captioned at the right intellectual level, allowing for the fact that when it comes to historical manuscripts we are all, in the medieval sense, illiterates. The British Library’s exhibitions sometimes suffer from the strength of its collections – books, basically – but here they have been amplified by loans from the Museum of Witchcraft at Boscastle, moving that worthy institution along the road to respectability. And every room has interactive, so you can make your own potions, address the divinatory sphinx, and manipulate a celestial globe.

So what does it tell us about magic and its history? There’s some marvellous stuff, including the Ripley Scroll: nineteen feet of instructions on achieving the Philosopher’s Stone, combining practical matters with grandiose fantasy in a kind of magic parody of the writer’s task. Facing it is Joseph Wright’s *Discovery of Phosphorus* with its ironic portrait of the bearded philosopher who has stumbled on some real chemistry. Compare and contrast: only the exhibition doesn’t do that, because it comes from Rowling’s perspective, in which everything is a source of inspiration rather than evidence for the development of ideas. Seen through a different prism, a lot of things on display – astronomical treatises, herbals, bestiaries – would be more history of science than celebration of magic. But it would

be ungenerous to make too much of that. A wave of Harry's wand, and the whole heterogeneous assemblage becomes a single enchanting experience.

The exhibition is now over but you can read about it in *Harry Potter: A Journey Through a History of Magic* (British Library, 2017)

NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS?

J. B. Smith

The Oxford Book of Nursery Rhymes gives us the following riddle: 'Flour of England, fruit of Spain, Met together in a shower of rain; Put in a bag, tied round with string; If you'll tell me this riddle, I'll give you a ring'. The riddle is generally thought to mean 'plum-pudding'. It has, however, been speculated that it is invested with a hidden meaning, pointing to the possibility of a marriage between Queen Mary ('flower of England') and Philip II of Spain ('fruit of Spain'), who 'met together in downpouring rain', if we are to believe a contemporary account. That being so, the 'ring' of the last line would be the wedding ring. As for the 'flour' of the first line, incidentally, we note that this is historically the same word as 'flower', since flour is the flower, or finest, of the wheat (cf. French 'fleur de farine'). One can thus distinguish three different layers of meaning at this point.

A Westmorland variant provided by B. K[irkby] (*EDD* 5, p. 56 against *read* v.² in the sense 'to explain, solve') is not generally open to such interpretations. It runs: 'Floors of England, frewts o' Spain, Mixt tagidder wi' a shoor o' rain, A hardin [hempen] jacket, a hempen string, If thoo'll rede [solve] that, thoos wise as a king'. Admittedly there is a slight problem with the first word. Does it mean 'flowers', and if so why? Or does it mean 'flours'? In that case the plural would presumably convey the idea of different kinds of flour.

Here now is an 'Old Riddle' from p. 115 of G. F. Northall's *A Warwickshire Word-Book*, London, EDS, 1898 against the headword *hurden*. The brackets are Northall's, and on p. 116 *hurds*, *herds* is glossed 'refuse flax or hemp': 'Flower (flour) of England, fruit of Spain, Met

together in a storm of rain, A hempen shirt, and a hurden cravat, If you're a wise man, tell me that'.

PEMBROKESHIRE FUNERAL CUSTOMS

J. B. Smith

Trouncing was a Pembrokeshire custom formerly observed at deaths. There is an entry on this in *EDD*, 6 (1905), p.248. It is from Wright's correspondent W[illiam] M[eredith] M[orris], in whose *Glossary of the Demetian Dialect of North Pembrokeshire* (1910; rpt. 1991, Felinfach: Llanerch) the custom is, rather strangely, not mentioned. In the aforesaid *EDD* entry of 1905, it is attributed to south Pembrokeshire, and is described as follows: 'An important rite in the obsequies of 150 years ago. The corpse was placed in the coffin as soon as possible after death, and then at the wake gathering it was carried around the room with unearthly noise and clamour. This was supposed to frighten away evil spirits, and to act magically upon the soul's enemies'.

