



Folklore for All

One-day Online Conference of
The Folklore Society
Saturday 17 September 2022, 09:00-17:00



Programme

- 09:00 Zoom meeting opens
- 09:45 Welcome
- 10:00-11:30 **Folklore Groups: Politics, Community Events and Role Play**
- 10:00 **Robert McDowall:** 'Folklore and Political Orthodoxy—Are they Mutual Influences?'
- 10:30 **Anna Milon:** 'Stories We Tell Together: Live Action Role Play as a Site of Reimagining Folklore.'
- 11:00 **Lucy Hornberger:** 'The Dunmow Flicht 2022'
- 11:30 Break
- 12:00-13:00 **Seasonal Events and Fairy Traditions:**
- 12:00 **Doc Rowe:** "'We'll Call Once More Unto Your House...'"
- 12:30 **Daniela Simina:** 'Reclamation of Fairy Folklore and Traditions in Post-Communist Romania.'
- 13:00-14:00 Break
- 14:00-15:30 **Elf-Shots, Magical Darts, and Wellington's Cone**
- 14:00 **Simon Young:** 'Elf-Shots, Distribution and the Roud Question.'
- 14:30 **James Andrew Whitaker:** 'Amazonian Magical Darts.'
- 15:00 **Joel Conn:** 'The Joke of Wellington: A Statue, a Traffic Cone, and a Shifting Folk Practice in Glasgow's City Centre.'
- 15:30-16:00 Break
- 16:00-17:00 **Folklore for All**
- 16:00 **Shabnam Ahsan:** 'Whose Folklore is it Anyway? Diversity in the "English" Fairy Tales of Andrew Lang, Ruth Manning-Sanders and Radiya Hafiza.'
- 16:30 **Richard Jenkins:** 'Looking for a Common Thread: Summing Up'
- 17:00 Conference closes

ABSTRACTS

Shabnam Ahsan (University of Hertfordshire)

Whose Folklore Is It Anyway? Diversity in the ‘English’ fairy tales of Andrew Lang, Ruth Manning-Sanders and Radiya Hafiza

Fairy tales are often seen as a marker of national and cultural identity, yet the relationship of English identity to ‘English’ fairy tales is not always clear-cut. Englishness is a disputed term often associated with Anglo-Saxon whiteness, but so-called English folk and fairy tales have always been—and continue to be—diverse.

In this paper I will examine how the English fairy tale has evolved from the nineteenth century to the present, and how our understanding of ‘English’ and ‘fairy tale’ have also evolved. Looking at the coloured Fairy Books of Andrew Lang, the gypsy tales of Ruth Manning-Sanders, and Radiya Hafiz’s *Rumaysa*, a retelling of *Rapunzel* with a Muslim protagonist, I will look at how an idea of Englishness is constructed or subverted through the identities of the collectors or authors of these tales; through the content of the tales themselves; and through the cultural identities of readers.

***Biographical note:** Shabnam Ahsan (she/her) is a postgraduate researcher in English Literature at the University of Hertfordshire. She is currently writing her PhD thesis on postcolonialism and British identity in children’s fairy tales from 1880 to the present. Her research interests include colonialism and Empire, children’s literature, folk and fairy tales, and national identity.*

Joel Conn (Independent Researcher)

The Joke of Wellington: A Statue, a Traffic Cone, and a Shifting Folk Practice in Glasgow’s City Centre

Running from Glasgow’s mediaeval High Street into the later ‘Merchant City,’ Ingram Street concludes with the 1778 townhouse of ‘Tobacco Lord’ William Cunninghame—now occupied by the city’s Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA). Sitting on top of a tall plinth in front of GoMA is a fine 1844 equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington. Sitting top of that, most days since the 1990s, is a traffic cone on Wellington’s head. At first bemoaned by the council as an act of vandalism, it is now adopted as an emblem of the city, and it is featured on everything from tourist tat to public bicycles to official announcements during COP26.

This paper will examine the folk practice and its adaptations, its origin tales, and its commercialisation, all to consider how the (supposed) act of a single prankster became a wider folk practice and was then co-opted by officialdom.

Biographical note: Joel Conn is a Scottish solicitor, practising in commercial litigation in Glasgow's city centre. Interested in contemporary legend for over 20 years, he finds time between work and his family to research folklore principally with a Scottish and/or legal aspect.

