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The lives and legacies of Iona and Peter Opie

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Abstract

This article outlines the biographies of Iona (1923-) and Peter (1918-1982) Opie and describes their aims, methods, and theoretical orientation with particular reference to their work on children's play and games in the third quarter of the 20th century. The account illustrates their separate identities as well as portraying the joint working relationship they built up as a husband-and-wife team.

The Opies' reputation as pioneer researchers into children's folklore in the UK and beyond derives from their publications, which have become classics in the field and widely read by a general audience as well as by academics and professionals. The Opies' scholarship and its reception and impact are considered here. The article also describes the Opies' archival collection, especially their 'working papers' and sound recordings, and highlights the importance of evaluating the Opies' contribution in terms of their archival legacy, as well as their published works.

Keywords: Iona Opie, Peter Opie, children's folklore, history of play

Introduction

Iona and Peter Opie were a husband-and-wife team of English folklorists best known for the numerous books they published on children's culture, including nursery rhymes and songs (1951, 1997b), school-aged children's language, verbal play, custom and belief (1959), outdoor games (1969), musical play (1985), and outdoor games with playthings (1997a). Iona Opie also published a selection of the notes she made during weekly observations of playtimes at her local school in Hampshire (1993). Through their work, the Opies helped to establish childhood culture as a serious field of study. Meticulously researched and accessibly written, these books have become classics, widely read by scholars, teachers, students and the general public (Hobbs & Cornwell, 1991)

Prior to this special issue, references to the Opies and their work can be glimpsed once or twice in almost every number of the *International Journal of Play* (2012–2014). Some mentions make connections with Antipodean research into children's playlore, such as the Opies' contact with Brian Sutton-Smith and Ian Turner (Sutton-Smith, Brown & Patte, 2012, p. 8; Darian-Smith, 2013, p. 147), and parallels and contrasts with collecting and scholarship in Australia (e.g. Armitage, 2013, p. 151; Darian-Smith, 2012, p. 266; Factor, 2014, p. 183). Their research is also mentioned in connection with the transmission of play, and stability and variation in games (Beresin, 2012, p. 136; Frost, 2012, p. 119), and with regard to changing contexts of outdoor play (Davey, 2012, p. 115; Jarvis, Newman & Swiniarski, 2014, p. 61). The Opies' documentation of television-influenced play, especially imaginative play, is highlighted by Marsh and Bishop (2013, pp. 279, 288), who conclude that

the legacy of the Opies remains highly significant in any study of contemporary children's play. Their ground-breaking work continues to inform studies of childlore and attests to their considerable insights into the cultural worlds of children, insights that remain important today. (p. 289).

The contributions to this special issue of the *Journal* highlight further connections as well as expanding on many of these themes. The present article provides a more detailed description of the Opies' lives and places their work within this biographical context. Drawing on various interviews and accounts given by Iona and Peter, it tries to convey something of their identities as individuals, and explores what motivated their research and how it was shaped by their circumstances, life experience, interests and personalities (Cott, Opie, Opie, Courtney, 1989; Opie, 2014). The main focus is on their research into children's play and games in the third quarter of the twentieth century, including their approach as folklorists and their methods.¹ I also consider responses to their publications, and the ongoing potential of their work for contemporary scholarship, highlighting the importance of evaluating the Opies' contribution in terms of their as yet little-studied archival legacy, as well as their published oeuvre.

I Lives

From '*children of Empire*' to marriage (1918–1943)

One is inevitably curious about the childhoods of two scholars whose lives subsequently focused so closely on studying the childhoods of others. Iona and Peter Opie themselves reflected on connections between their character traits and early formative experiences and their later vocation. As Iona later observed, 'both of us were children of Empire' (1988, p. 203). Peter Mason Opie was born in Cairo in 1918, the only child of Major Philip Adams Opie, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and Margaret Collett-Mason, a volunteer nurse

(Avery, 2004). Due to his father's occupation, Peter's family lived abroad for much of his childhood, particularly in India (Cott, 1983, pp. 291-292).

The early years of Iona Margaret Balfour Archibald were more settled physically in England. She was born in Colchester in 1923 to Sir Robert George Archibald, an expert on tropical diseases, and Olive Chapman, Iona being one of two girls (Courtney, 1989; Avery, 2004).

These circumstances impacted fundamentally on the upbringing of each:

Peter's father was a surgeon in Bombay; mine was a pathologist – the director of the Wellcome Research Laboratory in Khartoum, in the Sudan. The alternatives for children, in those circumstances, was [sic] to grow up without one parent, or without both. Peter's father and mother left him in England at the age of seven. My mother ruled an entirely female establishment in the south of England, to which, every year or so, my father – a bronzed stranger – paid a visit. (Opie, 1988, p. 203)

In England, Peter attended a prep school. His sudden childhood separation from his parents was a watershed in his life, and established what Iona saw as 'the solitary, fiercely independent person he was always to remain' (1988, p. 203). At the same time, this circumstance seems to have nurtured a love of writing, as he enjoyed corresponding with his parents, especially his mother. At the age of eight, he contributed a story about shooting tigers to the prep school magazine. He later described it as 'the most exciting thing I had ever done in my life. I couldn't understand why everybody didn't want to be a writer' (Opie, 1988, p. 203).

Peter went on to Eton College. He also visited India on a number of occasions as a teenager (Cott, 1983, p. 292; Courtney, 1989; Opie, 1988; Avery, 1984). At eighteen, in the same year as his father died as the result of an accident there, Peter penned an autobiography about his schooldays and life in India. Entitled *I want to be a success* (1939), it was illustrated with his own photographs (Opie, 1988, p. 204). Its very title speaks of the high expectations Peter had of himself, and its opening pages describe 'a boy who dreamed of success ... [but who] could not conceive how the Neon lights were to be induced to take notice of him' (Opie, 1939, p. 1).

