

Photographers, the English Calendar Custom and the Lure of the Wyrđ

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Centre for Contemporary Legend - Inaugural Symposium
Thursday 15th November 2018 9:30am - 5:00pm
Sheffield Hallam University
Collegiate Crescent
Main Bldg- D008

The city of Sheffield has an international reputation as a centre for folklore and legend scholarship that can be traced back to 1964. The academic study of Contemporary Legends began at the University of Sheffield in the 1982 with a series of conferences and publications in the Perspectives on Contemporary Legend series. We want to build upon these foundations working with friends and partners to reinvigorate folklore and legend studies in the 21st century. We aim to create an institutional base that can act as a focal point for all those working in the field of folklore and legend studies.

Our main areas of interest and research inquiry are:

- Story-telling: revisiting the power of the narrative
- Folklore on screen (TV and film)
- Hauntological media and the 'folk horror' revival
- Folklore in print (photography and photographic publication)
- Documenting folklore and traditions: amateur & professional; archivist & artist
- Contemporary Legend collection and research
- Supernatural folklore and extraordinary personal experiences
- Contemporary and historic moral panics
- Archives as a folklore research resource
- Intangible cultural heritage: engaging with communities to revisit concepts of English identity: individual and communal; local and national.

The purpose of this inaugural symposium is to generate discussion and debate about the study of folklore in higher education; what is needed, what is missing, and what you can offer. The core themes for the day's discussion will be:

- ARCHIVING, DOCUMENTING AND PHOTOGRAPHING FOLKLORE
- FOLKLORE STUDIES PAST AND PRESENT
- FOLK HORROR: FOLKLORE ON SCREEN



This Symposium has been produced by Dr David Clarke, Diane A. Rodgers and Andrew Robinson
Department of Media, Arts and Communication
Sheffield Hallam University



Panel 1

ARCHIVING, DOCUMENTING AND PHOTOGRAPHING FOLKLORE

Chair: Diane A. Rodgers

NEW WINE FROM OLD BOTTLES: RE-EVALUATING AND REINAUGURATING ARCHIVES OF ENGLISH FOLKLORE

John Widdowson

Emeritus Professor of English Language and Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield

It is no secret that archives in England, particularly those focusing on so-called “minority disciplines” such as folklore are shamefully undervalued and underfunded. In the present period of unprecedented social and cultural change in which our traditional heritage is of widespread public interest, quite apart from helping to fuel the tourism industry, and not to mention the fact that perceptions of national and regional identity are the subject of lively debate, it is scandalous that the resources of established archives dedicated to the fascinating range of English traditions remain largely inaccessible and unexploited. Even more disconcerting is the fact that these important archives are to be found only in a handful of institutions, which in many cases are not developing and extending their holdings by conducting major surveys designed to monitor continuity and change in our traditions both now and in the future.

The national societies dedicated to folklore studies have led the way in creating extensive archives as have the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield, among others. However, most of these major collections are by no means easy to access. Smaller collections also exist in other universities and institutes of higher and further education, as well as in regional archives and museums, but no comprehensive listing of these various resources yet exists. In addition, there are numerous private collections that could contribute substantially to a national debate or virtual hub of information on the full range of English tradition which can be made available for reference and research.

Proposals for new programmes in folklore studies at Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Hertfordshire offer a unique opportunity to exploit the archival resources already available and to inaugurate new archives, continuing the documentation of current and future developments in our English traditions to provide a permanent record of them in this period of our history for the curiosity and enlightenment of future generations.

J. D. A. Widdowson is the founder and former Director of the University's National Centre for English Cultural Tradition (NATCECT), Co-director of the Institute for Folklore Studies in Britain and Canada from 1986 to 2001, and was Curator of the University's Traditional Heritage Museum from its inception until its closure in 2012. He founded the Survey of English Tradition in 2000 and is the founder Director of the Centre for English Traditional Heritage (CETH). He was the editor of the journal Lore and Language, 1964-1999, and is the founder and co-editor of the e-journal Tradition Today, and editor of the newsletter trad.

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GAS FIRES, PLASTIC DUSTBINS AND ROBERT MAXWELL: THREATS TO UK CALENDAR CUSTOMS FROM THE DOMESTIC AND MUNDANE WORLD OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

Richard Bradley
Special Collections, Sheffield Hallam University

For a country of relatively small geographical area, the United Kingdom plays host to a remarkable amount of calendar customs, several of clearly ancient origin. Despite the fast pace of societal change and technological advance since the Second World War, a healthy amount of these annual rituals have survived into the increasingly baffling world of the early twenty-first century.

