

Costume in Legend And Tradition

The Fourteenth Legendary Weekend of The Folklore Society

Blackburn Museum, BB1 7AJ

Saturday 31 August and Sunday 1 September 2019



Programme

Saturday 1st September

9.30 Registration and coffee

First session

10.00 Helen Frisby, 'Widow's weeds and the "Woman Problem": Victorian mourning costume'

10.30 David Hopkin, 'The rich and the poor: lacemakers' sung thoughts about lace consumers'

11.00 Coffee at conference

Second session

11.30 Ernie Warner, 'Why would anybody dress up as a horse?'

12.00 Ulkar Yusifova, 'Clothing in Azerbaijani folk plays and its pre-Islamic sources' (to be delivered by proxy)

12.30 Chloe Metcalfe, 'Legends of ancient roots, anti-establishmentism, and criminality: the costumes of contemporary border morris dancers'

13.00 Break for lunch

Third session

14.30 Doc Rowe (Custom and costume)

15.00 Diana Coles, 'A quick look under the bonnet'

15.30 Fionnuala Carson Williams "'Yellow silk on Judy...": cloth and clothes in proverbs in Ireland'

16.00 Tea at conference

Fourth session

17.00 Mark Lewis 'The power of priestly vestments'

17.30 Skye McAlpine Walker 'How to dress a wizard: costume in the depiction of magical practitioners from the Middle Ages to the 20th century'

Sunday 2nd September

9.30 Coffee

First session

10.00 Jeremy Harte, 'Mark my footsteps: the trace of shoes in local legend'

10.30 Richard Jenkins, 'Old clothes, new clothes, no clothes'

11.00 Coffee at conference

Second session

11.30 Mark Valentine, 'A Fashion in Shrouds: What Do Ghosts Wear?'

12.00 Sophia Kingshill, 'Celt, kilt, cult: variations on tribal identity'

12.30 Richard Croasdale will give us a gallery tour, 'Cotton Town'. Richard maintains the looms for Blackburn Museum and has tales to tell...

13.30 Lunch

Abstracts

Helen Frisby, ‘Widow’s weeds and the “Woman Problem”’: Victorian mourning costume’

Although mourning costume has been worn over centuries and throughout the world, it was in Victorian Britain that the custom reached its apogee. For the respectable upper- or middle-class widow, a minimum of twelve months’ full mourning for a husband followed by six months’ so-called half-mourning was customary. Many never wore colours again, and lived secluded lives thereafter. Most intriguingly of all perhaps, it was overwhelmingly *other women* who policed a widow’s dress and general behaviour. In this talk I will suggest that, within the particular demographic context of late nineteenth century Britain, van Gennep’s notion of *rites de passage* and Robert Hertz’s distinction between ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ phases of ritual may help explain the peculiarly gendered nature of Victorian mourning. This talk will include a chance to handle examples of Victorian mourning jewellery – and even a mourning pin – from the speaker’s own personal collection.

Jeremy Harte, ‘Mark my footsteps: the trace of shoes in local legend’

Shoes have left their mark in British folklore. Tossed over telegraph wires or laboriously traced on the lead of church roofs, they’re a sign you were there. The footprints of kings, saints and giants are ever-present reminders that noble and magical people once walked amongst us. Shoes can be a sign of pride (rings on her fingers and bells on her toes) or contempt (excise meant wooden shoes): sometimes both, as the clatter of cheap working-class footwear turn into clog-dancing. Shoemakers, normally a mild breed, celebrated the feast of St. Crispin with legends of the heroic things done by practitioners of the Gentle Craft. But good shoes could easily turn into bad. Reversing them was the simplest form of magic, and an easy way for robbers and rebels to deceive their enemies. That’s why the shoes of powerful people and victims needed to be hidden secretly away. The sound of footsteps is the most common of haunting; midwinter snow may be scorched by the Devil’s hoofprints. Dying with your boots on might be admired in some quarters, but most of us would prefer to keep shoes off the table and in their proper, traditional place.

David Hopkin, ‘The rich and the poor: lacemakers’ sung thoughts about lace consumers’

Lace is a more decorative than functional textile; its use indicates that one’s dress is not everyday wear but communicative display. Lace is associated with the major life-cycle rituals – baptism, first communion, marriage and even funerals – as well as with costume designed to assert a social or regional identity. However, the lacemakers who produced handmade lace seldom wore lace themselves. Lacemakers were amongst

the poorest members of the working population, but lace was a luxury product, associated with royalty, aristocracy, the Church and the rich. It was primarily an export product, and there were multiple intermediaries between the lacemaker and the lace consumer. There were multiple attempts over the course of the nineteenth century, to create a direct – and one might even say a moral – relationship between producers and consumers. But on the whole lacemakers imagined, rather than knew, who bought their merchandise and how they used it. Lacemakers have left us very few written documents in which they discuss their lives, but there is another source that gives us access to their thoughts and hopes, as well as their traditions: their songs. Lacemakers sang while they worked, and in this corpus of shared songs they reflected on the differences that separated ‘rich and poor’ both in this life and in the next. In this paper I will consider, in particular, the song repertoire of Flemish lacemakers which offers a workers’ alternative to Catholic teaching on the value of poverty.

