

# From 'breathless catalogue' to 'beyond text' A Hundred Years of Children's Folklore Collecting

Katharine Briggs Lecture, 2015

Presented 18 November 2015, Warburg Institute, London

**Julia C. Bishop**

Dr Julia C Bishop

[J.C.Bishop@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:J.C.Bishop@sheffield.ac.uk)

70 Broughton Road, Sheffield S6 2AS

Julia Bishop is a Research Associate at the University of Sheffield where she studies children's play, past and present. Recent publications include a special issue of the *International Journal of Play*, co-edited with June Factor, on Iona and Peter Opie's contribution to the study of play (2014), and the book, co-authored with Jackie Marsh, *Changing Play: Play, Media and Commercial Culture from the 1950s to the Present Day* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2014).

## **Abstract**

In light of recent concerns about the emotional, mental and physical well-being of children, the lecture draws attention to research into children's folklore in Britain from the last century, stressing its potential to inform understandings of contemporary childhoods, particularly children's play. The emphasis is on the evidence to be found in archival sources, such as the collections of Norman Douglas (1868–1952), James Ritchie (1908–1998), and Iona (1923–) and Peter Opie (1918–1982). The changing nature of contemporary evidence, such as films featuring games and play uploaded by children and young people to video-sharing sites such as YouTube, is also illustrated, and the importance of a multimodal approach to audio-visual sources is stressed. The author compares the historical sources to the collectors' published work, and highlights the need for rigour in appraising these differing forms of evidence.

## ***Introduction***

I feel extremely honoured to be giving the 2015 Katharine Briggs lecture. While Briggs is, of course, principally known for her work on folktales, she was also keenly interested in children and childhood which are our focus tonight. Amongst the materials she collected were singing games (gathered with Mrs Cowan Douglas), published as *Traditional Singing Games from Scotland and the Border* (Douglas 1933).

Katharine Briggs was also intrigued by a game played by Glasgow evacuee children during the Second World War. It involved acting out the ballad ‘The Bonny Banks of Airdrie’ (Child 14, Roud 27):

At the beginning of the war some children evacuated to our house from the Gallowgate of Glasgow taught us the following version of the old ballad of Babylon. When they first came to us these children seemed to know nothing but music-hall songs, and to care for nothing but tap dancing; but after a little while they began to recall traditional songs and games, of which we found this the most interesting. It was played as a rule grouped round one of the outside stairs. The chorus stood on the steps and four children acted it. The tune was clearly a folk tune, and apparently of some antiquity. It is interesting to see how, ‘Turned her round and made her stand’ has become, ‘Turned her round till she could not stand.’ At this point the wicked brother spun the sister round and round under his hand till she fell to the ground. I found later this game was also well known in Edinburgh, and have lately collected a very similar version from there. It is possible that many more ballads may have been used as games or short plays; but this is the most complete example I have come across. (Briggs 1946)<sup>1</sup>

We will return to this rich description later on.

This evening is something of a whistle-stop tour of a hundred years – or thereabouts – of children’s folklore collecting, with particular reference to children’s play. It will take us from the ‘breathless catalogue’ of Norman Douglas’s *London Street Games*, first published in 1916, through the ‘modest, unsponsored, and wholly voluntary survey’ of Iona and Peter Opie at mid-century, to ‘beyond text’ – a consideration of the multimodal nature of play, and contemporary children’s practices of ‘curating the self’.

The hundred-year focus is not to dismiss the groundwork laid by those in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who helped to establish children’s folklore as a serious field of study (Marsh and Bishop 2014, 12–31). Principal among these was, of course, Alice Gomme (1894, 1898), whose achievements as a female folklorist and a pioneer of children’s folklore research have been ably described by Georgina Boyes (1990, 2000, 2001; cf. Roud

2014). Rather, we pick up where Boyes' study leaves off, to continue the story into the twentieth century and beyond, to our own times. This really warrants a book-length work, so we will not be able to stop and swing on every lamp-post this evening. In particular, I regretfully omit consideration of collections of singing games from the early to mid twentieth century (e.g. Gillington 1909a, 1909b, 1909c, 1913; Gomme and Sharp 1909–1912; [Gilchrist and Broadwood] 1915; Kidson 1916; James Madison Carpenter Collection Online Catalogue 2003–08).<sup>2</sup>

Our attention is first and foremost on the collecting – and the nature of the sources it has produced. Who were the collectors and what do we know of their motivations and methods? What kinds of documents did they produce and what content do they preserve? Who are the people represented in these collections and how are they represented? Who – and what – is omitted? In what socio-cultural contexts were these sources produced? And how do they relate to each other and to other sources of relevance to childhood? I want to argue that what we know about children's folklore is largely based on published studies and that we have not sufficiently considered the archival collections on which these are based. I believe that it is important to do so, not least because many of them are concerned with children's play of one kind or another, and they are taking on a new relevance in contemporary times.