As living standards for the majority of the UK population have increased, the knock-on effect can be an unexpected detrimental impact or enforced change upon these customs practiced by our ancestors. A petition¹ to the UK Government Department of Culture Media and Sport set up by Keith Leech recommends ratifying the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, highlighting the fact that, by contrast, many of our European neighbours have enshrined their customs by registering them with UNESCO, 'placing an international obligation on local authorities to assist rather than hinder their continuation for future generations'.

This presentation explores examples (collected over the course of my folkloric research, both through consulting archives and by interviewing local people involved in the customs during my fieldwork) where almost imperceptible changes in domestic life have impinged on the practice of traditional customs in some way.

[1] <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/the-uk-government-ratifies-the-unesco-convention-on-intangible-cultural-heritage>

Since 2015, Richard Bradley has been researching, attending and documenting the folklore and calendar customs of his native Derbyshire (and the wider Peak District). His artwork based on local customs has been exhibited at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery in the annual Derbyshire Open (2015), and published in travel guides.

Richard has published articles on making characteristically British sound recordings in Best of British magazine (August 2016) and distinctive regional sounds for Derbyshire Life (July 2017), as well as contributing sound recordings to the British Library Sound Archive's 'UK Sound Map' (2011) and 'Sounds of Our Shores' (2015) projects. His recently published local history books Secret Chesterfield and Secret Matlock and Matlock Bath (Amberley Books, 2018) both feature chapters on local folklore, customs and legends. He has lectured on local folklore to local history societies across Derbyshire.

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PHOTOGRAPHY, CALENDAR CUSTOMS AND THE LURE OF THE WYRD

Andrew Robinson
Senior Lecturer in Photography, Sheffield Hallam University

The English Calendar Custom, almost always performative and often processional, offers the interested photographer ideal subject matter. The specificity of occurrence, the challenge of capturing the essence on the day lest having to wait a whole year for another opportunity, and the sense of urgency to record this slice of living history before it is either corrupted by external forces or dies out entirely, has long attracted photographers.

The range of photographic responses and motivations vary from person to person and across time. From those who seek to document and preserve for personal archive, public record or family album, to those employed by folklorists and collectors to illustrate their research and publications. Some may wish to capitalise on public fascination with bizarre expressions of Englishness through editorial sales while others look for a suitable vehicle through which to express their particular photographic vision. Whatever their motivation those photographing these events partake in a ritualised viewing, and their photographs take their place in the history of images of the same event across time.

This paper uses the authors own unpublished documentation 'Another England' undertaken in the 1990s as a starting point for an exploration of photography's relationship with the English Calendar Custom through the work of a range of practitioners including Sir Benjamin Stone, D.R. Rowe, Tony Ray Jones, Homer Sykes, Sara Hannant and others.

Andrew Robinson is a Photographer, Artist and Senior Lecturer in Photography at Sheffield Hallam University, England, teaching on BA (Hons) Photography and MA Digital Media Management. Andrew's photographic practice investigates notions of individual and communal identity through a visual anthropology of people, place and trace applying creative strategies that integrate still and moving imagery along with text, audio and found materials. Recent work explores the journey as a vehicle for both photographic production and a meditative experience of landscape. Andrew's work has been published and exhibited widely and he has undertaken numerous art commissions and residencies and in a range of contexts including art, education, health and social research.

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Panel 2

FOLKLORE STUDIES PAST AND PRESENT

Chair: David Clarke

CONTEMPORARY LEGEND STUDIES: LOOKING BACKWARDS, SIDEWAYS AND FORWARDS.

Paul Smith

Emeritus Professor, Department of Folklore, Memorial University, Newfoundland, Canada.

This presentation firstly looks at how the study of contemporary legends has developed since the 1980s - from an initial simple observation in a conversation into The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research with a newsletter, journal and an annual international seminar. Secondly, some of the theoretical issues which have been explored over the years, but not necessarily resolved, will be indicated - including the issues of definitions and what we embrace in the canon of narratives we study. If time allows I intend to open a discussion of the question "Where do we go from here?"

Paul Smith is an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Folklore at Memorial University in Newfoundland. He has written on a wide range of folklore topics including contemporary legends, traditional drama, folklore and media technology, and folklore and popular culture. In 1982 he instigated the first annual Perspectives on Contemporary Legend International Seminar

hosted by the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition at the University of Sheffield. He was one of the founder members of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research and editor of FOAFtale News and Contemporary Legend. In collaboration with Gillian Bennett, he edited the five-volume Perspectives on Contemporary Legend essay series (1984-1990), wrote Contemporary Legend: The First Five Years (1990), compiled Contemporary Legend: An Annotated Bibliography (1993), edited Contemporary Legend: A Reader (1996) and wrote Urban Legends: A Collection of International Tall Tales and Terrors, A Greenwood Press Reference Book. (2007). In 2015 Bennett and Smith were the first recipients of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, Linda Dégh Lifetime Achievement Award.

