**The Society for Folk Life Studies**

**Annual Conference**

**Llandrindod Wells, Wales:  12th to 15th September 2013**

*\*\* Water \* Borderlands \* Vernacular architecture \*\**

The conference venue and hotel is the Hotel Metropole, Temple Street, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 5DY

Tel: +44 (0)1597 823 700; website:[*http://www.metropole.co.uk/*](http://www.metropole.co.uk/)

**PROGRAMME**

**THURSDAY, 12th  September**

17.15-18.10  Registration at the Hotel Metropole

18.15-18.20  **Eddie Cass** (SFLS President)  *Welcome*

18.20-19.05  **Dai Hawkins***Radnorshire, the unknown country*

A brief history of the vicissitudes of the Welsh language in Radnorshire and the Borders, from the Middle Ages, through the Act of Union to the present.

19.10-19.30   **Justin Baird-Murray***An introduction to the Hotel Metropole and its history*

*19.30  Dinner at Hotel Metropole*

**FRIDAY, 13th  September**

*09.00  Assemble at the Hotel Metropole*

09.00-09.05**Eddie Cass***Welcome and introductory remarks*

09.05-09.50  **Owen Roberts** (Aberystwyth University) *Aspects of the water industry in Wales*

What constitutes ‘pure water’ changes over time, and in different contexts. Wales presents a vivid case-study of this process; at different times, people have sought to define Welsh water and its purity or otherwise in their own terms – for ideological, economic or political reasons. This paper will explore how various forces have shifted ideas of Welsh water, from the water analysts of eighteenth-century Llandrindod to the bottled water industry of the twenty-first century.

9.50-10.30  **Nia Powell** (Bangor University) *The Welsh March:  a land of shifting  identities?*

The Welsh March has been held since the medieval period as a border zone lying between the English shires and what was considered to be *Pura Wallia.* Medieval political loyalties in the March shifted uneasily between Norman and Welsh, but cultural identity and cultural contrasts may have been more entrenched, forming a sharper English/Welsh boundary than a zone of transition. This paper will thus

examine whether a specific Marcher identity ever existed.

*10.30-11.00 Tea & coffee*

11.00-11.45  **Gavin Hooson** (Powys Library and Archive Services)  *Llandrindod: from common land to spa town*

This talk will deal with the early promotion of the ‘healing’ waters, the coming of the railway and the enclosure of the common land which allowed the development of a completely new town, the names behind this great leap of faith, and the visitor experience at Llandrindod Wells.

11.45-12.30  **Mark Redknap** (Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales) *Llan-gors crannog - an early Medieval time capsule*

Freshwater lakes in Wales, as elsewhere in Europe, were often sacred places, and some have produced rich sacrifice assemblages associated with ritual processes. Llangorse Lake (Llyn Syfaddan) was renowned for its prophetic powers, and some of the folklore associated with it may have a basis in historical events. Archaeological investigation of the early medieval crannog on the lake, and the current preparation of the final report, have brought together folklore, history and archaeology in a rich stories that start in the late ninth century AD.

*12.30  Lunch at the Hotel Metropole*

13.30-14.30  ***Short papers****:*

*13.30-14.00***Linda Ballard***Unitarianism and murder in 1870s Ulster*

Stith Thompson assigns the reference E422.1.11.5.1 to the narrative motif ‘ineradicable bloodstain after bloody tragedy’, which appears in several short legends from Holywood, Co Down. One of these relates to Miss Isabella Ker, who was brutally murdered in her home in the town on Sunday 29 December 1872. The notorious case was widely reported in the press and is mentioned in Hansard. A memorial to Miss Ker, referring to ‘her dedication to the cause of Unitarian Christianity’ may be seen in the porch of the non-subscribing Presbyterian Church in Holywood. This paper explores broad social and cultural issues raised by the relationship between the newspaper reportage of the murder and the associated legend, and by her monument.