Perennial concerns about a perceived decline in childhood presuppose the viewing of childhood from a historical point of view. In our recent book, *Changing Play*, Jackie Marsh and I consider continuities and change in childhood play emerging in the period between 1950/60 and the present day, as evidenced in fieldwork from several different studies, in order to suggest a more nuanced view, especially in relation to the influence of media and commerce (2014). Just last month, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood published a report that highlights issues around the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people in today's world (UK Parliament 2015). Among other things, the research presented invokes perceptions of change in children's play over time, particularly relating to the reduction in outdoor play and a lack of free, self-directed play opportunities and risk-taking. It links these trends to the rise in mental health and behavioural problems among young people:

Children who do not have the opportunity to control their own actions, to make and follow through on their own decisions, to solve their own problems, and to learn how to follow rules in the course of play, grow up feeling that they are not in control of their own lives and fate. They grow up feeling that they are dependent upon luck and

on the goodwill and whims of others, a frightening feeling indeed when one realises that luck goes both ways and that others are not always dependable. (Gray 2011, quoted in UK Parliament 2015, 26)

It is vital, then, that we identify and critically examine the historical evidence of childhood play, and the perceptions of children and childhood on which they are contingent, in order to ensure valid comparisons between the present and the past, and to inform judgements as to cause and effect.

Not only do children's folklore collections contain some of this evidence, but the last hundred years has seen an exponential increase in the documentation of children's folklore. Only some of this has been published. The task of making this evidence available, and subjecting it to source criticism, has only just begun. It is to some of the collections made in Britain that we now turn.

### *Norman Douglas's 'Breathless Catalogue'*

In July 1916, 48-year-old Norman Douglas (1868–1952), at that time a relatively unknown travel writer, published a book entitled *London Street Games*. Cast in the form of an imagined conversation with the reader, Douglas surveys both games and verses of children playing in the street. The opening paragraphs give the flavour:

There's not much for *us* to do, down our way – in the way of sports, I mean. Nothing at all, in fact. When we come home from work we generally go straight indoors and have a laydown, and a cup of tea and a pipe; or else we go out and watch a match somewhere. There's always the "Three Swans", of course. . . .

But the youngsters get on all right – seem to, at all events. Some of them have got bats and stumps or footballs, and off they go into the park; and some of the girls have got shuttlecocks, and off *they* go. But most of them haven't, you know; so they just lark about where they are. PAPERCHASE and ROUNDERS, for instance; you know those? They're plain sailing. But some of these games, like EGG-IN-CAP (also called EGGET), are rather complicated; and as to MONDAY-TUESDAY (or NUMBERS; another kind of egg-in-cap) – it would take me till next Saturday *week* to explain it. Perhaps you can make it out from this description:

"After clipping the throer calls out the name of the day in the weke and the chap whats taken that day has to catch if he misses it they all run away and shout no Egg if I move – becose if they dont the throer can say a egg if you move – & that helps to make the quantity of the Eggs....[etc.]"

Now you know how it's done. (1916, 1–3)

The book had its origins in ‘a little Cockney study’ (1931, ix) which Douglas published in 1913 as an article, entitled ‘In Our Alley’, in *English Review*, of which he was an assistant editor (Karl 1971/1972). Expanded into book form, under the title *London Street Games*, it was turned down by several publishers as unprofitable, eventually being published through the help of Sir Lees Knowles, a Conservative MP, military historian and barrister, who financed this and other books by Douglas (Holloway 1976, 224). It is to him that the 1916 edition, dubbed ‘this breathless catalogue’, is dedicated.

The book is only a catalogue in the general sense. Its 162 pages (1916 edition) mention roughly 950 games and verses or songs but there is no attempt at formal systemisation. Every so often the game is described in more detail, usually with a quotation from one of the players, as above, or sometimes in a summary of Douglas’s own. The verses of game songs and rhymes are more often quoted in full, but sometimes just the opening couplet is given. In total, about sixty games are described in this way and 140 verses quoted in full or in part, leaving 750 items referred to by name only.

Douglas’s rationale for this emerges towards the end of the book, where he states:

It doesn’t matter how all these sports are played. What matters is that they are played. To show how wide-awake our youngsters are, to be able to go on inventing games out of their heads all the time – that’s the point: my point, at least. The particular rules of all these different games – they don’t strike me as very important, or even interesting. (1916, 155–56)

When the book was reprinted in a new edition in 1931, now furnished with a preface, index, and one or two slight changes to the text, Douglas defended his approach further. He claimed that the book was intended as a ‘social document’, rather than ‘an informative treatise’, hence its impromptu recital of games which, in its ‘sense of flurried accumulation’, illustrates the inventiveness of the children (1931, x).

Nonetheless, there is a loose structure to the book. The initial focus is on boys’ games, then games played by girls and boys, followed by girls-only play, games played by younger children, and seasonal games. Douglas repeatedly emphasises the way in which children invent games using whatever is to hand, such as boots, buttons, cigarette cards, scraps of metal, and cherry stones, or, indeed, when there is nothing to hand. This process has more recently be conceptualised as a form of ‘bricolage’, the players drawing on whatever personnel and environmental, material and cultural resources are available to them to orchestrate their play, especially resources not intended for such purposes (Lichman 2001; Willett 2015).