Lucy Hornberger (University of Hertfordshire)

The Dunmow Flitch 2022

The Dunmow Flitch Trials involve married couples attempting to convince a mock judge and jury that they are happily married and have never, in the past year and a day, spoken a cross word to each other nor wished to be un-wed. Successful claimants are awarded a flitch of bacon. The Trials are believed to have a 900-year history, were mentioned by Chaucer, and continue to be both a living tradition and an important aspect of the civic identity of the Essex market town of Great Dunmow.

Performed, under normal circumstances, every four years in a leap year, Covid cancellations created a six-year gap between the previous Flitch Trials and the 2022 event, thus the organising committee was particularly keen to put on a great show. I was initially an interested bystander but ended up being co-opted on to the Flitch Committee a couple of weeks before the event—thus I am well placed to tell the story of this long-lived tradition and the extremely entertaining and successful Dunmow Flitch Trials of 2022.

Biographical Note: Lucy Hornberger is an MA student on the Hertfordshire University Folklore Studies programme. She is particularly interested in traditional festivals, contemporary grave decoration and Japanese folklore.

Richard Jenkins

'Looking for a Common Thread: Summing Up'

Biographical Note: Prof. Richard Jenkins, Trustee and Hon. Treasurer of The Folklore Society, and unfolkussed folklorist. His book *Black Magic and Bogeymen* won *The Katharine Briggs Award* in 2015

Robert McDowall

Folklore and Political Orthodoxy: -- Are they Mutual Influences?

This paper will provide a summary of the conclusions from an historical examination of the political orthodoxy of folklore from the middle of the nineteenth century when the term

'folklore' was first used and understood to the present day. The article selectively draws on different themes and geographies to illustrate examination of the themes of political orthodoxy and the conclusions emerging from that examination.

Biographical Note: *Robert McDowall is a former President of the Folklore Society (2011-2014)*

Anna Milon

Stories We Tell Together: Live Action Role Play as a Site of Reimagining Folklore

In her book *Uprooted* (2016) Nina Lyon laments the lack of participation in folk drama she observed in British communities: people are more comfortable sitting on the side-lines, taking photographs than taking part in narratives that have implied participation for centuries. This lack of involvement, Lyon argues, petrifies the practice of folk drama and the stories told through it. One of the few bastions of both collaborative storytelling and total participation in Britain is Live Action Role Play (LARP). LARP is a creative pastime akin to the Bakhtinian carnival, where participants co-create a story without an external audience. LARP is also a site of folklore retelling, as the stories being told are heavily inspired by fantasy fiction, folk narratives, and world mythologies.

This paper argues that LARP is a radical site for reimagining folklore due to the non-hierarchical engagement of all participants, the rapid feedback between real-world concerns and the stories told within the play environment, and the non-teleological aim of telling stories for stories' sake that lies at the heart of the hobby.

Biographical Note: *Anna Milon is a third year PhD student at the University of Exeter, researching the Horned God as an environmental figure in fantasy fiction and Live Action Role Play. She holds a BA in English Literature from Royal Holloway, University of London, and an MA in Medieval Literatures and Languages from the University of York. Her project lies at the intersection of pagan studies, ecocriticism, and innovative approaches in fantasy and game studies. Anna has a cat, but then what scholar doesn't?*

Doc Rowe

'We'll Call Once More Unto Your House...'

Nearly sixty years of visits to the May Day celebrations in Padstow by Doc Rowe has resulted in a vast body of field work, of annual documentation using film, video, photography and oral testimony with local people. May Day itself is a hugely important and culturally significant tradition for this Cornish community and given the existence of this valuable testimony has inspired an innovative and dedicated project with them.

Padstow People's Autobiography is a 3-year project creating an interactive, public facing on-line repository using the contemporary genius of digital technology. This conference will have the

first public announcement of a project that was proposed pre-pandemic but is only now becoming active. At the heart of the project will be the collaboration with local people and mutual participation giving an 'autobiographical' voice to their accounts of families and attitudes of past and present. It is also hoped that this may create models for future work elsewhere, particularly in other communities and events that Rowe has documented for over half a century. It was a visit to Padstow in 1963 that initiated a life-long dedication to field work and collecting.