A related custom is recorded by Morris on pp. 318-19 of his *Glossary* against the headword *winglos*, 'wake, or lichwake; the custom of watching over and performing various ceremonies in connection with the dead'. Morris continues: 'The Rev. D. Jenkin Evans gives the following interesting account of the old-time *Winglos* in the antiquaries' column of the *Pembroke County Guardian* under the date of May 2, 1896: 'Although this old custom of watching and illuminating the chamber of the dead is still practised, it has lost all its most peculiar features, namely, the drawing up of the corpse through the chimney of the house where the death has occurred, before it was conveyed to its last resting place. The process of this extraordinary and mysterious custom was as follows: a certain number of persons would be engaged to remove the corpse from its coffin to a convenient place near the fire, where the pinioning of the dead would be performed. This was effected by tying a rope to the upper part of the body, the other end being passed up the chimney by means of a long stick or pitchfork. Then a sufficient number of men (possibly

according to the weight of the corpse) would be told off and sent to the top of the chimney on the outside of the roof, which they reached by the help of a ladder, for the purpose of hauling the corpse. These – having first fixed themselves as securely as the perilous nature of the situation would allow – took hold of the rope and signalled to the party inside by crying ‘Hir wen gwd’ [‘long white bag’] (words probably referring to the long white shroud with which the body was wrapt), and the party inside answered ‘Whare’n barod!’ (words equivalent to ‘We are ready!’) and slowly but surely up the chimney went the corpse. When it had been brought to the top, it was carefully lowered again, and eventually replaced in its coffin. I am told that the last of such ceremonies in N. Pembrokeshire took place at a cottage on the glebeland known as Old Mill in the parish of Pontfaen’.

Compare Robert Scourfield and Keith Johnson, *Below the Landsker*, Cresswell Quay, Jackylando, 2008, p. 70, who, presumably with reference to the above, allude to an all-night vigil, when candles were lit ‘to ward off the powers of darkness’. They continue: ‘A tradition which persisted until the mid-eighteenth century was the drawing of the corpse up a chimney before being set in the coffin, no doubt thought to be the first rung towards eternity’.

A SCOTTISH CURE FOR SORE EYES

J. B. Smith

In *The Edinburgh Topographical, Traditional and Antiquarian Magazine*, Edinburgh: Thomas G. Stevenson, December 1848, in the section beginning ‘The Parish of Auchterhouse, Forfarshire’, we find on pp. 152-53 against Sunday 2 May 1652 the following account: ‘Mt [= Margaret?] Robertsonne, in the Bonnettowne [now Bonnyton], was before the Sessions for Charming of her chyld, by going from the Bonnettowne to the Kirktowne [Kirkton Auchterhouse] wall [‘spring, stream’!] and washing of her daughter’s eyen, and saying yt

“Fish beare fine, and fulle beare gall;

All ye ill of my bairne’s eyen in ye wall fall”.

Being accusit of this, confessit [‘confessed’] Shoe [‘she’] did so, and yt [‘that’] Janet Fyffe

learned her; for yee qlk [‘for which’] yee minister is to acquaint the Presbritrie of it before Shoe be further examined’.

The account continues against 23 May 1652: ‘Mt Robertsonne and Janet Fyffe are appointed to Sit the Stole of Repentance in Sackcloth, ay [‘at all times’] till they be penitent’.

There follows the comment: ‘This was a grave affair for their reverences of the Presbytery to consider – an ignorant woman washing the sore eyes of her child’.

THOMAS DAVIDSON: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Stephen Miller

Thomas Davidson was the contributor of a number of well-researched articles on a number of themes in folklore, specifically animals and magic and especially the notion of elf-shot. Some eight articles have been traced published between 1955 and 1960, as follows: ‘The Untilled Field’, *Agriculture History Review* iii.1 (1955): 20–25; ‘Elf-shot cattle’, *Antiquity* xxx (1956): 148–54; ‘The Horseman’s Word: A Rural Initiation Ceremony’, *Gwerin* 1 (1956): 67–74; ‘Cattle-Milking Charms and Amulets’, *Gwerin* 2 (1957): 22–37; ‘Notions concerning the Wieland Saga’, *Folklore* lxix.3 (1958): 193–95; ‘A Witch Post from Scarborough’, *Man* 58 (1958): 160b–61; ‘The Cure of Elf-disease in Animals’, *Journal of the History of Medicine* xv (1960): 282–91; ‘Animal Treatment in Eighteenth-Century Scotland’, *Scottish Studies* 4 (1960): 134–49. After this, Davidson is not heard from anymore.