Douglas came to the conviction that ‘if you want to see what children can do, you must stop giving them things. Because of course they only invent games when they have none ready-made for them, like richer folks have’ (1916, 156). Likewise, he disparages ‘organized games’, such as he has observed in parks, county council schooling and the scout movement. He believes that such adult intervention inhibits children’s capacity for, and enjoyment of, play:

The fact is, boys are not left to themselves the way they used to be; everybody goes fussing about and telling them to do this and that, when they want to be doing something else – something of their own; that’s why many games are being forgotten. I don’t know a single boy who really cares for “organized games” the way a man does. (1916, 120–21)

There is a striking parallel here with the views expressed a century later in the All-Party Parliamentary Group report described above.

### **‘The most arduous and exciting sport’: Collecting London Street Games**

More detail as to the research underlying *London Street Games* is revealed in Douglas’s preface to the 1931 edition where it emerges that the book is based on ‘an enormous and fascinating bundle of play-rules written by the children themselves’ (1931, ix). The game descriptions were collected in Finsbury, Hackney, Islington, Whitechapel, Stepney, Limehouse, Poplar, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Deptford, Camberwell, Kennington, Bermondsey, Rotherhithe, and Shadwell, and ‘God knows where else’. Douglas’s biographer, Mark Holloway, quotes sources which supplement the account given by Douglas in *London Street Games* itself. Apparently, Douglas regarded

stalking these shy East-End (and S.E. and N.E.) children, and winning their confidence, [as] the most arduous and exciting sport I had yet undertaken, especially in the case of the boys, who are far more distrustful than the girls. Those of them who could write described the games in their own fashion on scraps of paper...I made them control each other’s descriptions. (1976, 224–25)

Douglas’s son, Robert, recalls that his father took sweets, pennies, and small toys with which to ‘bribe the suspicious urchins to divulge their invented games’ (quoted in Holloway 1976, 225).

This portrayal conjures up the imagery of a safari in which the children are akin to suspicious creatures who need to be approached by stealth and tamed through treats so that they will supply what the collector is seeking. At the same time, the collector thrives on the

challenge of ‘winning them over’ through measures afforded by his greater socio-economic and age status.

All this contrasts sharply with the authorial stance Douglas adopts in the book. There he positions himself as an adult from the same community as the young people whose games he describes, through his references to ‘down our way’, ‘when we come home from work’, and ‘our boys’, for example. As such, he accrues to himself the authority of an insider who has formerly been one of these boys himself, and who knows them and has observed them as an adult. This is counterpointed with the reader’s position which is constructed as that of naïve outsider. Douglas plays on the reader’s presumed curiosity and deliberately mentions games without describing them at all, or only partially explaining them, in order to tantalise the reader and to stress his own superior knowledge. This extends to bawdy and scatological material which Douglas occasionally introduces into the text, only to back away from them moments later, such as ‘Deliver Up Those Golden Jewels’ (or ‘Deliver Up the Black Pudding’) and ‘Touching the King’s Sceptre’ (1916, 22, 23). Though Douglas may claim his ‘breathless catalogue’ style of presentation reflects the children’s inventiveness, therefore, I would argue that it is highly contrived and reflects as much about the egocentric and manipulative posture assumed by its author as it does about children’s street play.

Fortunately, however, the children’s manuscripts are preserved among Douglas’s papers at Yale University Library (Bock 2010). As far as I am aware, they have not been examined by play researchers before. They comprise approximately 430 sheets, some bearing the name of the contributing child, on which are written game descriptions and rhymes, some with illustrations as well. An initial examination of the papers suggests that they contain the descriptions of the 750 items only briefly mentioned in the book, and a number of variants, shedding further light on the history of individual games and rhymes. An example of this is a leapfrog game ‘Four Ways to London’ only mentioned in the book (1916, 25) but described in full in the papers (Figure 1). It is a version of what the Opies later called ‘Spanish Leapfrog’, the name ‘Four Ways to London’ not apparently being known to them (Opie and Opie 1969, 250–51). Another game explained in the papers is the aforementioned ‘Deliver Up Those Golden Jewels’. This involves a trick in which an innocent boy is flattered into being the judge in an imaginary trial but the ‘golden jewels’ he receives from the prisoner turn out to be horse dung which is thrown in his face (see Figure 2).

The manuscripts also show that Douglas’s account of his collecting is highly selective. According to Holloway’s biography, Douglas’s pocket diary suggests that he contacted school teachers, presumably with a view to collecting games descriptions from

their pupils (1976, 225). Douglas is completely silent about this in the book. Yet, there are several indications in the archival collection that this was the case, including letters from school contacts and the fact that many game descriptions include the name of the contributor and their school name. Vauxhall Street School and Albion Street School, Rotherhithe, crop up the most frequently, often in conjunction with girls' names. There are also letters from children themselves, some evidencing they have received a book from Douglas in return for sending game descriptions.