Iona was also privately educated, at Sandecotes School, a boarding school for girls in Parkstone, Dorset. In later life, she and Peter regarded this private education as an advantage for their research in that they lacked familiarity with many of the items they collected from state-educated children:

Normally, an anthropologist has to go to another country to do his research so that he can see it with a foreigner's eyes. We can see our children – and we only deal with state-educated children – with an unprejudiced eye because we were not part of that educational system ourselves ... We are talking about essentially something we didn't know anything about in the first place – children in the street. And therefore, it's as if we had the advantage of going to a different country, but one happened to be able to speak the basic language. (Cott, 1983, pp. 293-294)²

The Opies were thus conducting a form of 'anthropology at home', something they recognised even before this phrase was coined (Jackson, 1987).³

In common with many children, Peter was interested in collecting. As a boy, he gradually amassed the constituent pieces of a toy farm (Opie, 1988, p. 203). Later, at Eton, he

collected cigarette cards which were used as currency among the pupils in place of money (Cott, 1983, p. 286). Combined with a kind of ‘all or nothing’ approach to anything he set his mind to (Opie, 2014), this childhood hobby became ‘collecting fever’ in his adult years (Cott, 1983, p. 286). As well as in the qualitative information on children’s language, traditions and games, discussed below, it played out in his extensive collecting of children’s literature, and of toys, gadgets and other smaller artefacts of childhood (Cott, 1983, pp. 287-291; Opie, 1988, p. 204). The children’s book collection he and Iona amassed became the largest then in private hands. It is now at the Bodleian Libraries where it forms the Opie Collection of Children’s Literature.⁴

Peter’s interest in collecting went beyond amassing things, to their organisation, classification and preservation (Cott, 1983, p. 290; Opie, 1988, p. 203), an essential component of the approach and achievement in the joint work he was later to undertake with Iona. He came from a family of perfectionists and Iona later commented, slightly tongue-in-cheek, that Peter too was ‘always a perfectionist. I mean, his stamp collection had to be better mounted than anyone else’s’ (Courtney, 1989).

It was not collecting that occupied Peter’s attention when he left school but the outbreak of the Second World War. He joined the Royal Fusiliers, becoming a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Sussex Regiment in 1940 (Opie, 1988, p. 204; Avery, 2004). An accident while training, however, brought his military career to a premature close the following year. He felt ‘bitterly ashamed of what he saw as a failure’ and later, when many of his battalion were killed in action in Africa, he resolved to succeed ‘not only on his own account, but for these friends whose lives had been cut short so young’ (Opie, 1988, p. 204). He turned to writing, including a stint working for the BBC, before becoming a full-time writer, living at home with his mother.

Meanwhile, Iona, who turned sixteen just after the war broke out, joined the meteorological section of the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in 1940 (Opie, 1988, pp. 204, 205). A shy and retiring personality, she had been a bookish but practical child who liked to shut herself away and read, and enjoyed making little playthings (1988, p. 204; Courtney, 1989). As a teenager, she began to collect antiquarian books, especially poetry and limited editions, an activity which her mother tolerated ‘and did not press her own conviction that secondhand books harbour germs’ (1988, p. 204).

It was this love of reading that brought Iona and Peter together. A fellow WAAF lent her a copy of *I want to be a success*, Peter’s autobiography:

Before I was half way through the book, I felt I knew Peter; and when I had finished it I wrote to ask him, ‘What happened next? Did you change? What do you think now?’ (Opie, 1988, p. 206)

Peter sent a 45-page reply. They corresponded and began to meet up soon after, Iona travelling to London from Hampshire, where she was stationed, as often as she could get leave. In Iona’s later account, it was not quite a case of love at first sight, more a meeting of minds and sharing of common interests. Iona suggests that she was also impulsive and impressionable (1988, pp. 206-207). She enjoyed their friendship but at the back of her mind was the assumption that she would study botany and become a plant pathologist when the war ended, and that their friendship would simply continue. Peter, on the other hand, was ‘undoubtedly on the lookout for a wife’ and proposed marriage, to which Iona, eventually, capitulated (1988, pp. 204, 207).

‘Face to face with childhood’: The Oxford dictionary of nursery rhymes (1943-1951)

After their registry office wedding in 1943, Peter continued writing, producing *Having held the nettle* (1945) about wartime life, and *The case of being a young man* (1946), a continuation of his autobiography (Opie, 1988, p. 207; Courtney, 1989; Avery, 2004). Soon, Iona became pregnant with their first child, James. She left the WAAF and Peter began working for a publishing company in London which, not long after he joined, was evacuated to Bedfordshire in order to escape the bombing raids (1988, p. 208). The Opies went with it. On a country walk one day, they came across a ladybird and found themselves reciting the ‘Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home’ rhyme (cf. Cott, 1983, p. 68; Opie, 1988, p. 208; Opie, 2014). Curious to know more about its origins and meaning, they began to research into the rhyme, thereby catalysing the intense fascination with children’s culture that was to become their life’s work.

What was the attraction of this subject area which other adults so often disparage and dismiss as trivial? In Peter’s case, one might cite the collecting, organisation and interpretation of many small pieces of information and, in the case of nursery rhymes, the bibliographic detective work involved, and discovery of a topic that had not received serious study for over a hundred years (Halliwell, 1842). On the cusp of becoming a parent for the first time as well, Peter later spoke of being ‘unprepared’ and ‘terrified’ at the prospect. He felt the need to ‘know everything one could about children and about getting ready for this awful event’, throwing himself into the study of childbirth and traditions associated with early childhood. Whereas hitherto he had been attracted to autobiographical writing – ‘about myself, or love, or the people I’d met’ – he now found ‘suddenly, I had been brought face to face with childhood’ (Cott, 1983, pp. 268-269). The subject offered Peter the scope to become first a ‘biographer’ of nursery rhymes, then, as the work on children’s play unfolded, a biographer of childhood more widely.

The situation was rather different for Iona. While she shared Peter’s curiosity about nursery rhymes and enjoyed the thrill of their discoveries, she soon had another imperative – the needs of James Opie who arrived on her 21st birthday (Opie, 1988, p. 209). It was not a good moment to become a de facto research assistant, especially to a man of ‘iron discipline and dedication’ to his work (Opie, 1988, p. 207). Yet, Peter had more or less assumed that he would work with whoever he married (Cott, 1982, p. 252; Opie, 1988, p. 209) and Iona found herself facing the challenge of combining domestic duties, childcare and working with Peter.

This situation placed Iona under considerable pressure (Cott, 1983, pp. 279-280). Peter, moreover, claimed that the book would be hers, and that she was its author. Iona did not want this ‘pseudostatus’ and felt ‘manipulated’ (1988, p. 209). At the same time, she felt unable to remonstrate (p. 209). It would have been hard for her to do so in the circumstances. They were still a young couple getting to know each other, and, with a child on the way, maintaining a stable family unit became her priority (Courtney, 1989). She already had experience of parental conflict and opted to knuckle under rather than rock the boat (Courtney). She later wrote to Kaye Webb: ‘I am a sacrificial sort. I was not so much subjugated as gave myself – eventually.’ (Grove, 2010, p. ?).