There is also an earlier book-length study of Scottish witchcraft to be noted: *Rowan Tree and Red Thread: A Scottish Witchcraft Miscellany of Tales & Legends & Ballads; Together with a Description of the Witches’ Rites & Ceremonies* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1949). Davidson seems to have been a researcher in materials science, specifically metallurgy.

Further bibliographical references are welcomed as well as any biographical information; please email to Stephen Miller at chiollagh@gmail.com

THE FLITTING BOGGART

Ceri Houlbrook

The tale of the flitting boggart is a common one. A folkloric creature torments a family with its pranks, forcing them to quit their home. They pack up their belongings but often don't make it as far as the door before they discover the boggart has decided to come with them. In 1829 John Roby, purportedly recounting the words of Thomas Crofton Croker, wrote of this story in relation to a farmer named George Cheetham, of Boggart Hole Clough, Manchester. He makes it as far as out-the-door and down-the-road.

'Things could not long continue in this fashion; the farmer and his good dame resolved to leave a place where they could no longer expect rest or comfort; and George Cheetham was actually following with his wife and family the last load of furniture when they were met by a neighbouring farmer named John Marshall.

"Well, Georgey, and soa you're leaving th' owd house at last?" said Marshall.

"Heigh, Johnny, ma lad, I'm in a manner forced to't, thou sees", replied the other: "for that wearyfu' Boggart torments us soa, we can neither rest neet nor day for 't. It seems loike to have a malice again't young ans, – an' it ommost kills my poor dame here at thoughts on't, and soa thou sees we're forc'd to flit like".

He had got thus far in his complaint, when, behold, a shrill voice from a deep upright churn, the topmost utensil on the cart, called out – "Ay, ay, neighbour, we're flitting, you see".

"'Od rot thee!" exclaimed George: "if I'd known thou'd been flitting too I wadn't ha' stirred a peg. Nay, nay, – it's no use, Mally", he continued, turning to his wife. "We may as weel turn back again to th' owd house as be tormented in another not so convenient".

They did return; but the Boggart, having from the occurrence ascertained the insecurity of his tenure, become less outrageous, and was never more guilty of disturbing, in any extraordinary degree, the quiet of the family' (*Traditions of Lancashire*, 1829).

Similarly unfortunate hauntees, followed by the flitting boggart, feature in tales from locations as varied as Yorkshire and Italy, but I came

across one recently who made it a little further than down-the-road. In Susan Price's *Ladybird Book of Ghostly Tales*, she recounts the story of 'Russell's bogle', who torments farmer Jim. Jim makes it out of the door and down the road; in fact, he emigrates all the way to Montreal to be rid of the mischievous bogle – only to find the creature waiting there for him. It turns out that the modern-day boggart has become something of a globe-trotter.

LOVE LOCKS IN MEMORIAM?

Rosalind Johnson

A footbridge over Churchill Way, Salisbury's inner ring road, was the scene of a tragedy a few years ago when a young man fell to his death. Occasionally floral tributes appear fastened to the railings. What appears to be a more permanent memorial are about seven padlocks fastened to the railings on the opposite site of the bridge from where the floral tributes usually appear. They are quite rusted, so have clearly been there for a while. It is possible that they have been left by romantic couples, but such love locks usually have the couple's names written or inscribed on them, and these locks have none. One wonders what happened to the keys, were they thrown onto the road below?