Evidently 'stalking' and 'bribing' reluctant child contributors on the streets of London was only part of Douglas's approach to fieldwork. He enlisted the help of teachers and child collectors too, and in this can be said to have anticipated the methods of the Opies, although he was not the first to do so (see, Nicholson 1897, and the discussion in Marsh and Bishop 2014, 15).

More work needs to be done to discover the identity of Douglas's youthful contributors. Although he refers to 'bigger lads' and younger ones, he does not specify their age beyond the comment that the boys did not play the games over the age of fourteen (1916, 155); neither does their age appear on their written contributions. The standard of writing evidenced in the papers is generally quite high in most cases, a fact which Douglas himself noted (1931, x), and some children were obviously in school. There are also references to better-off children than Douglas's contributors, but a more exact picture of the latter's socio-economic circumstances must await research to trace contributors through official records.

### **Douglas's Motivations**

What prompted Douglas to go the trouble of assembling the materials for *London Street Games* in the first place? He was an aspiring writer of travel literature, such as *Old Calabria* (1915), and novels, one of his most acclaimed works, *South Wind*, being published in 1917, the year after *London Street Games*. Indeed, *London Street Games* is unique among his oeuvre, although he later published a book of limericks (Douglas 1928), many bawdy and scatological, and his travel literature evidences interest in folkloristic topics such as myth and legend, local custom and foodways.

Douglas was not the first to collect and publish the games of lower-class London children and he was certainly aware of other studies. The Douglas papers at Yale contain library call slips for several of Alice Gomme's works, including her nationwide study, *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1894, 1898). This had already included examples of London street play (Boyes 1990, 202). Often criticised for focusing on rural

games and drawing on adults' memories of play, Gomme had explicitly encouraged collecting among children in the capital:

To those of my readers who are interested in London life or in the evolution of town life generally, I can promise considerable enjoyment by a visit to some of the slums and courts where these games are going on; and our reformers may learn a lesson from them, and perhaps see a way out of the dismal forebodings of what is to happen when the bulk of our population have deserted the country for the towns. (1894, 10)

There had been a flurry of articles during the first decade or so of the new century on London children's games (e.g. Pugh 1903; Bradley 1907; Salmon 1910). Significantly, the Douglas papers contain a copy of the Edwin Pugh article, 'Some London Street Amusements'. It is likely that Douglas knew Pugh personally since Pugh, one of the 'Cockney Novelists', had published a number of short stories in the *English Review* (Vogeler 2008, 173).

Both Gomme and Pugh were influential on Douglas's book. This is particularly clear in the case of Gomme who, in the persona of 'Aunt Eliza', is portrayed as a know-it-all pedant whose propensity to explain games, including through survivalist interpretations, Douglas resents, to the point of misogyny:

Then she says that Here we come gathering nuts in May is a relic of Marriage by Capture', and some more stuff of that kind. No doubt; no doubt. Aunt Eliza thinks a good deal about Marriage by Capture – to judge by her talk, at least. Nobody ever tried to capture her, you know. And nobody ever will, I don't think. (1916: 88)

The personal nature of these remarks seems completely gratuitous, and the more ill-judged given that Alice's husband, George Laurence Gomme, had died just five months before *London Street Games* was published (Boyes 2001).

The treatment of 'Aunt Eliza' in *London Street Games* contrasts with Douglas's more sympathetic treatment of a character named 'Mr Perkins', who 'works with the firm of Framlingham Brothers (Limited), a likeable well-spoken gentleman, and he often watches the children playing and sometimes we have a talk about things at the "Three Swans"' (1916, 6). Douglas, as the narrator of *London Street Games*, and Perkins are portrayed as in agreement about which games are waning and why. I suspect that Perkins is a reference to Edwin Pugh whose interest in working-class life and culture in London's East End mirrored his own background (Cross 1985, 235–36). His earlier article on street amusements, complete with photographs, must have found favour with Douglas in its focus on the play of poorer children, especially its observation that

Rag dolls and paper balls serve the purpose just as well as the more elaborate toys of the richer children; and perhaps there is compensation for the lack of such luxuries in an inevitable quickening of the imagination. (1903, 266)

Douglas himself was far from working class by background, however (Holloway, 1976). From a Scottish aristocratic family (with some German heredity too), he was brought up in Vorarlberg, a mountainous region in western Austria, where the family owned several cotton mills. Douglas claimed that his interest in street games began in 1910 (Holloway 1976, 224). At this time, he was struggling to earn a living through writing, having spent his inheritance. He had also just divorced his wife, gaining custody of their two young sons whom he prevented her from seeing ever again (Holloway 1976, 152). An alternative object of Douglas's interest and desire was becoming apparent, namely, young boys (Holloway 1976, 169–71). The immediate prompt for Douglas's interest in London street games was almost certainly the relationship that he developed with Eric Wolton, a 12-year-old working-class boy from Camden Town whom he first met at the annual firework display at Crystal Palace on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1910.<sup>3</sup>