Initially, Peter’s day job was still with Todd Publishing, now back in London, so the work was confined to the evening and weekends. They managed to produce a large collection of nursery rhymes, together with a note as to the date of their earliest appearance, and duly submitted it to a publisher, Herbert Van Thal, for consideration. It was greeted with interest but also the exhortation to provide a fuller description of each rhyme’s history (Opie, 1988, p. 209; Opie, 2014). They were both in despair. Iona recalls that she ‘scarcely felt capable of looking after a flat, a husband, and a baby, far less of writing paragraphs of folkloristic history with all the research that would involve’ (Opie, 1988, p. 209).

Peter’s response to this setback was to take up the challenge and work harder on the project. His book, *The case of being a young man*, had been named joint winner of the

Chosen Book competition in 1944. With the prize money behind him, supplemented by various editing jobs and royalties from his earlier books, he decided to work full-time as a writer (Opie, 1988, p. 210). It was at this time that he began the book collection, his first purchase being *The cheerful warbler*, a nineteenth-century chapbook containing nursery rhymes (Opie, 1988, p. 209). Meanwhile, Iona continued to be Peter's 'main work force' and they worked together most days and evenings (1988, pp. 209, 211). Peter's mother provided some childcare, especially when they had to visit a library to consult books that were not in their collection (Opie, 1988, pp. 210, 211; Courtney, 1989).

Whilst researching in the Bodleian Library in Oxford on one occasion, they were noticed by the then Keeper of Western Manuscripts, Richard Hunt, who introduced them to Betty Withycombe, the compiler of the Oxford dictionary of Christian names, which was the Opies' model for their own work. It was due to her that the Opies' book was considered for publication by Oxford University Press (Cott, 1983, pp.271, 274-276; Opie, 1988, p. 212; Opie, 2014). After six months of peer review, including by the editorial board of the Oxford English dictionary, and various conceptualisations as to the scale of the work, it was accepted for publication in 1949. Betty Withycombe became 'godmother' to the book, suggesting improvements, including the revision of Peter's introduction (Opie, 1988, pp. 212-213).

During these years, the family moved out of London, first to Surrey, and later to Hampshire (Opie, 1988, pp. 211, 214). Peter insisted on a lifestyle of 'complete seclusion' in order to manage the intensive and extensive nature of the work (Opie, 1988, p. 210). Meanwhile, their family continued to grow, first with the arrival of Robert, and later Letitia.

The Oxford dictionary of nursery rhymes [ODNR] was eventually published in 1951, seven years after the Opies had first begun the research. The book was an instant success with the general public, as well as a scholarly audience (Opie, 1988, p. 213). The first print run was 10,000 copies, a large printing for those days, yet it sold out within a month (Cott, 1983, p. 275). Sixty years on, it is still the definitive work on the subject, there now being a revised edition, undertaken by Iona (1997b). In the view of the author and historian Gillian Avery, the ODNR is 'a measured and mellow book that one might guess had come at the close of a lifetime's contemplation of the subject, instead of six [sic] scrambling years ... during which a student-age couple were teaching themselves their craft' (1999, p. 290).

The ODNR contains 550 different rhymes. It presents the fullest extant text of each, meticulously annotated with observations on its earliest appearance, subsequent documentation and interpretations, and noteworthy textual variation. International parallels are also cited. The Opies' aim was to be 'detailed, without ... being tedious' (1951, p. vi). As they observe in their introduction, the origins of many of these rhymes lie in literature that was not composed with children in mind at all, such as bawdy ballads, riddles, street cries, love songs, the popular stage, and tavern and barrack-room songs (1951, pp. 1-45). The Opies' commentaries, based on their painstaking research, debunk those commentators whose unsubstantiated but popularly perpetuated claims – that *Ring-a-Roses* refers to the Great Plague of 1665, for example – have bedevilled the serious study of the genre.

Much previous scholarship into children's rhymes, and indeed more broadly into children's play, customs and beliefs, was the work of antiquarians and folklorists (Opie, 1989; Bishop & Curtis, 2001, pp. 3-10; Marsh & Bishop, 2014, pp. 12-22). The word 'folklore' itself had been coined in 1846, just a century before the Opies entered the field, by the antiquarian scholar, William Thoms (Thoms, 1846/1965).⁵ In his definition, this 'good Saxon compound' refers to 'people' ('folk') and their body of learning ('lore'), and a children's custom is one of the examples he gave to illustrate this (1965, p. 6). The concept brought together a number of strands of scholarship and, in Britain, led to the formation of the Folklore Society in 1878 (Dorson, 1968). Among its members was Alice Bertha Gomme, whose study, *The traditional games of England, Scotland and Ireland*, is an important

example of a study that included field-collected materials as well as armchair scholarship (see Roud, 2014; cf. Ashton, 1998).

Not surprisingly, the Opies gravitated towards the Folklore Society quite soon after they began researching nursery rhymes (Opie, 1988, p. 209). The study of folklore in England was languishing at this time and the ODNR has been credited as an important early sign of its post-war revitalisation (Simpson, 1982). Peter went on to give a lecture on ‘The Collection of Folklore in England’ to the Royal Society of Arts (Opie, 1953), by which he had been awarded a silver medal the same year (Simpson, 1982). He became more involved with the Folklore Society at this time, serving on its council from 1951 to 1969. Further important publications followed, as detailed below, and Peter and Iona were jointly awarded the Society’s Coote Lake Medal in 1960. Peter went on to become President in 1963-1964 (Opie, 1964), a post in which he was unable to continue due to ill health (Simpson, 1982). Meanwhile, the Opies had received honorary MA degrees from Oxford University in 1962, and Peter served as President of the Anthropology Section of the British Association in 1962-1963 (Simpson, 1982).

From nursery to street and playground (1952-1997)

Despite these affiliations, and later honorary degrees, the work of Iona and Peter Opie was accomplished entirely outside the academy. It was also undertaken without the support of grants. Instead, they lived on the royalties from their publications (Opie, 1989, p. 57). The success of the ODNR, and the ensuing publication *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* (1955), generated important income for their subsequent work into children’s play, as they would not accept publishers’ advances for fear of ‘tempting providence’ (Opie, 1989, p. 57; cf. Opie, 1988, p. 215).