TOOTH FAIRY

Rosalind Johnson

Some ten years I was explaining to my son that it was traditional for the tooth fairy to leave a silver coin in exchange for each tooth, and therefore a 50p coin was a generous exchange. It now seems that the tooth fairy leaves rather more, and inflation may make the concept of a silver coin redundant. The *Salisbury Journal*' columnist Martin Field (12 April 2018, p. 57) writes that he has been for many years under the impression that tooth fairies (he uses the plural) paid £1 per tooth, but current rates vary from a 'miserly' 50p up to £2. He calls for a uniform rate to be established.

THROUGH A KEYHOLE

Jacqueline Simpson

Some years ago one of my Scandinavian colleagues, Tommy Kuusela, told me that there was a belief among Swedish children and teenagers that if you went alone to seven (or nine?) churches that were closed, and bent down to whistle through the keyhole and then look through it, in the last church you would see the devil. Youngsters would dare one another to do this. He asked me if there was any similar belief in Britain, and I said I hadn't heard of any. However, I've now come across the following item from Mabel Peacock's unpublished collection of Lincolnshire material deposited with the Folklore Society and now printed in Gillian Bennett's *The 100 Best British Ghost Stories* (2012) p.172:

'The old court house, Kirton-in-Lindsey, was said to be haunted by the ghost of a lady who burst a blood vessel and died suddenly at a dance once held there. An old gentleman told me in 1907 that when he was a boy some sixty years previously, he and his companions had a theory that if you put pins into the keyhole of the entrance door, and then ran round the building nine times, and afterwards peeped through the keyhole, you would see the ghost of the lady'.

ROLLING APPARITION

Jacqueline Simpson

In reply to J. B. Smith's enquiry about the rolling seckyban of Galloway (*FLS News* 81), I would draw attention to its appearance in fiction, in a short story 'The White Sack' by A. N. L. Munby in his collection *The Alabaster Hand* (1949), pp. 75–84 in the paperback edition by Four Square. The story is set on Skye, and the narrator tells of becoming aware of a column of mist which appears to be following him across the boggy terrain between the shore and the mountains, eventually chasing and tripping him: 'I got the impression of being enveloped in some coarse damp fabric, and my face was pressed into the soft damp ground. The friend who rescues him fetches 'a recent volume of the publications of the Scottish Folklore Society' with legends and stories collected by 'that great antiquary John

Francis Campbell if Islay, where he reads: 'The White Sack used to roll itself round men's feet, bringing them down, then, getting on top of them, it would flatten them out and murder them'.

FAMILY SAYINGS

(1) Jacqueline Simpson

Many families have sayings which are used in recurrent situations, rather in the manner of proverbs, but are not found in standard collections of proverbs. It may be of interest to print some of them here. For example, my mother used to say to me when she gave me shopping to carry as a teenager, 'Donkeys go better when laden'; this was in the 1940s, but a friend of mine who is in his early twenties told me recently that his own mother uses it to him in exactly the same way.

My father had two 'riddles', of which the first was based on accurate observation of birds: 'How can you tell the difference between a rook and a crow?' – 'If you see one rook on its own it's a crow, but if you see a lot of crows together they are rooks'. But the answer to his second 'riddle' is a joke, created by rapidly slurring the words together: 'How can you tell the difference between a weasel and a stoat?' – 'Oh a weasel is so easily distinguished, while a stoat is totally different'.

(2) Heather Bell

In my family we would say 'The mongoose is dead' if someone announced as fresh news something which was in fact past its shelf date; this had arisen because when I was in England, but my parents in India, my letters to them always contained enquiries about a pet mongoose, until one sad day the message came ...

If it was raining off and on, we said 'The dhobi [washer-man] is beating his wife', because we believed he did if she didn't take in the drying wash in time.

(3) Jacqueline Simpson

In French one says, if there is a short rain shower followed by sun, *Le diable bat sa femme et marie sa fille*, 'The Devil is beating his wife and celebrating his daughter's wedding'.

(4) Margaret Greenwood

If it was getting very late for something, my mother would exclaim in dismay ‘Good God, look at the time! Beds not made, pots not emptied, whores not dressed, and Cossacks in the courtyard!’.

If someone lazily asks one to do something (e.g. make tea), one replies ‘Do it yourself. You’ve got a bone in your arm, haven’t you?’.