Doc Rowe has been documenting British Cultural tradition for nearly sixty years using video, film and photography as well as audio. His unique collection of contemporary and historical material on the traditional culture of the British Isles and Ireland is now housed in Whitby. The strength of the collection lies in its ongoing 'serial' fieldwork and regular contact with communities where individual events flourish - hence the material is at once wide-ranging, first hand and constantly updated.

A long-term council member of the Folklore Society and Oral History Society, he regularly broadcasts on aspects of folklore and tradition. As well as a number of one-man exhibitions, he has written a number of books and his photographs are regularly published.

Daniela Simina (Independent researcher)

Reclamation of Fairy Folklore and Traditions in Post-Communist Romania

Romanian fairy folklore, once extremely rich in lore and traditions, is gradually recovering from times and events that nearly brought it to extinction. The reclamation efforts began long ago, but they only started to come to fruition years after the fall of the Communist regime, in 1989.

This paper gives a brief overview of how fairy lore and practices changed due to assimilation into Christianity, their mutilation and survival through the policy of spiritual annihilation imposed by the Communist regime, and the efforts involved in reclaiming what was left.

Special consideration is given to the work of Romanian scholars who fled the country to escape persecution, and to that of foreign scholars who had an active interest in investigating and preserving Romanian fairy traditions and folklore. The last sections focus on the ongoing reclamation process and its importance and impact.

Biographical Note: Daniela Simina is native of Romania, the granddaughter of a Fairy Seer and medicine woman. Daniela grew up immersed in the lore and traditions of her native culture. Since very young she developed a vested interest in fairy folklore particularly. Growing up, Daniela explored European nature-based traditions of spiritual healing, and never stopped studying fairy lore from Romania and other cultures. Daniela teaches courses, classes, and workshops on various modalities of energetic healing, yoga, and esoteric subjects. Her quest is to empower people through education, inspire connecting with spiritual heritages, and be a catalyst for awakening to the enchantment of natural energies. She has published 'An Overview of Romanian Fairy Lore and Traditions,' https://www.academia.edu/49428132/An_Overview_of_Romanian_Fairy_Tradition_and_Lore.

and she is currently working on 'A Brief Comparative Study of Romanian and Irish Fairy Lore and Traditions Irish and Romanian Fairy Doctors throughout Time.'

James Andrew Whitaker (CNRS-LEEISA, French Guiana)

Amazonian Magical Darts

Across Amazonia, one often encounters notions of magical darts that are frequently associated with local shamanic theories of sorcery, pathogenesis, and magical warfare. Although hotly debated, notions of magical projectiles have also occasionally emerged in narratives about European folklore. Among the Makushi Amerindians of Guyana (Daly and Shepard 2019; Whitaker 2016), such phenomena emerge in at least three contexts: (1) conflicts between shamans, (2) underwater creatures in rivers and lakes, and (3) at least one astronomical constellation. Although occasionally mentioned by anthropologists (e.g., Chaumeil 2001, Harner 1972), magical darts in Amazonia have received minimal attention from folklorists yet may hold comparative interest. This article will examine concepts and practices related to such phenomena based on recent fieldwork in 2021 among Makushi people in Yupukari Village, Guyana.

Biographical Note: James Andrew Whitaker is a post-doctoral researcher at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS-LEEISA) in Cayenne, French Guiana, and an honorary research fellow at the University of St Andrews. His research examines Amazonian histories, ontologies, and folklore.

Simon Young

'Elf-Shots, Distribution and the Roud Question'

Elf-shot was the name traditionally given to fairy projectiles and these were, in folklore, particularly connected to prehistoric flint arrowheads. Was elf-shot, though, a part of fairy beliefs in all of Britain and Ireland? Should we associate them more with Celtic or Germanic traditions or are these divisions beside the point when it comes to fairylore?

Biographical Note: Simon Young is a British folklore historian, based in Italy. He has a longstanding interest in the study of the supernatural. He edited *Magical Folk* (2017) with Ceri Houlbrook, and has published dozens of peer-reviewed articles in *Folk Life*, *Folklore*, *Gramarye*, *Supernatural Studies*, *Tradition Today* and other journals. In 2022 he published *The Boggart* (Exeter University Press) and *Nail in the Skull and other Victorian Urban Legends* (University Press of Mississippi).