Whilst preparing the ODNR, the Opies realised that there were many children’s rhymes that fell under a separate category from nursery rhymes. They published a small volume of these in 1947, under the title *I Saw Esau*:

When we were doing the nursery rhymes, we realized that there was this other stuff that was being communicated from child to child. We didn’t actually know if the subject really existed, but we did distinguish child rhymes from nursery rhymes; and that, I think, was the first time that that had been done. So in 1947, in order to make a little money, we put out a small book entitled *I Saw Esau* – just by going to the files and using material we weren’t going to use in the Dictionary. But we also put it out, in a sense, as a kind of scout volume. And within weeks one was getting the real stream of stuff, and we started meeting children. So we thought: This is extraordinary, they’re all repeating the rhymes that Norman Douglas had printed in *London Street Games* – we thought the children must have been reading a cheap edition of Douglas’s book. And then, after we had moved from Farnham to Alton, we realized that, since the children were producing the rhymes there, too, they were probably being repeated all over the country. (Cott, 1983, p. 276)

Douglas’s *London street games*, mentioned here by Peter, was first published in 1916 and reprinted in 1931. Douglas was an author who compiled an account of the games played by London street children from accounts that the children had themselves written down for him (Douglas, 1931, p. ix). A controversial figure in many respects, Douglas’s slim volume served as an inspiration for several researchers into children’s play later in the twentieth century (Marsh & Bishop, 2014, pp. 16-18). The Opies were later to credit it as a ‘pioneer work and social document of the first importance’ and ‘the study which comes nearest to

being a predecessor to the present work [The lore and language of schoolchildren]' (1959, p. xxi).

Some earlier studies of children's rhymes and games had also drawn on children's testimony, but the Opies were struck by Douglas's exclusive use of it. They were also aware of adults' tendency to become nostalgic about their childhood, to overlook the mundane and everyday aspects of it, and to find it difficult to recall childhood rhymes with accuracy (Opie & Opie, 1959, p. xxiii; Opie, 1988, p. 213; cf. Opie, 2014). They decided

to collect children's folklore directly from children, in their own words and on a national scale, either by direct communication or through informal questionnaires that suggested topics and invited opinions rather than requiring answers of 'Yes' or 'No' or lists, or descriptions of named games (which might not be known under that name locally). (Opie 1989, p. 60)

In 1951, the same year as the ODNR appeared, the Opies wrote a letter to the Sunday Times asking the public for assistance in documenting children's folklore. It yielded 151 responses and from this beginning they came to establish a nationwide network of correspondents, including many teachers in both primary and secondary schools (Opie 2001, p. x; Opie, this volume). Through them, the Opies distributed a series of questionnaires designed to elicit written descriptions from children about their everyday practices in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the contemporary play, language, customs and beliefs of school-aged children in Britain.

Surveys had become a widely used approach even before the Second World War (Bulmer, Bales & Sklar, 1991). In particular, questionnaires were among the tools of the Irish Folklore Commission, founded in 1935 (Almqvist, 1977–79), and Mass Observation, established in 1937 to study 'the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain' and create an 'anthropology of ourselves' (www.massobs.org.uk/original_massobservation_project.htm). Among those undertaken in the post-war era (Davis, 2009) was the Survey of English Dialects (1950-1961), led by Harold Orton at the University of Leeds (Orton, 1962–1971). From the Opies' perspective, this method allowed the breadth of geographical coverage that they needed, added to which audio recording technology was cumbersome and mostly confined to the recording and broadcasting industries in the 1950s. As we shall see, the portability and availability of devices increased during the 1960s with the invention of the compact cassette, leading to consumer use, and Iona was to use sound recording in the 1970s for their volume, *The singing game*.

The Opies' first questionnaire (Figure 1) evidences their interest in 'oral lore', the chants, rhymes and terminology of games, verbal play such as jokes, and children's informal language more generally. Questions relating to games and crazes are included, including skipping, ball bouncing, singing and ring games, and current games and crazes, but these questions are fewer in number. While this undoubtedly reflects the way in which the Opies had come to the study of children's play, it is also evidence of the point that they later noted in the preface to *The lore and language of schoolchildren*: 'one of the difficulties in making the present study has been that, since this work has no true predecessor, we had first to find out what there was to find out, before we knew whether there existed a subject to study' (1959, p. xxi). The second, 'supplementary' 'Oral Lore of School-Children II' questionnaire, for example, responds to the materials that they had received from the first questionnaire, explaining that 'the extent and intricacy of the lore current among school children has been shown to be considerably greater than expected' and presenting further questions under three main headings, namely 'Games', 'Customs and Beliefs' and 'Words and Sayings'. At least one further version of the questionnaire, and the handwritten 'extra suggestions' noted on

them, their open-ended questions, and suggestions for essays in which ‘children in a class are allowed to choose whichever subject they like’ bespeak an inclusive approach that goes beyond play to children’s folklore, especially their oral culture, more generally. They also stress their interest in its transmission, distribution, age, origins and ‘implications’ for individual children themselves.

The first survey carried out by the Opies in the 1950s drew contributions from some five thousand children. They came from seventy state schools in various parts of England, Scotland and Wales, plus one school in Dublin (Opie & Opie, 1959, pp. xxv-xxvi). These comprised both primary and secondary schools (including grammar schools and secondary moderns), schools with large and small pupil populations, long-established and new schools, and schools in rural and urban locations. They also included a number of church schools and bilingual (Welsh-English) schools.

The Opies regarded children aged between 7 and 11, particularly 8- and 9-year-olds, as being ‘most in possession of the lore’ (Opie 2001, p. x) but in practice the age range of the contributing children was 6-14 years (Opie & Opie, 1959, p. xxi). The Opies asked teachers not to ‘correct’ the children’s writing and stressed that they were interested in receiving all contributions, however slight they may appear.

The questionnaires resulted in a steady flow of information and it became clear that the Opies’ next publication would be equal in scale to the ODNR. Indeed, as this volume took shape, they realised that it would need to focus on the lore and language materials, with the games being discussed in a separate volume. Likewise, as they worked on the games publication, it became clear that further volumes would be needed to cover the singing games and the games that involved equipment. In this way, they always had ‘seedcorn’ with which to begin the next publication, and the subject of each book developed out of the previous one (Opie, 1989, p. 59). This also meant that, even after Peter died, there was still a substantial amount of his writing available to Iona to draw on for the subsequent volumes of their books (Opie & Opie, 1997a, p. 6).

The sheer amount of information that they were acquiring was daunting, and the regimented and puritanical regime that had come to characterise their lives continued (Opie, 1988, pp. 213-216; 1989, pp. 57-59; Opie, 2014). Iona’s contribution tended to be in terms of archiving, rough drafting, and sounding board, and Peter’s was as the lead writer. Each undertook library research and correspondence (Opie, 1988, p. 214; 1989, p. 57). Iona would compile the information relating to a particular game, linguistic item, practice, or belief. In the days before photocopiers, never mind computers, this involved either cutting out or, more usually, copying out items from the survey responses and placing them in the relevant sheet file. These were supplemented with further information on the same topic from other sources, such as related examples from the collections of others, clippings from newspapers and magazines, copies of relevant secondary literature and bibliography. This material would be sorted and analysed in order to come up with ‘increasingly differentiated categories’ (Opie, 1989, p. 60). The work was crucial to keeping physical and intellectual control of the material. As Iona has commented, ‘we have no memories, we only have filing systems’ (Cott, 1983, p. 282).