(5) Jacqueline Simpson

But a phrase when *refusing* to do something is: ‘I can’t do that, I’ve got a bone in my leg’.

**CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS
DISAPPEARING**

Gordon Ridgewell

The Times of 15 December 2017 (p. 4) reported that a recent survey had shown that a third of the people interviewed said they no longer put out stockings for Father Christmas to fill, and no longer listened to the Queen’s Speech; however, putting up Christmas trees and having turkey dinners remain popular.

GHOSTLY VOICES

Gordon Ridgewell

The procedures and expectations of current ghost-hunters are well illustrated by an account in *The Hertfordshire Mercury* of 4 January 2018 (p. 8) of the experiences of the Cambridgeshire Ghost Hunters when visiting the ruins of ‘Cold Christmas’ Church, i.e. the church of St Mary

and All Saints in Old Church Lane at Ware (demolished in 1853), which has allegedly been ‘a hotbed for ghost sightings for decades’. It was an unusually cold night. The watchers saw and photographed floating ‘orb’ lights and recorded ‘strange hammering sounds’ followed by an eerie voice growling ‘let me out’. A stone was also thrown at them, from a direction where there was nobody around. The nickname ‘Cold Christmas church’ is said to refer to an occasion in the 1700s when many local children died during an exceptionally cold winter. Modern ghost-hunters also claim that the churchyard contains unmarked graves of children murdered by witches during satanic rites.

SOLSTICE CELEBRATIONS

Gordon Ridgewell

The Times of 22 December 2017 (p. 9) had a photo of a group of pagans in frivolous costumes celebrating the winter solstice at sunrise on Painswick Beacon in Gloucestershire, and another on 23 December of Druids and pagans doing so at Stonehenge, surrounded by an appreciative crowd. It is clearly a happy, cheerful event rather than the solemn ceremony of older Druidic groups, and the leaders are dressed in red, not white.

Editorial comment

Being a pedant, I feel bound to point out that the alignment of Stonehenge is to midwinter sunset, not sunrise.

EDITORIAL APPEAL

Jacqueline Simpson

It is becoming increasingly difficult to gather enough material to fill the 16 pages of *FLS News* – indeed it is only through the contributions of a mere half dozen of faithful and energetic supporters that this can be done, and our regular readers will easily know what their names are! I presume the reason for this situation is that nowadays people turn more instinctively to the internet than to a printed medium to record their discoveries or opinions. However, I also know that many members of the FLS say they much enjoy reading *FLS News*, so I appeal to you all to keep the contributions rolling in.

LOCH NESS MONSTER

Gordon Ridgewell

An article by Paul Simons in *The Times* of 19 December 2017 (p. 61) notes that the Loch Ness Monster seems to have been unusually active lately, eight sightings having been reported in 2017 to Gary Campbell, an enthusiast who keeps records of such things. Simons explains that persistent strong winds sometimes can cause the water to pile up at one end of the loch, where it rolls to and fro and sometimes drags up old logs and other debris from the depths, so that they may look like living creatures swimming. More mysterious was a phenomenon in March 1761, when the water ‘piled up like a mountain’ with ‘a very uncommon hollow sound’. This, he suggests, could have been caused by seismic activity, for there was an earthquake in Portugal on that date, and the loch lies over a fault zone.

IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE

Jeremy Harte

When Charles II was marching south with his Scottish army to what would prove to be defeat at the Battle of Worcester, he drank from Collinson’s Well at Hutton-in-the-Forest in Cumberland (Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland* (1794) 1 p. 512). So says tradition, and it may be true: kings, like the rest of us, have to drink somewhere, and Charles was at the head of a Presbyterian force who would probably have disapproved of him taking anything stronger than water. However, it seems more than coincidence that when Charles I was marching to what would prove to be his defeat at the Battle of Naseby, tradition says that he watered his horse from King Charles’ Well at Tur Langton in Leicestershire (James Rattue in *Leics Arch. & Hist. Soc.* 67 (1993) p. 69). Since this spring appears in earlier records as Carles Trough, it looks as if folk-etymology has improved the name and provided a story to go with it. Meanwhile, Cromwell and his men are remembered as having drunk from a well in a cottage garden at Long Marston on their way to victory at Marston Moor (Parkinson, *Yorkshire Legends* (1888–9) p. 28). This was before his taking of Farleigh Castle, when he stopped in Conkwell at the house called Cromwell’s Rest

and watered his horse at the wishing well (Katy Jordan, *Haunted Landscape* (2000) p. 95). A motif is starting to take shape. Once a great battle was fought, and just before it the king or other leader drank from a well, which you may still see today.

