THE SCHOOL OF SCOTTISH STUDIES

Robert Kerr

HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

The school of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh was established in 1951, as a research institute for the intensive study and recording of Scottish traditional life in fields not covered by the teaching departments.

In 1957, at the end of the first quinquennium, a Director was appointed, who is responsible to the University, with an Advisory Committee which includes the heads of interested departments.

The School is financed entirely by the University.

AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

The broad aim is the study of Scottish traditional life in its European setting, on lines similar to those developed in several Scandinavian institutes and, more recently, in Ireland and Wales.

The principal activities of the School are the recording, documentation and study of:

(1) Oral tradition (e.g. tales, legends, proverbs, custom and belief)
(2) Traditional song and instrumental music
(3) Material Culture
(4) Place-Names

All these activities aim to cover the whole of Scotland, i.e. both the Highland and the Lowland areas, and, from a linguistic point of view, Gaelic as well as Scots-speaking districts.
THE CENTRAL INDEX

In addition to the indices which form parts of the archives listed below, there is a Central Card Index, arranged on the same lines as the Central Index at Uppsala. It contains nearly 100,000 references to books, manuscripts, articles in periodicals, tape recordings, and illustration, relating to the subjects with which the School is concerned. All other indices are geared to or devised as an integral part of this central index.

ARCHIVES

The various archives now include over 1,940 sound-record tapes, equivalent to more than 3,880 long-playing discs; also 500 twelve-inch 78 r.p.m. direct-recorded discs. Typed copies of transcriptions are in preparation, as well as musical transcriptions.

The Folklore Archive: This contains recordings of folk-tales, legends, anecdotes, and other material collected by members of the staff in the field. The folk-tales, some in Gaelic, some in Scots, are arranged according to the Aarne-Thompson system of classification. The archive also includes manuscript material written down by local informants in uniform notebooks supplied by the School; and a microfilm copy of some 10,000 pages of Scottish Gaelic material collected in the Hebrides by the Irish Folklore Commission before the establishment of the School of Scottish Studies.

The Music and Song Archive: This archive contains recordings mainly collected by the School staff. To facilitate reference to the collection, there are in progress indices to:

1. titles, or first lines, of songs
2. performers
3. titles of items of instrumental music

The Material Culture Archive: This includes some 6,000 mounted photographs of objects, such as houses, farms, agricultural implements, tools, and fishing gear. Also housed here are collections of drawings and plans. The index to this archive is also arranged on the Uppsala system.

The Place-Name Archive: As part of its Scottish Place-Name Survey the School is in the process of building up a central and comprehensive archive of Scottish place-names, their forms in early records, their local pronunciation, as well as any kind of information which
might help in their linguistic analysis. So far this archive contains roughly 700,000 index cards, and, with the assistance of about 170 voluntary helpers from all parts of Scotland, collections of so far unrecorded names are being made in the field. Tape-recordings are being used for the preservation of the local pronunciation of names, a particularly fruitful method in those areas in which the Gaelic language is on the point of dying out, which means that such recordings will be impossible to make in a few years' time.

The Research Fellow in charge of the Survey acts as official adviser to the Ordnance Survey, on the question of place-names on Scottish maps.

ACCOMMODATION AND RESEARCH FACILITIES

The School is housed in two eighteenth-century houses, 27 and 28 George Square, Edinburgh 8. In the same building, very conveniently, are accommodated the University's two Linguistic Surveys of Scotland (Scots and Gaelic), and the staffs of the two Scottish Dictionaries now in process of publication - the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue and the Scottish National Dictionary.

In addition to small study-rooms for the members of the research staff, there is a conference room for lectures, seminars, and symposia; a library containing some 4,000 volumes; specially-conditioned rooms for the storage of tapes and discs; a studio equipped for high-fidelity listening and recording; a sound-recording laboratory; and a drawing office.

From time to time, lectures are delivered in the School, on subjects related to its work, by visiting folklorists or by members of the staff.

METHODS OF COLLECTION

Each year, working to an agreed plan, members of the research staff spend periods of varying length in the field, seeking and recording material (by means of tape-recorders, measurements and camera), which is then systematically arranged in the School's archives for current and future research and comparative study.

PUBLICATIONS

Twice-yearly the School publishes an illustrated journal, Scottish Studies. It contains articles by the staff, as well as relevant
articles by outside contributors, notes, and book reviews. An annual feature recently introduced is the publication of a Scottish Folklore Bibliography for the preceding twelve months (beginning with 1961) prepared by the Archivist.

Selected items from the School's collection of folk-tales, folk-songs, and instrumental music were published in the form of long-playing records in 1960 in a limited edition (now sold out, except for the Folk-tale disc) with accompanying booklet, and further selections are in preparation. The first in a series of questionnaires on material culture (this one related to houses and crofts), has been issued recently in conjunction with the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

STAFF

The staff at present comprises a Director (B. R. S. Megaw) and six Research Fellows: Dr. W. F. H. Nicolaisen (Place-Names), Hamish Henderson (Lowland Folk Song), Donald A. MacDonald (Folk-tales), Dr. Anne Ross (Custom and Belief), John MacInnes (Gaelic Folk Song), and Iain A. Crawford (Material Culture). In addition there are an Archivist (Miss Elizabeth Sinclair), two Transcribers (one for texts and music respectively), a typist for Gaelic texts and research papers, two sound-recording technicians, a draughtsman (who also files the photographic collection), and a secretary-typist. A new post will be available next session for musicological research, and it is hoped that Mr. Thorkild Knudsen, of the Dansk Folke-mindesamling, Copenhagen, may be able to initiate this work.

In a voluntary capacity there are, in addition, an Honorary Research fellow in Music (Mr. Francis Collinson) and an Honorary Archivist (author of this article).

RECORDING EQUIPMENT

In the early days of the School, the tape-recorders used in the field, where electric power was not available, were single-track battery-driven. These ran at 7 1/2 ins. per sec. They were expensive to run and maintain, and were not reliable enough for long field trips.

Later, fairly reliable small battery-driven portables became available. Their top speed was 3 3/4 ins. per sec. As this speed was unsuitable for the recording of music, whenever possible large
power-driven half-track recorders were used, running at 7 1/2 ins. per sec.

Recently it has been possible to obtain efficient small half-track battery-operated portables which operate at 7 1/2 ins. per sec. These have not yet been long in use, but from the tests so far carried out it is expected that they will produce good-quality recordings over a long period. They are so small that the largest tape reel they can take is 4 ins. In order to increase their recording time per reel it has been found necessary to use "triple-play" tape; this has a very thin polyester base, and is therefore unsuitable for long-term storage. These tapes must therefore be copied without delay on to thick-based "standard play" tape.

When the School began its work, fairly cheap acetate-based tapes were used. These do not have good storage qualities. It had been hoped that metal matrices might be made, but the cost was found to be prohibitive, so that existing material is now being edited and transferred to modern high-quality surfaced P.V.C. tapes, which experience shows will last for at least 14 years, without noticeable deterioration, provided that humidity and temperature conditions are correctly maintained.

It is hoped in the near future to extend the School's photographic collection by the addition of cine films of folk life and crafts, produced by members of the staff on their field-trips.

NOTES

1. For an account of this system see The Folklore and Folk Music Archivist, Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring 1961.

2. Folklore Fellows Communications (Helskinki) 184: "The Types of the Folk-tale."