Once the information was compiled and the chronological ordering and preliminary analysis undertaken, Peter wrote it up, a process that could take days or weeks (Opie, 1989, p. 57). Iona then wrote comments on the draft. ‘Only after he had considered all my suggestions and objections and had adjusted the piece accordingly,’ she says, ‘did we discuss it face to face which meant, in fact, resolving those points on which we did not agree’ (1989, p. 57). In Peter’s characterisation of the process,

I'm the one who sits and stews ... and Iona is the one who does the 'action,' so to speak: She collects, records, and then says that I've got it all wrong when I've written it down. It never occurred to me that I would marry someone whom I *wouldn't* work with. The work is more important than the part either one of us plays in it. And the breakthrough comes when you don't mind the other person criticizing what you're doing. (Cott, 1983, p. 252)

To judge from this, the authorial 'voice' of their published works is largely that of Peter, but the substance is very much a synthesis of their individual views of their material, borne of their close engagement with it, meticulous attention to detail, and their debate as to how to interpret it (Opie, 1989, p. 57).⁶ In practice, the distinction is harder to make since these debates could come down to 'shared struggles to get a sentence exactly right' (Opie, 1988, p. 215). Their collaboration, then, extends to the crafting of their volumes. As Iona asserts, they were 'truly two-handed compilations' (1989, p. 57).

It was arduous work spread over many years, and there were times when they wondered whether their work would somehow prove damaging to the living culture they were seeking to document (Courtney, 1989). During this time they supported and encouraged each other with humour and banter (Opie, 1989, p. 58). They improvised playful practices to lighten aspects of the work, such as proofreading (Opie, 1989, p. 58), and adopted songs and slogans to keep them going (Opie, 1989, p. 61; Courtney, 1989). Another source of sustenance was through corresponding with their many contributors.⁷ Each had their particular correspondents (Opie, 1989, p. 57) who 'became our friends (for we had no social life). Even though we never met them, we got to know them well' (Opie, 1988, p. 213). The degree of personal interest maintained in the correspondence between Iona and the contributors and fellow researchers who got in touch is illustrated in a number of the memoirs in the present issue, and highlighted in the acknowledgements to the books, discussed by Factor in this special issue (2014). As Barnes (2014) and Curtis (2014) note in particular, Iona had the personal touch, often providing feedback on their correspondents' contribution and making them feel valued as a participant in the largescale project.

Each book took them around seven years to complete (Opie, 1989, p. 58). The first to appear was *The lore and language of schoolchildren in 1959*, the same year as Brian Sutton-Smith's *The games of New Zealand children* (1959), based on his doctoral thesis on children's games in his native New Zealand. Peter Opie had in fact met Sutton-Smith in the early 1950s when Sutton-Smith had been invited to present a lecture to the Folklore Society (Marsh and Bishop, 2014, pp. 19-20; Factor, 2014). They clearly had a memorable discussion about children's games though the extent of any influence by Sutton-Smith on the direction of the Opies' researches is not clear (see Factor, 2014).

The number of schoolchildren who contributed to their surveys gradually increased, a further five thousand being counted among those who contributed to the next volume, *Children's games in street and playground* (1969). Iona later stated that they had a cumulative total of approximately twenty thousand respondents to their surveys (Opie, 2001, p. xi). Over the years, and especially for the volume that became *The singing game* (1985), they also expanded their collecting methods to include audio recording (Jopson, Burn & Robinson, 2014). Using 'a 12-guinea tape-recorder from Selfridges, with 3-inch tapes' (Opie, 2011), Iona travelled around the country by car recording children performing songs and singing games, and talking about their play:

It was only when we failed to find a contact in some corner of Great Britain, or in some offshore island, that I went off on an expedition with a tape recorder: to Cape Wrath in the left-hand top corner of Scotland, to the Land's

End in Cornwall, to the westerly tip of Wales, and to the Isle of Wight. For the last [sic] of our books on school lore, *The Singing Game*, I also made special forays into the places where the older lore flourishes best, the depths of the cities; and there I found games, like ‘There comes a Jew a-riding,’ which were believed to have quite died out. (Opie, 1988, p. 213)

Iona enjoyed talking to the children and found this kind of research much more conducive (Courtney, 1989). The papers at the Bodleian Libraries contain her transcriptions of the recordings. She sometimes made these expeditions in the company of another researcher into children’s play, such as the Norwegian scholar Berit Østberg, and the Jesuit priest, Father Damian Webb, whose photographs feature in several of the Opies’ books (Jopson, Burn & Robinson, 2014).⁸

Motivated by the thought that it would be good to stay in touch with children following the publication of *The lore and language of schoolchildren* in 1959, Iona also began to undertake observation in the playground of her local junior school, in Liss, Hampshire, in 1960 (1993, p. vii). From 1970-1983, she visited weekly, noting down what she saw, heard or was told during ‘the fifteen eventful minutes of playtime’. A sequence of these observations was later published in a solo volume by Iona, entitled *The people in the playground* (1993).

It is clear that, as their own children grew up and she became more experienced, Iona’s confidence had greatly increased (Cott, 1993, p. 280). By contrast, in the early 1980s, Peter’s strength began to decline. The doctors could find no specific cause and Peter struggled on working, though becoming increasingly irritable (Opie 1988, p. 216). He died of a heart attack on 5 February 1982, aged 63. Iona felt ‘total loss’. She describes herself as grieving ‘in the most energetic way’ and, for several years following his death, lived her life ‘on auto-pilot’ (Courtney, 1989). Nevertheless, she continued her visits to the playground during this time, finding the vitality of the children there a comfort. At the time of Peter’s death, she had been working with him on two books, *The Oxford book of narrative verse* and *The singing game*. Despite her grief, she completed them and they were published in the 1983 and 1985 respectively. Following this, she began to feel more herself again, and the more spontaneous and whimsical side of her personality re-emerged, unfettered by the strict routine, iron discipline and high expectations of Peter (Courtney, 1989).

Up to this date, their joint publications had been hugely successful and, despite Peter’s premature death, recognition of their achievements continued in the form of further honours:

- 1987 Hon MA Open University
- 1991 Hon DLitt. University of Nottingham
- 1997 Hon D.Univ. University of Surrey (Roehampton)
- 1998 Commander of the British Empire for services to the study of children’s literature and childhood
- 1998 Fellow of the British Academy.