POST GRADUATE STUDIES IN FOLKLORE

Owen Davies and Ceri Houlbrook
University of Hertfordshire

The History group at the University of Hertfordshire are currently putting together a Masters in Folklore Studies, due to commence in 2019. This presentation will outline the processes and challenges of putting together a postgraduate programme of study centred on folklore, and will consider the content of its proposed modules.

Owen Davies is Professor of Social History at the University of Hertfordshire, and has been leading the validation of the MA Folklore Studies, working with Ceri Houlbrook. He has published widely on the history of the supernatural and recently re-joined the Committee of the Folklore Society.

Dr Ceri Houlbrook is a Research Fellow in Folklore and History at the University of Hertfordshire, having attained a doctorate in Archaeology at the University of Manchester in 2014. Her primary interests are contemporary British folklore and the material culture of ritual practices and popular beliefs. She has co-edited a volume on The Materiality of Magic; published a book on The Magic of Coin-Trees from Religion to Recreation ; and is currently penning one on the global phenomenon of love-locks. She co-manages the Concealed and Revealed Project, which explores domestic concealment in the post-medieval home, focusing on contemporary engagements with concealed deposits. She is currently working with Professor Owen Davies on the validation of a Folklore Studies MA at the University of Hertfordshire.

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AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

Dr Katy Soar
Lecturer in Greek Archaeology, University of Winchester.

Given the clear interrelations between archaeology and folklore, it seems odd that this relationship is not taught more explicitly within archaeology departments. In this talk I'd like to consider the various ways these two interrelate and how to design and develop a course which adopts an integrated approach combining archaeology and folklore, in light of my plan to develop such a module in my department, starting in 2019.

Dr. Katy Soar is a lecturer in Greek Archaeology at the University of Winchester. She has published both academic and popular articles on Minoan archaeology, the history of archaeology and anthropology, and archaeology and folklore.

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Panel 3

FOLK HORROR: FOLKLORE ON SCREEN

Chair: Andrew Robinson

SOMETHING WYRD: FOLK HORROR, FOLKLORE AND BRITISH TELEVISION

Diane A. Rodgers

Senior Lecturer in Media, Arts and Communications, Sheffield Hallam University

Television schedules in 1970s Britain were so full of with stories involving folkloric narratives featuring paganism, witchcraft, stone circles and ghosts that such tales account for many hundreds of hours of programming. These often eerie series, episodes and teleplays had lasting effects on audiences and on makers of film and television today like Ben Wheatley (*Kill List*, 2011) Mark Gatiss (*The Tractate Middoth*, 2013) and Jeremy Dyson (*Ghost Stories*, 2017) whose work often distinctly references British 1970s television. My research examines how folklore is communicated in British television during the 1970s and the reasons for its continued impact.

Television narratives like these are now beginning to be widely referred to as 'folk horror', coined in 2003 by director Piers Haggard to describe his film *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971). Haggard's film is now canonised as one of the 'holy triumvirate' of folk-horror films alongside *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Wicker Man* (1973). A revival of interest in them and other, related media texts has gained 'folk horror' (and what I refer to as the 'wyrd') status as a sub-genre and increasing attention from both cult and academic audiences alike.

However, two elements have yet to gain much serious academic attention to date: the importance of television folk horror and the folklore of folk horror. I consider the importance of how "mass media contributes to the maintenance and creation of folklore" (Schenda, 1992: 29), examining television as a form of mass-mediated folklore: what folkloric tropes and legends were propagated by British 1970s television, how they were portrayed and why they have had significant impact and influence on future generations of media creators. Combining folkloristics with screen studies, I propose to highlight the significance of television in the communication of folklore and how this continues to affect the cultural development of folklore.

Diane specialises in alternative and cult TV, films, music and comics, and am currently conducting PhD research into folklore in 1970s British Film and Television. She has presented at a number of conferences on Folk Horror, and has recently had a book chapter 'Robin Redbreast: Folk Horror for Christmas' published in the edited collection Yuletide Terror. Diane has also had a research article 'Something Wyrd This Way Comes: Folklore and British Television' recently accepted for publication in Folklore journal. As well as being one of the founder members of the Centre for Contemporary Legend, she sings and plays guitar in her garage punk band The Sleazoids and adores Godzilla, horror, science fiction, drawing comics, and vintage Viewmaster reels.