If Douglas's reference to 'stalking' children makes modern ears, attuned to the ethical conduct of fieldwork, uneasy, this dimension of Douglas's lifestyle troubles our conceptions of his methods and motivations still further. There are those who defend Douglas's preferences as pederasty, saying that he treated the boys with whom he had relationships well, took on a fatherly role towards them and educated them, and in some cases maintained friendships with them even after they grew up and got married; it is argued that their families welcomed Douglas and approved of his involvement (Allan 2008). His affections were not always welcomed by the boys he approached, however. Shortly after the publication of *London Street Games*, a 16-year-old boy whom he met at the Natural History Museum reported to the police that Douglas had assaulted him. Two other charges were also brought against Douglas for offences with two brothers aged ten and twelve, though these were later dropped. Douglas decided to jump bail and headed for the continent (Holloway 1976, 229–32). Further relationships with boys ensued, but the research into street games had run its course.

Nevertheless, Douglas's book became an important reference point for the study of children's play in the twentieth century, inspiring later researchers such as James Ritchie (1965, ix), Nigel Kelsey (1983) and, most famously, Iona and Peter Opie (Opie and Opie 1959, v). Even so, its comparative value was limited with regard to games due to Douglas's lack of detailed description. With the verses, on the other hand, the Opies were

able to verify that 108 of the 137 noted by Douglas were still current in the 1950s (Opie and Opie 1959, vi). The impact of *London Street Games* lay in its urban focus, synchronic approach, and its use of testimony produced by young people themselves. As we have seen, its focus is exclusively on the play of lower-class children, in contrast with the more mixed demographic of Alice Gomme's child contributors (Boyes 1990, 201–02).

### ***The Inter-war Period***

There seems to have been relatively little extended research into children's folklore in Britain during the interwar years. Some of the collecting that was done did not reach a wide audience at the time but was used later on by Iona and Peter Opie. This includes the Macmillan collection, comprising children's descriptions of games and rhymes sent in to a 'Letter to Young People' column in the *Somerset County Herald and Taunton Courier* during the 1920s (Opie and Opie 1969, xv, and FLS Archives Box T221). Another source used by the Opies from this period was Mass Observation (1937–1950s), a project which aimed to document everyday life in Britain through a range of techniques, including the National Panel of Diarists who volunteered to record the details of their everyday life in daily journal entries, or responded to questionnaires ('directives') on particular topics (Opie and Opie 1959, xv).<sup>4</sup>

There were other important developments relevant to the study of children's folklore during the inter-war period. The fundamentals of modern child psychology were being forged during this time, for example, by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, although the impact of their work was not felt until some decades later in Britain. Meanwhile, the Irish Folklore Commission instigated the Schools' Folklore Scheme of 1937–38 in which 100,000 children in some five thousand primary schools were engaged to collect folklore, including games and pastimes, from older members of their local communities (Folklore Schools 1937–38). Elsewhere, the academic study of children's games took a major step forward when schoolteacher Dorothy Howard (1902–1996), completed her doctoral thesis on 'Folk Jingles of American Children: A Collection and Study of Rhymes used by Children Today' for the School of Education at New York University in 1938 (Factor 2005). As we shall see, teachers were later to become important collectors of children's games and rhymes in Britain too.

### ***The Second World War and Beyond***

Despite the reprinting of Douglas's *London Street Games* in 1931, it was only in the late 1940s, following the Second World War, that new research into children's folklore in Britain began to appear, not only in the form of print and photographs but also the newer media of

radio and film. The work of Leslie Daiken (1912–1964) was one of the first signs of this emergence. An Irish poet, short story writer and teacher living in London, he wrote several books on children's toys and games (e.g. 1949, 1953, 1963). He also presented radio programmes on these subjects and, in 1958, directed a 23-minute film, *One Potato, Two Potato* (Leslie Daiken n.d.).<sup>5</sup> A detailed study of his contribution to the study of childhood culture has not yet been undertaken to my knowledge, but it is ripe for evaluation.

Another important publication from the 1940s was Iona and Peter Opie's book, *I Saw Esau: Traditional Rhymes of Youth* (1947). This was something of a precursor to their classic books on children's play, published during the second half of the twentieth century, which we will come to below. First, though, we consider the work of the Scottish teacher-collector, James T. R. ('Docky') Ritchie.

### ***'Docky' Ritchie and the Norton Park Group***

Dr James T. R. Ritchie (1908–1998) was a maths and science teacher at Norton Park School situated on the Edinburgh-Leith border. He began teaching at a time when post-elementary school education was being rationalised as 'secondary' education, compulsory to 14 years (from 1936) and then to 15 (from 1947). Norton Park was a 'junior secondary' school, intended for those who did not pass the relevant intelligence tests.

Ritchie was born and bred in Edinburgh with wide-ranging interests including art, literature, politics, and football. He also had a passion for the Scottish language and culture and was an outspoken critic of the imposition of Standard English in Scottish education (Ritchie n.d.).