Peter had planned another twenty years’ worth of writing and publication, however (Cott, 1983, p. 277), and, at the very point where Iona might reasonably have felt that she had fulfilled her obligation to their joint enterprise, she forged on, assuming responsibility for it all. A spate of publications followed, including *A dictionary of superstitions* (1989, with Moria Tatem),⁹ *A treasury of childhood* (1989, with Robert Opie and Brian Alderson), *The people in the playground* (1993), *Children’s games with things* (1997a), and a revised edition of the ODNR (1997b). As Iona observes in the preface to *Children’s games with things*, ‘here

is, probably, the final book by “Iona and Peter Opie”, for it is the last book that will contain a substantial amount of Peter’s writing on children’s lore’ (1997a, p. vi). Gillian Avery has quoted Iona’s feelings of relief to have reached this point, and gives her own estimation of their work:

The end of the journey brought euphoria. ‘Oh it is such a relief to have finished,’ she wrote to me in December 1997, ‘and to be freed from the wheel at last ... No more books, hurray, hurray! I can settle down with my orchard-full of ducks and geese and bantams, and a few little schemes of [a] mildly literary nature that I have had in mind for some while.’ Nevertheless, it had been one of the most successful literary collaborations of all time, one that can be compared to the Brothers Grimm in both execution and achievement. (1999, p. 297)

Iona reached the age of 74 in 1997, and had devoted 53 years of her life to folklore studies, particularly the study of children’s folklore. It was from this vantage point that she gave the inaugural address, ‘A lifetime in the playground’, to the ‘State of Play’ conference at the University of Sheffield, the following year, the transcript of which is included in the current special issue (Opie, 2014).¹⁰ Since then, Iona has retained an interest in the childhood research of others, and continues to live in Hampshire.

II Legacies

Publications

The first of the Opies’ books on children’s play, *The lore and language of schoolchildren* (1959), is concerned with children’s oral culture of rhymes and speech, customs and beliefs. It uncovers a whole raft of children’s verbal play forms, including riddles, jokes, epithets, and jeers, as well as the language associated with play, such as truce terms. As noted above, the age of the Opies’ respondents ranges from 6-14, thus including adolescents, not only primary school children as is often assumed. Lill (2014) rightly highlights that in general there has been far less attention to the play of young teens (cf. Roud, 2010, pp. xii-xiii). It is worth recalling that the Opies began their surveys during the decade that saw the invention of the notion of adolescence and the rise of teenage popular culture.

Scholarly reactions to *The lore and language of schoolchildren* saw it as an exhaustive, pioneering, insightful and classic study (Hobbs & Cornwell, 1991, p. 178). There were also criticisms that the book does not dwell on the actual usage of items or wider socio-cultural context in which they occur (cf. Grugeon, 1988; Reedy, 2014). Hobbs and Cornwell comment that ‘the failure to study individual communities in depth or the history of individual rhymes in depth are, of course, deficiencies which, if dealt with, would have transformed the character of the book’ (1991, p. 178). This was also recognised by Basil Bernstein, who observed in his review of the book, ‘It would have been of great sociological interest if the material had been organized along sex, age and class lines but this was not the intention of the authors’ (1960/1977, p.179).¹¹

One is, then, bound to ask, what was ‘the intention of the authors’? The Opies identified themselves as folklorists and heirs to the earlier antiquarian, literary and mythological scholarship in their chosen subject area. They employed a range of research methods which they saw as complementary in their endeavour to build up a corpus of qualitative information relating to childhoods, traditions and play (Cott, 1983, p. 251)

During the time of their field research in c.1950-1980, folklore studies became established in universities in North America, and also in a handful of universities in Britain and Ireland, and scholarly approaches to the subject were changing (Bishop & Curtis, 2001,

pp. 3-8). The Opies worked outside of higher education and had no formal training, but their conceptualisation of tradition anticipates the dynamic view of ‘the folklore process’ (Toelken, 1996, pp. 19-30):

In the past, and more or less to the present day ... people have thought of folklore as relics or vestiges of the past, and that to study folklore in the present is a way of learning about the past, that there are a finite number of things which can be found, and that they are deteriorating as they come, and fast disappearing. Now, our approach to this is almost exactly the opposite: We believe that folklore is a living force that comes along through the ages, and it’s changing – sometimes there is more of it, sometimes less. (Cott, 1983, pp. 296-297)

The Opies’ work represents, like many modern folklore studies, a combination of both synchronic and diachronic approaches. On the one hand, they wished to ‘leave a picture, for future generations, of how the children of today amuse themselves in their own free time’ (Opie, 2001, p. xiii). At the same time, they were interested in continuity and change as it occurred in texts, forms, behaviours and popularity of games. This encouraged a comparative approach, between past times and the present, and between one geographical location or area and another. Each of their books on schoolchildren’s traditions, language and play reflects these approaches. Thus, *The lore and language of schoolchildren* is ‘solely concerned with the contemporary schoolchild, and wherever possible his story is told in his own words ... Historical annotation and comparative material has largely been relegated to the footnotes, or to paragraphs following the sign * *’ (1959, p. xv). As well as mapping the field, the Opies’ historical documentation enables the reader to view the games as ‘living organisms which are constantly evolving, adapting to new situations, and renewing themselves or being replaced’ (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. vii).

The Opies’ next book based on their childlore surveys was *Children’s games in street and playground* (1969) which won the Chicago Folklore Prize. It names 2,500 games in its index, and these are divided into twelve basic types, each then arranged according to the basic motif of individual games (Cott, 1983, p. 255), as discussed by Beresin in this volume (2014). A notable feature of the volume is its inclusion of games of risk. These include the Knife Game (1969, pp.), which is also discussed by Lill (2014), and Chicken, which can take many forms, and is exemplified in the contemporaneous film, *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), as a game of near-collision played in cars and was documented by the Opies as played on bicycles (Opie & Opie, 1969, pp. 270-272).