*14.00-14.30* **John Burnett***Scots writer Norman Douglas as an ethnologist*

Norman Douglas (1868-1952) is chiefly remembered for a travel book, *Old Calabria* (1915) and for a novel set in Italy, *South Wind* (1917).  More broadly, he was an energetic scholar, with a highly independent mind.  He wrote on children’s games, for example, and festivals in Italy.  The present contribution takes an overview of his cultural world, popular and learned.

14.45-17.00  ***A walking tour*** *of Llandrindod Wells*led by **Brian Maund**

18.00-19.00  **Wine Reception at the Radnorshire Museum (**courtesy of Will Adams, Curator) **(**Temple Street Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 5DL Tel: 01597 824 513; Website: [www.powys.gov.uk/radnorshiremuseum](http://www.powys.gov.uk/radnorshiremuseum))  Kindly sponsored by **The Folklore Society**

*19.15  Dinner at the Hotel Metropole*

*20.30-21.10* ***Short papers****:*

*20.30-20.50* **Morgana McCabe-Allan** (University of Glasgow) *The rambler's guide to Scottish rag wells, past and present*

This paper will explore some of Scotland's historical and modern rag wells, elaborating upon practices observed and their explicit and implicit meanings. In particular it will focus upon material practices: what people hoped to find there, what they did there and what they left behind. The roles of water, trees, animals and weather will accompany those of human agents as we ramble through the Scottish countryside in search of these magical sites.

*20.50-21.10***Cozette Griffin-Kremer (**CRBC/Brest) *Tracking change – lily-of-the-valley custom and festival in France*

A quick look at general lily-of-the-valley Maying customs in France and their economic impact, then a closer inspection of how a particular town festival with the plant as pillar of the events has changed over recent years, so that we can speak of the sources attesting (or not) to change. This is especially visible in the parade floats and the wealth of ‘tradition’, as so many people term it, that stands behind them, over the years as well as in each yearly avatar, and enables us to speak of adhesion and agency, most especially of what underwrites the will to act and how people speak of what they are doing.

**SATURDAY, 14th September**

*09.00  Assemble at the Hotel Metropole*

09.00-09.45  **Lillis Ò Laoire** (NUI Galway-[OÉ Gaillimh](http://www.nuigalway.ie/index.php?language=gaeilge)) *Seán Ó hEochaidh and the folklore of Donegal*

Seán Ó hEochaidh 1913-2002 was the most prolific collector of Donegal folklore for the Irish Folklore Commission (1935-1971). He worked hard all his life and amassed a huge body of manuscript and other materials that are now kept at the National Folklore Collection (NFC), Dublin. In this paper, I will briefly outline some of his methods and his approaches to collecting. I will also discuss the ideologies underpinning his success as a collector. The paper concentrates in particular on the year 1947, by which time he had become a seasoned field worker of some ten years experience. This was the year he visited *Na Cruacha* (The Croaghs, at the north end of the Bluestack Mountains), the Reelin river valley in south central Donegal, ringed by the eponymous low mountains that gave the place its name. Here a small community eked out a niche existence as sheep herders, peat harvesters and subsistence farmers. Ó hEochaidh was gratified to find a considerable number of monoglot Irish speakers among the community, which was locally regarded as a repository of old ways and speech. Ó hEochaidh's subsequent publication in *Zeitschrift fuer Celtische Philologie* (1962/3) detailed his visit to the Croaghs and gave a comprehensive inventory of the inhabitants' Gaelic sayings and idioms. My paper contrasts the published account with his unpublished field diary (NFC, ms 1289) to highlight how his more forthright day to day accounts of life in the Croaghs emerged in print as a paean of praise to this small, dwindling community and its people, where the adversities they faced were presented in coded understatement. The reasons for these changes will be discussed in the light of ideologies of social class and hierarchy current in mid-twentieth century Ireland.