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FOLK HORROR IN BRITISH TELEVISION DRAMA: THE PATTERN UNDER THE PLOUGH

Dr. Douglas McNaughton
Senior Lecturer in Film & Screen Studies, University of Brighton

The folklorist George Ewart Evans (1966) has suggested that British culture is marked by ‘the pattern under the plough’, referring to the way in which aerial photographs reveal the ancient agricultural practices underpinning contemporary shaping of the landscape. The roads, fields, and forests we know today often follow routes laid down in pre-Christian times. It is not only these shaped landscapes that retain their pre-modern infrastructure, but the customs and practices which took place in them also continue into the present day (Johnston 2015). Ancient beliefs, narratives and traditions therefore persist in spite of efforts to repress them (Young 2010).

As Hunt (2002), Harmes (2013), Fuller (2016) and others have demonstrated, a corpus of ‘folk horror’ emerged in late 1960s-early 1970s British cinema, combining rural settings, superstition and paganism.

The photography lingers over shots of field, woods and villages... The emphasis the cinematography places on their rural setting led the television writer and performer Mark Gatiss to suggest that these films... are ‘folk horrors’. (Harmes p.67)

While this wave expired with the collapse of the British film industry in the mid-1970s (Hutchings 1993), this paper argues that many of the concerns and tropes of this wave transferred from cinema into television drama throughout the 1970s. The paper examines key examples of this televisual folk horror cycle, and sets them in their historical context to show the ways in which they adapt myth and folklore to work through anxieties about technological and social change in 1970s British culture (Young 2011). Of particular interest is the use of ‘anti-landscape’ (Hutchings 2004) as representing an atavistic space in which the past intrudes into the present, raising issues around the permeability of both spatial and temporal boundaries.

Dr. Douglas McNaughton’s research interests include British television drama, telefantasy, screen technologies and the sociology of space. His research focus is on the intersection of space, technology and labour in television production. His publications include work on the historical influence of the actors’ union Equity on British television production in Journal of British Cinema and Television and research on experimental multi-camera film technologies in Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television. Recent publications include several articles on camerawork as performance, and Scottishness in the BBC’s Doctor Who.

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HESITATION, REPETITION AND DEVIATION: THE TEMPORAL NIGHTMARES AND HAUNTED LANDSCAPES OF BRITISH TELEVISION

David Powell
PHD Candidate, Film Studies at the University of Birmingham.

“A place retaining a trace of historical and cultural happening... can then allow for the slippages in time, the event and its topographical traces being the gateway that allows the past to exist within the present, often fantastically and sometimes horrifically.”¹

Adam Scovell is quoted here discussing the TV adaptation of Alan Garner’s unsettling teenage drama *The Owl Service* (1969-70, Peter Plummer), but he could be describing any number of

British television series and serials that feature landscapes stained by their folkloric heritage in which the past is not dead and forgotten but an atavistic and baleful force lurking just out of sight, eager to influence the present.

The manner of this temporal invasion takes many forms: the unearthing or discovery of long hidden but powerful relics, described by Mark Fisher as 'xenolithic artefacts', such as in *The Owl Service* and *Quatermass and the Pit* (Rudolph Cartier, 1958-59); the latent power vested in landscapes shaped by ancient cultures, as in *Children of the Stones* (Peter Graham Scott, 1977) and *Stigma* (Lawrence Gordon Clark, 1977); and occasionally the past itself breaking through as an aggressive, antagonistic force, as in *The Stone Tape* (Peter Sasdy, 1972) and *Sapphire and Steel* (David Foster, 1979). In all these instances the landscapes of the serials are inseparable from their folkloric past, hauntologically charged and corroding linear, progressive time through cyclicity, repetition, stasis and timelessness.

With a focus on the 1970s, this paper will survey a range of British television series and serials to examine the psychogeographical relationship between the landscapes and the pasts they are haunted by, and typify the forms of temporal distortion that manifest themselves.

[1] Adam Scovell - *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* – Auteur Publishing 2017, p56

David is studying part-time for a PhD in Film Studies at the University of Birmingham, his thesis characterising folk-horror in British cinema and television. He has presented papers at the At Home With Horror conference (University of Kent, October 2017), and at the Urban Weird (University of Hertfordshire, April 2018), Screening the Unreal (University of Brighton, July 2018) and After Fantastika (University of Lancaster, 2018) conferences. He is currently working on an article for inclusion in a forthcoming folk-horror focused edition of Revenant.

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