Children’s games in street and playground was reviewed by the anthropologist Edmund Leach:

The earlier book [*The lore and language of schoolchildren*] still stayed within the conventions of orthodox folklore studies. The emphasis was on the surprising perpetuation of children’s rhymes down the centuries, the plotting of distributions, the tracing of origins . . . But now they have become anthropologists: they have come to realise that it is not so much the games that are interesting as the children who play them, so the emphasis has partly shifted towards a record of the child’s astonishing ‘natural’ capacity for organisation and rule-making and learning and teaching. (Quoted in Cott, 1983, p. 254)

Of particular note is the outspoken way in which the Opies write about space, environments and play (1969, pp. 10-12). They consider differences in play in a restricted environment, for example: ‘We have noticed that when children are herded together in the playground, which is where the educationalists and the psychologists and the social scientists gather to observe them, their play is markedly more aggressive than when they are in the street or in the wild places’ (1969, p. 14). They conclude, ‘in our continual search for efficient units of educational administration we have overlooked that the most precious gift we can give the young is social space: the necessary space – or privacy – in which to become human beings’ (p.14). Similarly, ‘in the long run, nothing extinguishes self-organized play more effectively than does action to promote it’ and ‘those people are happiest who can most rely on their own resources’ (p. 16). Some years later, Colin Ward, the anarchist and architect, cites much of this discussion with obvious approval (1990, pp. 73-76, 83-84).

The singing game (1985) won the 1986 Katharine Briggs Folklore Award. As one reviewer pointed out:

The Singing Game, like the rest of the Opies’ childlore studies, is imbued with an affection and respect for children and their culture. Its lack of patronisation and acceptance of the values of children – an outstanding characteristic of the Opies’ writing – remains an object lesson to all researchers in the field ... [It] represents a fitting tribute to the work of a partnership which renewed, enlivened and – in the best sense – popularised, English folkloristics. (Boyes, 1988, p. 136)

It contains 474 singing games, some with venerable histories, others drawing on film and popular music of one or more generations previously, and others newly composed or adapted to contemporary popular song. While some forms are seen as waning at the time of their research, others are becoming more popular, including clapping games, ‘the most zestful, speedy, and energetic of the singing games, and, in the modern phrase, one of the chief growth areas’ (Opie & Opie, 1985, p. 446).

The People in the Playground (1993) was Iona’s solo volume, based on her playground observations at Liss Junior School. It contains some interesting observations on the role she adopted as an observer and how she explained it to the children. She states, for example, ‘I sort of moon about, I’m a sort of typical village idiot, really ... I have to get the children to explain. And they love explaining, they know more than I do. Playtime is the one time when children are the “superiors”’ (1993, p. 245).

As discussed by Giddings (2014) and others, the Opies saw children as human beings. Iona explains:

Adults sometimes ask us why we use the word ‘people’ in our books on children’s games, ‘You need six people to play a game,’ for example. But that’s what they themselves say. We never like to make fun of children, because this isn’t what we’d want to have done to us. So if a child makes a mistake in saying a word, we would never print it that way; but if it’s his ordinary way of talkin[g], that’s fair enough, that’s the right way of saying things’. (1993, pp. 245-246)

Richards and Burns conclude that Iona’s book represents ‘an extended rhetorical claim about children-as-people, their status as interpreters of their own social worlds and the pre-eminence of speech in their lives (Richards and Burns, 2013, p. 211). Another interesting aspect of the book is the degree to which Iona was able to include language that in the past would have been considered inappropriate for publication (Opie, 2014).

The final games book was published in 1997. It covers marbles, fivestone, throwing and catching, gambling, hopscotch, chucking and pitching, ball-bouncing, skipping, tops and tipcat. It also describes seasonal play and contains an extended section discussing the perennial idea that children's play is dying out, characteristically placing it in historical context and showing just what a long-lived meme it has been.

The Opie archival collection

The materials amassed by the Opies form an archival collection now distributed between the Bodleian Libraries (University of Oxford), the Folklore Society Archives (London) and the British Library (London). The Bodleian holdings are known as the Opie Working Papers and comprise 247 boxes (Jopson, 2011; Bishop, 2013). They contain most of the children's language, games and play material as well as other aspects of the Opies' research and personal lives. The papers are currently arranged as follows:

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|----------|---|
| Series 1 | Children's papers and correspondence between the Opies and teachers (38 boxes) |
| Series 2 | Publications materials (31 boxes) |
| Series 3 | Correspondence with colleagues/contributors (16 boxes) and personal letters/diaries/private albums (65 boxes) ¹² |
| Series 4 | Opie sheet files (97 boxes). ¹³ |

Of the approximately 250,000 pages in the Opie Working Papers, an estimated 114,000 contain research materials relating to children's play and traditions.¹⁴

Preliminary research into the Opies' archival collection suggests that it is an essential complement to their publications, adding new and more detailed information for the study of transmission and variation of particular items of children's folklore. It includes drawings, many more examples and variations of the games and rhymes featured in the books, further games and rhymes not discussed in the books – including items which were received, or became more significant, after the publication of the book to which they related (e.g. Bishop, 2010), and bawdy items which could not be printed at the time (Boyes, 1995) – and information relating to other aspects of childhood and examples of children's creative writing. The collection also sheds further light on the Opies' methods of working, and contains letters from many supporters and contributors to their work over a period of many years (as mentioned in Factor, 2014, and Barnes, 2014).¹⁵

Sixty years on, the ethnographic information in the collection has acquired historical significance which throws into sharp relief some of the changes in childhoods which have taken place in the intervening time (cf. Marsh and Bishop, 2014). Those who contributed to it as children are now aged roughly 50 to 70. It is therefore still feasible to try and trace them, and the schools they attended, a number of which are still in existence, in order to discover more about their identities, and the demographics of their local communities at the time. In particular, there is little in the collection regarding social class and ethnicity. It is not possible to tell from the collection the degree to which the schools who took part were multicultural, and to what extent the child contributors were representative of, for example, immigrant populations to Britain during the 1950-80 period.¹⁶ In addition, with the digital technology now at our disposal, there is much scope for searching and reordering the material in different ways, such as that suggested by Bernstein (quoted above).

Conclusions

It is seventy years since Iona and Peter Opie embarked on their epic journey through the folklore of childhood. Peter was not to survive the full journey, but his influence is very much

felt, and his voice present, in the later publications of ‘the Opies’. Together, they took seriously and respectfully, but not humourlessly, the material the children provided, and wove it into a rich and detailed ‘biography’ of childhood in the third quarter of the twentieth century.

To work together as a married couple is to have one’s marriage scrutinised. After Peter died, Iona, too, tried ‘to understand all the circumstances of our life together’ (1988, p. 216). She has written and spoken about this in a candid, but never bitter, manner, and the portrayal of Peter presented here is indebted to these accounts.