09.45-10.30  **Sarah Blowen***‘Good fences do good neighbours make’? Borderlands in the Balkans*

What happens when neighbouring communities united by geography, economy, history, language and culture find themselves on different sides of an international border? The villagers of Epirus, a mountain region in the Balkans, found themselves divided between northern Greece and southern Albania twice in the Twentieth century. As a result, political and economic differences have come to obscure social and cultural unity in this area with a rich folk life tradition. This paper will explore the background to the creation of the border – a tale rich in folklore itself – and the attempts of a small museum to highlight the shared cultural values of the divided region. Can ethnology succeed in conflict resolution where politicians have failed?

*10.30-11.00  Tea & coffee*

11.00-11.45  **Nick Mansfield** (University of Central Lancashire) *The persistence of Anti-Welshness in the Marches*

The national, ethnic and cultural tensions between England and Wales have a long history. This talk focuses on the more recent relationships in the middle Marches; between Shropshire and Radnorshire, Montgomery and Denbighshire. It looks at the way in which twentieth-century concerns over class were distorted by these older tensions and in particular how they hampered the initially promising growth of the labour movement in Shropshire.

11.45-12.30  **Eddie Cass**Presidential address: *James Madison Carpenter and George Baker: An analytical description of an artistic relationship*

When Carpenter was collecting folk plays in the Cotswolds, he met George Baker, a rural worker and a talented amateur artist. Carpenter commissioned Baker to draw some possible illustrations for a book he planned on folk plays. The book was never written and Baker’s drawings, some forty in number, have never been seen in public. This paper will explore the relationship between two men of very different backgrounds.

*12.30 Lunch at Hotel Metropole*

13.30  ***A coach excursion*** *to the churches of Llananno and Llanbister with their medieval rood screens, the ruins of Abbey Cwm Hir and the Elan Valley reservoirs*led by **Ray Smith & David Jenkins**

18.00 (approx)  Return to Hotel Metropole

*19.00  Dinner at the Hotel Metropole*

20.00-21.00  ***Informal discussion on developing new audiences for Folk Life Studies,***led by **Sarah Blowen**

As the university departments and museum specialist curators who traditionally kept the folk life flame burning become rarer and rarer, how can the discipline and its allied practices continue into the future? The need to understand vernacular life remains as strong as ever, but how can this relevance be brought to new audiences? After some initial musings, we invite the conference to discuss the future of folk life studies.

**Sunday, 15th September**

*Information regarding church services will be available for those wishing to attend.*

*09.00  Assemble at the Hotel Metropole*

09.00-09.45  **Annual General Meeting** of the Society for Folk Life Studies.

09.45-10.30  **Steph Mastoris** (Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales)  *The river maps in Michael Drayton’s* Polyolbion

Between 1613 and 1622 the poet and playwright Michael Drayton (1563-1631) published *Polyolbion,* a lengthy epic poem on the history and mythology of England and Wales. The text was illustrated by a suite of 30 maps showing most of the rivers and large streams of these two countries. This presentation will discuss the background to the poem and analyse the historical and mythical iconography found in these remarkable maps.

*10.30-11.00  Tea & Coffee*

11.00-11.45  **Bill Britnell** (Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust)  *Llanelwedd Rocks, Radnorshire: farming on the edge in the 17th to early 19th centuries*

The presentation will look at the recent excavation of a mid 17th to early 19th upland farmstead on the southern end of the Carneddau range, just to the south of Llandrindod Wells, consisting of longhouse and associated corn-drying kiln and bread ovens. The talk will look at the agricultural context of the farmstead on the edge of the upland commons, its social context revealed by probate records and artefacts, and its relationships with contemporary rabbit warrens and the larger landed estates in the parish.

11.45-12.45  **Eurwyn Wiliam** (Royal Commission for Ancient & Historical Monuments Wales) *The study of vernacular architecture in Wales*

The study of traditional buildings, or vernacular architecture, in Wales began properly in the 1930s, and has been dominated by the work of three men – Cyril Fox, Iorwerth Peate, and Peter Smith. Early recording was followed by synoptic interpretation and the subject today, whilst still not recognised by university curricula, is slowly being brought back into the fold of wider subjects such as history, geography and regional ethnology.

12.45-13.00  *Concluding remarks*

*13.00  Lunch at the Hotel Metropole*

*End of conference*