Ritchie had read Robert Chambers' book, *Popular Rhymes of Scotland* (1841) but it was the second edition of *London Street Games* which made him realise that the games and rhymes were still current among contemporary children (1965, ix). Sometime later his own students drew his attention to their games, as he subsequently narrated with characteristic humour:

One morning in Norton Park School, I was teaching science in Leith, and finding the response on this occasion not very lively, I asked: 'Then what do you like doing?' The class answered: 'We like playing games.' 'What games?' They told me, and I began there and then to write them down. In the afternoon, whilst teaching mathematics in Edinburgh, I also found time to jot down some more games. From then on I collected every sort of rhyme or playing jingle, and my collection grew. (1965, ix)

He also encouraged students to write down their own examples. One of the first outputs of this research was a series of radio programmes entitled *The Singing Street*, broadcast on the Scottish Home Service in 1949. It was followed, in turn, by an 18-minute film of the same name (1951), made in collaboration with two of his teacher colleagues, Raymond Townsend and Nigel McIsaac, who styled themselves the Norton Park Group (Ritchie, McIsaac and Townsend 1951). The film involved a cast of about sixty pupils, aged 12-13 years, and was filmed in the streets of Edinburgh in the Easter holidays.

Some years after the film was made, Ritchie compiled several books presenting more of the material he had amassed on children's play. *The Singing Street* (1964) and *Golden City* (1965) focus on games of the street and the back-green respectively, while a further book focusing on the school yard, originally entitled 'The Bumble Bell' in reference to the playground bell, was drafted but never published.<sup>6</sup> The books are illustrated with photographs taken by Raymond Townsend and are characteristically appreciative of the young people's wit, ingenuity and vernacular. They contain a more diverse selection of games than the film, including chase games, boos (marbles), peevers (hopscotch), seasonal customs, and pavement art. 'The Bumble Bell' goes even further than the earlier volumes to incorporate discussion of children's names for different kinds of sweets, their defiance of corporal punishment in school, graffiti, games involving pen and paper, and visual jokes.

Ritchie's books are thus an eclectic mix of genres and examples. These he links to the written memories of Scottish authors and his own observations between past and present which highlight both continuities and change. Unlike Douglas, he does not adopt an insider stance or attempt to score points against individuals. Rather, he celebrates 'the free and robust imagination' of children, his appreciation of their wit and inventiveness, and promotes his conviction that cultivating the vernacular Scots tongue would revive Scottish education and inspire a new generation of Scottish scientific and artistic achievement (Ritchie n.d.).

### ***Iona and Peter Opie's 'modest, unsponsored, and wholly voluntary survey'***

The research and publications of Iona (1923–) and Peter Opie (1918–1982) need little introduction to the audience of a Katharine Briggs lecture. The Opies are iconic in their status as English folklorists, exercised significant influence on the development of folklore studies in Britain, and played an important role in the Folklore Society (Simpson 1982; Boyes 1995; Bishop 2014b; Widdowson 2014). Their research into both parent-child folklore (e.g. 1951) and children's peer culture (1947, 1959, 1969, 1985, 1993, 1997a, 1997b) helped to establish

the study of childhood as a serious field of enquiry and has been widely read and cited in academic and popular studies (e.g. Hobbs and Cornwell 1991).

Their in-depth studies of children's play were preceded by a compact volume entitled *I Saw Esau: Traditional Rhymes of Youth* (1947). It brought together children's rhymes which the Opies perceived as distinct from the nursery lore they were researching for the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (ODNR). The currency of the rhymes surprised them:

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, 276)

This supposition was to have far-reaching consequences. So far, the Opies had been principally occupied with the historical and comparative study of printed sources, such as chapbooks, or previously collected oral sources. They now decided to elicit information themselves, from school-aged children, which meant turning to field research. The rationale was that adults' memories of childhood play were often incomplete and prone to nostalgia, overlooking the mundane and everyday in favour of the more colourful items (Opie and Opie, 1959, vi–vii; Opie 1988, 213). Others at the time saw this move as misguided, asserting that 'children no longer cherished their traditional lore' due to the cinema and television, and that the Opies were 'fifty years too late' (1959: v).

While earlier studies of children's rhymes and games had sometimes drawn on children's testimony (Marsh and Bishop 2014, 13–15), the Opies were struck by Douglas's reliance on it. His method of getting children to write things down also offered a scalable solution for reaching a much greater number of children over a larger geographical area. So it was they opted

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, 60)

In 1951, the *Sunday Times* published a letter from the Opies requesting assistance from the public in collecting. From the initial 151 responses they developed a national network of correspondents, including many teachers in both primary and secondary schools (Opie 2001,

x). Through them, the Opies distributed a series of questionnaires. By the time they came to publish their first book, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* in 1959, they had received contributions from about five thousand children at seventy state schools in England, Wales and Scotland (plus one in Dublin) (1959, vi). The numbers grew as their research continued such that, by Iona's calculation, the final total was around twenty thousand contributors (Opie 2001, xi).