It seems clear that, as regards their life’s work, Peter began as the commanding officer (cf. Opie, 1988, p. 210). He was single-minded and focused and, although he had moments of doubt, he ‘had been brought up in the best traditions of the British army: the young lieutenant does not falter before his men’ (Opie, 1988, p. 216). Nevertheless, his approach, and the close involvement of Iona in helping to execute it, fundamentally affected their lives, and those of their children. There is a story of sacrifice behind their research and their books, especially in the early years when the children were young and their income less assured. There is also the feeling of regret that Peter never reached the point where he could enjoy his success, that the everyday struggles loomed larger for him than the immensity of his achievement, in partnership with Iona:

He wanted to ‘To Be a Success’ and he was a success. We accomplished what we set out to do. Yet our days were filled with failures. We failed to find quotations we needed; we failed to express an idea clearly and had to start again. When successes came, they seemed to be only intermissions of failure. (Opie, 1988, p. 216)

In Iona’s estimation, ‘in everything he did, he tried his utmost. He had a strong will, and unlimited enthusiasm: in the end they broke his never-very-strong body’ (Cott, 1983, p. 300).

They never broke Iona, though. Whether or not their life’s work was Iona’s ambition, or Iona’s preference, it is equally hers. She struggled with it, persisted with it, mastered it, and realized it:

After these early domestic and maternal years – climbing the glass mountain and the trials – I found that I’d done my training: I had learned how to do research and produce books, and I was able to take over a lot of the work. So when Peter was feeling a little bit weary with the subject, I came into it, thinking, Now is my chance, now I can have the job I always wanted! And with my new enthusiasm, I sort of rushed in and made a new wave ... Peter’s the writer, but I can take a game and rough-shape it’ (Cott, 1983, p. 280)

Few research teams, and indeed many marriages, do not survive for forty years, particularly in the face of the pressures that were faced by these two pioneers.

After Peter died, Iona took on the remaining legacy, a remarkable act of determination, courage and loyalty. She expresses this in typically pragmatic terms, saying that she felt she had inherited the ‘family firm’ and had to finish writing (Courtney, 1989). She also collaborated with others and published her own solo work as well. In all this, she took care not to eclipse Peter and stressed their shared vision. The work had become her identity too. She was one half of ‘the Opies’ whose books were read, admired, studied, and loved. In completing their joint work, she has brought out about Peter’s ‘success’, as well as her own, despite her lack of ambition in this regard.

Throughout, Iona helped to sustain herself through the ‘company’ of other authors, her correspondence with contributors, her appreciation of the ‘battiness’ of children

(Courtney, 1989), and her sense of humour. She has never lost her generosity of spirit. She may have been a ‘plodder’, as she called herself, but her doggedness paid off. She has somehow been able, in the words of a popular song of her youth, to ‘keep right on to the end of the road’ (Courtney, 1989). She emerges as a person of heart, humour, and humanity.

Scholarly perspectives come and go, and have certainly done so since the Opies began their work. Yet, their publications have survived as classics, and continue to have relevance well beyond their original aims. This is even more the case with the archival collection whose value as ‘longitudinal data’ has yet to be fully explored. The collection represents not only the legacy of the Opies, but also ‘the people in the playground’ (and the street), and the ‘army’ of teachers and other adult correspondents who contributed to it.

Some years ago, Hobbs and Cornwell contended that

the Opies did not convey any sense of where research might go from the point to which they had taken it. They do not seem to have seen themselves as addressing other workers in the field; perhaps they felt there were none. [The lore and language of schoolchildren] is addressed by specialists to a lay audience. (1991, pp. 178-179)

They cite as evidence of this the fact that the Opies did not publish their questionnaires, as was also noted by Legman at the time (1991, p. 179). When these, and indeed all of the Opies’ archival collection, become available in digital and searchable form, however, all students of childhood, and of play, will inherit ‘the family firm’ and be able to use it for their own research purposes. That they can understand the circumstances in which it was created is Iona’s additional gift.

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¹ The Opies’ scholarship also covered adult traditions of custom, belief and folktales, and folklore methods (e.g. Opie & Opie 1974; Opie & Tatem, 1989; Opie, 1953, 1954, 1957, 1963, 1964).

² Curtis (2014) reflects on the social distance between Iona Opie’s schooling and her own.

³ As discussed below, the Mass Observation study, which had been established in 1937, was conceived in similar terms.

⁴ The Opie Collection of Children’s Literature contains 20,000 titles including books of stories and nursery rhymes, chapbooks, comics and magazines, and educational texts such as primers and alphabets. For more details of the collection, see http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/finding-resources/special/catalogues/opie_collection_of_childrens_literature and http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/finding-resources/special/catalogues/rare_books_named_collections/rare_books_named_collection_descriptions.

⁵ For more information about the formation and development of folklore studies in England, see Nicolaisen, 1995; Bennett, 1994, 1996; Roper, 2007.

⁶ These debates were sometimes mediated by their assistant, Doreen Gullen (Opie, 1989, p. 57).

⁷ They likewise identified with other authors and previous scholars in their field, Iona commenting ‘Most of our friends we’ve never met. They’re either dead long ago or we’ve been writing to them but haven’t met them’ (Opie, 1988, p. 213; cf. Opie, 1989).

⁸ The Opie recordings are now deposited at the British Library where they form the ‘The Opie Collection of Children’s Games and Songs’ (shelfmark C898). Damian Webb’s collection is deposited at the Pitt Rivers Museum (for the photographs, see <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/photocollection.html>, and for the sound recordings, see <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/reel2real/index.php/collections-webb.html>).

⁹ This was a contribution to Peter’s vision of a ‘dictionary, arranged on historical principles, of English traditional lore’ (Opie, 1964; cf. Opie, 1989, p. 59).

¹⁰ A recording of the talk can be accessed at <http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/opies-biography.html>.

¹¹ The plans to digitise and catalogue the collection, detailed in note 13, would in fact allow the collection materials to be ordered by these very variables.

¹² Peter Opie’s diaries are embargoed until the death of the individuals that feature in them.

¹³ The Folklore Society Archives holds a further 24 boxes of the Opies’ papers, consisting of research materials on weatherlore, superstitions, research materials on calendar customs, research materials on calendar customs, beliefs, children’s games, index of counting out rhymes, personal papers and Folklore Society correspondence.

¹⁴ A project entitled ‘Childhoods and Play: An Archive’ is currently seeking funding to digitise and catalogue the Opies’ research papers and, subject to the necessary permission, to make them freely available online for academic, educational and community purposes. The project has been granted British Academy Research Project status (2012–2017) and is a collaboration between the University of Sheffield, the University of London Institute of Education, the Bodleian Libraries, the British Library and the Folklore Society. Further information is available on the project website (see <http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/>).

¹⁵ It would make an interesting supplement to the collection to gather as many as possible of the Opies’ letters to correspondents in the collection.

¹⁶ The Opies mention ‘a young coloured boy from Notting Hill’ (1969, p. ?), but the visibility of ethnic communities is generally almost completely absent in their publications.