I’m not sure if we should include the literary passage from canto VI stanza 19 of *Marmion* (1808) in which Scott describes the English army, on their way to Flodden Field, drinking from St. Helen’s Well on the south bank of the Tweed – though the tradition was recorded locally some years later (S.A. Fyler in *Berwks. Nat. Club* 5 (1863–8) p. 347). Evidence is more plentiful for the story that Richard III drank from King Richard’s Well at Husbands Bosworth before the battle nearby. The site was much visited, and in 1813 a wellhead was erected by Lord Wentworth with a Latin inscription. James Rattue gives details, there’s an engraving copied in Roy Palmer’s *Folklore of Leicestershire* (1985) p. 15, and a ghost has been photographed on site (*Fortean Times* 194 (2005) p. 80). But for all that, the tradition is spurious: the fighting took place somewhere else entirely, as has been shown by battlefield archaeology (Richard Morris, *Time’s Anvil* (2012) p. 308).

Going back in time, we learn that Danes’ Well was the spring from which the Danish army quenched their thirst before the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 (Whelan & Taylor, *Yorkshire Holy Wells* (1989) p. 73). Some verses written in 1836 tell the story of how St. John’s Well at Harpham in the East Riding rose where St. John of Beverley struck the ground with his staff, in order to refresh the thirsty army of Athelstan on his way to engage the Danes at Brunanburh (Smith, *Ancient Springs of the East Riding* (1923) pp. 123–9). Admittedly St. John had been dead for two centuries when the battle took place, but that only adds to the quality of the miracle. About the time that Athelstan’s grandfather Alfred was gathering his army in preparation for the Battle of Edington, they were exhausted by fighting the Danes until the king prayed for water, when up rose the six springs in Six Wells Bottom west of Stourton (Olivier & Edwards, *Moonrakings* (1932) p. 82). When

Edmund Bogg was making his topographical tours in Yorkshire, he stopped at Penwell Farm near Northallerton and was shown Penda's Well, where the king and his army quenched their thirst before the Battle of Winwæd (*Old Kingdom of Elmet* (1902) p. 137).

That must surely be a learned fabrication, for who apart from antiquarians has ever heard of Winwæd? In any case, we have passed several centuries beyond any era when one might plausibly claim that traditions preserved an actual memory of events. These are stories from that common genre, the wars of former times. Several others have a similar character although they depart from the more standardised formula in which a king drinks before a battle. There is, for instance, the Hic Bibi Well near Standish in Lancashire, 'said to have been thus named during the Civil Wars, when soldiers were searching for water, which was found here: the officer, who was something of a pedant, exclaiming, as he drank, "Hic bibi!"' (Taylor, *Crosses and Holy Wells of Lancashire* (1906) p. 45).

The Wars of the Roses have inspired three more stories. The Battle of Hedgeley Moor in 1464 saw the death of Ralph Percy, son of the Earl of Northumberland, afterwards commemorated by a standing cross; in 1809 tradition said that 'a spring of water, that issues not far from the Cross, is still called Percy's Well, at which this Chieftain is said to have drunk in the heat of the battle' (Binnall & Dodds, *Soc. Antiq. Newcastle* 4th ser 10 (1942–6) pp. 32–3). At Aberford in the West Riding they used to point out the Duke of Buckingham's Well where the Duke, fleeing from the slaughter of Towton Field, fell sick of the flux until locals helpfully advised him of the stringent properties of the well, so that he drank from it, was cured, and carried on fleeing (Bogg, *Old Kingdom* p164). At Elston in Nottinghamshire, Willow Rundle spring at Elston (Notts) owes its existence to events after the battle of East Stoke in 1487, when a soldier who had been mortally wounded appealed to a brother in arms for water, and told the comrade that if his soul went to Heaven, on the spot where he had lain a spring of water would arise and flow for ever (Brown, *History of Nottinghamshire* (1891) p. 96).