What began as 'a modest, unsponsored, and wholly voluntary survey', then, became 'the most comprehensive folklore collecting scheme which has yet been undertaken in Britain' (Opie and Opie 1959, viii). It was by no means an isolated phenomenon, however. Surveys had become established as a research methodology prior to the Second World War, and social surveys flourished in the post-war era (Bishop 2014b, 211). The Opies' survey was distinct in being privately conducted, though, for they worked outside of academe, despite the honorary degrees that were bestowed on them, and financed much of their work through the royalties from their books (Bishop 2014b, 210, 211).

One consequence of their chosen methodology is that the bulk of the Opies' data comprises self-reported information from the children, rather than direct observation by the Opies themselves. It is hard to see how they would have obtained the necessary geographical breadth in any other way. As time went on, however, this evidence was supplemented by information documented using other techniques. From 1960, Iona began to visit her local junior school, in Liss, Hampshire, where she became an observer on the playground and wrote down the children's folklore and their explanations (1993, 245). Iona later published some of the fieldnotes from her weekly visits as *The People in the Playground* (1993).

In addition, in the late 1960s, Iona purchased 'a 12-guinea tape-recorder from Selfridges, with 3-inch tapes' (Bishop 2014b, 214) and in the period 1969–1983 set to work filling in some of the gaps in their survey data, and collecting both words and tunes of children's singing games for their next book. This included '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, 213). These trips were sometimes made in the company of other collectors, 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 and Robinson, 2014).

### **The Archival Collection of Iona and Peter Opie**

The children's folklore materials amassed by Iona and Peter Opie form an archival collection which is distributed between several institutions. The bulk of their papers are held at the Bodleian Libraries (247 boxes),<sup>7</sup> with a smaller collection in the Folklore Society Archives (22 boxes), and the sound recordings at the British Library (85 tapes). The exact relationships between the parts of the collections held at the different institutions have yet to be fully traced but we have an overview of each repository's holdings and their significance.

The Bodleian holdings are known as the 'Opie Working Papers' and contain most of the children's language, games and play material as well as other aspects of the Opies' research and personal lives (Bishop 2013). They are currently arranged as follows:

- Series 1      Children's survey responses and correspondence between the Opies and teachers relating to the survey (38 boxes)
- Series 2      Materials relating to the Opies' publications, broadcasts and talks (31 boxes)
- Series 3      a. Letters from the Opies' colleagues/contributors (16 boxes)  
                  b. the Opies' personal letters/diaries/private albums (65 boxes)<sup>8</sup>
- Series 4      the Opies' loose-leaf working files and address books (97 boxes).

The smaller corpus of materials in the Folklore Society Archives includes the Opies' collectanea, from both adults and children, relating to custom and belief, the latter forming the basis of *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Opie and Tatem 1989; FLS Boxes T150–T154, T210–T211). There are also items relating specifically to children's play, such as newspaper clippings from the Macmillan collection (mentioned above), and a card index of counting out rhymes (Box T228). As well as their research material, there are personal papers and documents relating to the Folklore Society itself, dating from c.1950–1980 (FLS Boxes T217–T231).

The audiotapes have been digitised, catalogued and made publicly accessible via the British Library Sounds website (Opie Collection of Children's Games and Songs [2011]). They were made in a range of locations in Britain (Figure 3) at varying sites, such as schools, housing estates, and inner city recreational grounds. The recordings evidence Iona's informal and inclusive approach to interviewing. As well as the more historical singing games, for example, she collected pop song performances by the children, and information about sweets and television viewing (Jopson, Burn and Robinson 2014).

The existence of the Opies' archival collection as a whole is known about through the their books but it has been little used due to its low profile, difficulties of access, and the lack of a detailed guide to its contents (Jopson 2011). Yet, it contains a wealth of unpublished

material. Initial research on the papers at the Bodleian Libraries and the sound recordings shows that this includes a plethora of items which the Opies could not include due to limitations of space, and which provide further evidence of stability and variation in form and text. There are also items which were considered too scatological or risqué for publication at the time, items beyond the scope of the books, further contextual information and supplementary details, and material received too late for inclusion in the book to which it relates. Some examples are given below.

The archival collection provides further information about the items which were published by the Opies. Although the Opies were assiduous in citing the geographical location from which an example came, their books do not always include the age and gender of the individual from whom it was collected. The collection provides supplemental details as to when the item was recorded, at which school, and from which contributor. Collating all the examples in the collection would further show the frequency with which particular items were documented and their distribution across the Opies' research locations.

In addition, the collection sheds light on the people who contributed to the Opies' study. By consulting the papers in Series 1 at the Bodleian Libraries, for example, it is possible to work out the numbers of children who contributed from each school and in which years they did so, and to break down the responses by gender, age and region. Teachers' covering letters for the survey sometimes contextualise the responses in terms of the children's circumstances, the ability level of the class, the interest or otherwise of the children in the collecting task, and the way the questionnaires were administered by the teacher. In his review of *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, Basil Bernstein observes that the book '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, 179). The collection, on the other hand, clearly has the potential to be studied in this way adding to its value as longitudinal data with relevance to various fields of study.