Richard Jenkins, ‘Old clothes, new clothes, no clothes’

One of the things that strikes me about the scholarly approach to folk tales - and I must admit in advance that this would not be my Mastermind topic - is how little attention seems to be paid to what the people in the stories are wearing. This is a massive generalisation to which many exceptions could, no doubt be found, but I am going to go with it: the world of tale types, motifs, and so on, does not have much to say about costume. Why? And what, if anything, might this tell us about folklore scholarship?

Sophia Kingshill, ‘Celt, kilt, cult: variations on tribal identity’

National costume isn’t usually what people actually *wear*. An exception is the kilt, a garment invented in the eighteenth century, which has flourished since the 1820s and in the last couple of decades, has become phenomenally popular. Factors of romantic nostalgia, class mobility, and nationalism play a part in the story, which I’ll try to follow with the help of fashion theory and a very limited amount of field research.

Mark Lewis ‘The power of priestly vestments’

Since the earliest days of the Christian Church, liturgical vestments have been worn by priests for the celebration of the Mass and other in other devotional contexts. These sacred garments have evolved over time, acquiring many symbolic meanings and have been credited with extraordinary supernatural powers. Furthermore, at different times they have been both revered and loathed in the developing church. This paper explores the origins and developing history of clerical dress and

vestments, including their condemnation before and during the Reformation as frivolous and superstitious accessories, fostering an abuse of power and authority. The lay and clerical attitudes and customs surrounding clerical apparel that still persist in many denominations, are also explored.

Chloe Metcalfe, 'Legends of ancient roots, anti-establishmentism, and criminality: the costumes of contemporary border morris dancers'

Drawing upon interview data with 60 dancers conducted between 2015 and 2016, this paper explores how the costumes of revival border teams help to inspire the creative re-imagining of history. Stories are woven around the rag jackets worn by many teams, underpinning the notion that this dance form must be an ancient form of morris, because it looks like it should be. In addition the dark colours selected by many contemporary teams inspire myths of a struggling working-class identity. The use of facial disguise is linked to poaching and/or aggravated begging rather than the influence of nineteenth century minstrelsy and carnival. This paper contextualises these myths by considering the place of folk dance within an English context. I consider why many middle class participants are attracted to engaging with a dance form which is conceptualised as being 'degenerate'. I suggest that these stories enable a greater number of individuals to engage with an overtly folkloric dance form. These border morris stories, inspired by the costumes of modern teams, help to establish a contemporary folk dance form which is distinct from a victorianised merrie England of maypoles, vicars, and village fêtes. I draw into the discussion the idea of an alternative Englishness which through focusing on working-class identity allows for an involvement in tradition which sidesteps the problematic, and for many middle-class liberals, distasteful, associations of Englishness with colonialism, empire, and the monarchy.

Mark Valentine, 'A fashion in shrouds: what do ghosts wear?'

Sometimes they just wear their bones, sometimes their shrouds, sometimes the sort of clothes they would have worn when they were alive. What does the apparel seen in popular images of ghosts tell us about the nature of the spectres, their witnesses and their creators, or recorders? I'll explore the outward appearance of ghosts in some traditional tales and supernatural fiction and explores what this may tell us about the inner meaning and social or cultural context of these spirits. I'll also look at a few of the more outré examples to appreciate why they differ. The talk draws mostly on classic literary ghost stories as influenced by, and in turn influencing, common conceptions of ghostly figures.

Skye McAlpine Walker ‘How to dress a wizard: costume in the depiction of magical practitioners from the Middle Ages to the 20th century’

Modern popular culture recognises the archetypal costume of the wizard: a long robe, often decorated with stars, and a pointy hat. The combination of these three elements, in addition to the wearer’s gender and facial hair, is enough to establish their profession in the eyes of a Western audience. But where did this signature look originate? Can we trace its elements back to real practicing magicians of the middle ages and early modern period and/or their fictional counterparts? This paper will explore the history and development of the wizard’s garb in occult practice and the popular imagination.

Ernie Warner, ‘Why would anybody dress up as a horse?’

Since ancient times, people have ascribed different powers and properties to birds and animals. Owls have wisdom, wolves have ferocity, oxen have patience and assiduity, and eagles have royal dignity. Shamans have dressed as particular animals in order to assume the properties of that animal for the purpose of magical rituals, while hunters have donned animal skins as a means of camouflage. In our own folklore, there are many traditional activities which involve some kind of animal figure. There are calendar customs such as the Whittlesea straw bear and the Padstow ‘obby ‘oss, and many morris sides parade an animal effigy to represent their origins. This talk covers all of these topics, but concentrates on British customs.

Fionnuala Carson Williams “‘Yellow silk on Judy...’”: cloth and clothes in proverbs in Ireland’

Forming the core of my paper will be proverbs from oral tradition in Ireland which refer to cloth and clothes. Most of them are in the Schools’ Collection which is part of the National Folklore Collection held in University College Dublin, now available in its entirety online at www.duchas.ie. Only certain garments and certain materials are mentioned in the proverbs. I will review these and comment on why this might be. I will also compare them with some non-European proverbs concerning cloth and clothes and discuss similarities and differences. While proverbs with such references are not numerous, they bolster the record of material traditional life and lay bare attitudes running through it. Many of them stretch back a long way and some of them were, and still are, often used.