An early nineteenth-century sketch of St. Chad's Well, near the future St. Pancras Station, is captioned 'on this spot was fought a battle between Canute and Edmund Ironside; an old monkish legend says that this water sprung at y^e foot of Edmund at y^e moment of victory' (Chesca Potter, *Source* 1st ser 1 (1985) p. 20). The tradition owes much to the nearby place-name of Battle Bridge, now Kings Cross, which was an irregular development from the medieval *Bradefordebrigge*, so it is unlikely to have featured in anything written by real, historical monks. On the other hand Malcolm's Well at Alnwick is so called because Malcolm III 'was here mortally wounded near a certain spring, leaving his name to it for ever', and this tradition would be early if, as stated, it is found in the *Chronicle of Alnwick Abbey* (Binnall & Dodds, *Soc. Antiq. Newcastle* 4th ser 9 (1941–2) p. 302).

In the last resort it doesn't matter whether these traditions are made up to explain a place-name, or represent plausible local memories of a historic incident, or even if they were to appear in contemporary records. There's nothing about them contrary to common sense – everyone needs to drink sooner or later, and I am assured by re-enactors that nothing dehydrates you more than swinging around several pounds of metal all day while covered by armour. And yet they are visibly tale-types rather than history. A story which is neither fictitious nor supernatural can still have all the qualities of a local legend. I am sure there are many places where an animal's behaviour did in fact reveal the healing qualities of a spring, or a girl was saved when leaping from a height by the billowing out of her skirts, or two pious ladies teamed up to build a church: just as there have been other places where these stories were told without any chance of them being true. But we seem to lack a word to describe these narratives which, regardless of their truth content, are told to fulfil some undefined mythopoetic urge.

FIRES OF STONES

J. B. Smith

'Down in the Rhinns when anybody takes a farm or a house over anybody's head, it is the custom

to put a stone fire in every fire-place in the house, and to put a spell on it, to prevent the incomer from doing any good in it.

When Alick McGill left Craigslove, or rather when the laird put him out for voting the wrong way in the election, and left the farm to an Ayrshire man, he got a kind of uncanny woman they ca't Flora Mac-an-Toar to put a spell on the land to prevent the Ayrshireman thriving.

Accordingly they got twa-three sacks filled with sand, and Flora and another wise woman took sowing-clouts and sowed the sand over every field of the farm by moonlight, at the same time praying – it is said, to the devil – that the new tenant might never get a crop till that night's sowing sprouted.

When that was done they carefully biggit ['built'] a fire on every hearth in the house, beginning with a layer of thick tangle stalks near the ground – or the grate in the parlour end, – then a good layer of broken bottles or flints; then a layer of little stones, and above them a layer of big stones; heaping them right up into the lum, and then jawing ['flinging'] a bucketful of sand

over each; praying as they finished them that the Ayrshireman might never prosper till these fires burned. The doors were then barred on the inside, and they went out by the window, wishing all kinds of bad luck to whoever would open these doors from the outside; it being believed that the first body that passed from without over the threshold, would die before the next new moon. [p. 110]

The consequence was that the new tenant went all to the bad, and had to beg the laird to take the farm off his hands, and when he left it he of course lost all the money he had spent on it in improvements. The next tenant not being under the curse put on the farm, throve well enough, and made money in it.'

Source: 'Saxon', *Galloway Gossip Sixty Years Ago*, Choppington, Northumberland: Robert Trotter, 1877, pp. 109-10. See also Fionnuala Williams, 'A Fire of Stones Curse', *Folk Life*, 35 (1996-97), pp. 63-73, and 'A Fire of Stones Curse Rekindled', *Folk Life*, 42 (2003-04), pp. 113-20.

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