The Opies were great correspondents. Letters preserved in Series 3 of the Bodleian papers show the multitude of occasional adult contributors to their research, and the extensive network of people with whom they were in touch about it. As Barnes (2014) and Curtis (2014) have noted, Iona in particular had the personal touch, often providing feedback on the correspondent's contribution and making them feel valued as a participant in the largescale project (cf. Opie 1988, 213). Many correspondents have preserved their letters from the Opies and there is scope to locate these items and request copies of them as a complement to the existing Opie archival collection.

Lastly, the archival collection furnishes insights into the Opies' working methods. Reviews of their publications have sometimes highlighted the lack of a detailed account of their research process. Hobbs and Cornwell attribute this to the lay readership that the Opies had in mind for their books (1991, 179). Legman, in particular, lamented the fact that the Opies' did not publish their questionnaires (1976). They are, however, preserved in the archival collection and are considered below. Series 1, 3a and 4 of the Bodleian papers also evidence annotations and marginalia by Iona and Peter, indicating provenance, noting when items have been copied across to the working files, and commenting on their significance. Other items have clearly been cut out from the manuscripts in Series 1 of the Bodleian papers and stuck into the relevant loose-leaf folder (concerned with a particular type of game or genre) found in Series 4. Such practices observable in the collection materials put flesh on the bones of the Opies' later descriptions of their working methods (surveyed in Bishop 2014b, 213–14), evidencing the way in which they kept intellectual control of the mass of information they received, especially at a time when photocopiers were mostly confined to business use, and home computing was unheard of.

### **The 'Suggestionnaires'**

Series 1 of the Bodleian materials contains copies of the various questionnaires – or 'suggestionnaires', as the Opies sometimes referred to them – and the children's responses to them (Box 11). They are mostly undated but some are numbered, suggesting a possible chronological sequence. Several are annotated with additional questions. Figure 4 shows the beginning of what appears to be their first questionnaire. Five pages in length, it covers the chants, rhymes and terminology of games, verbal play such as jokes, and children's informal language more generally, and seeks information on 'transmission, distribution, age, origins, and implications to the child himself'.

'The Oral Lore of School Children II' is described as a supplement to the first questionnaire (Figure 5). It requests information on further and more specific games and areas of language, custom and belief. The preamble illustrates the way in which the iterations of the questionnaire were a response to the material that had been sent in, seeking further or more nuanced information, as well as introducing new topics. The same questionnaire also illustrates the way in which the Opies' made productive use of open-ended questions to allow for the new or unfamiliar (Figure 6). Their open-minded attitude to what constituted play and games is evidenced in additional suggestions, such as that requesting 'names of acrobatic tricks or games played on railings'.

The questionnaires are essential to understanding the children's survey responses contained in Series 1 of the Bodleian materials, and the responses in turn throw light on the dates at which the different incarnations of the questionnaire were sent round (Figure 7).

### **The People in the Street and Playground**

The Opies regarded children aged 7–11 as 'most in possession of the lore', particularly 8–9-year-olds. The age range of their contributors, on the other hand, was stated as 6–14, not just primary school children, as is often assumed (Opie and Opie 1959, xxi; Opie 2001, x). In fact, it can be shown from the archival collection that young people up to the age of 15–16 contributed as well.

The Opies' contributors were children attending state schools. A total of approximately 150 schools were involved in the Opies' survey and Iona's fieldwork, roughly 73 secondary schools, and 81 primary schools, distributed across England, Wales and Scotland. The period of the Opies' research was broadly coincident with the era of the tripartite school system in England and Wales (1945 to the 1970s) in which pupils took the 11-plus exam in order to determine which of the three types of school they attended from the age of eleven. The Opies' sample included all three types of secondary school – the grammar school, secondary technical school and secondary modern school – as well as schools (both primary and secondary) with large and small pupil populations, long-established and new schools, schools in rural and urban locations, and a number of church schools and bilingual (Welsh-English) schools (Opie and Opie 1959, vii).

There is little explicit information in the collection about the demographics of the local communities the schools served, especially social class and ethnicity. Thus, for example, it is not possible to tell 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.

Nevertheless, Iona and Peter Opie believed that 'broadly speaking...our contributing schools, and the children in them, are representative of the child population as a whole' (1959, vii). Furthermore, they represent 'the fun-loving but father-fearing specimen who is typical of the vast majority' rather than 'the delinquent' (1959, viii). The Opies find it necessary to defend this claim at some length. Their perception of a disproportionate emphasis on 'extraordinary' childhoods may be linked to the rise in child psychology and psychiatry as a shaping force in public opinion at this time, and an emphasis on the role of the family in children's emotional and psychological, as well as physical, health (Stewart 2014).

Sixty years on, the children who took part in the surveys are, of course, now adults aged roughly 50–70. It is still possible, therefore, to try and trace them. A small-scale research project, conducted by Jackie Marsh and myself in 2011–12, undertook to do just this and to interview them about their childhood lives (Marsh and Bishop [2012]). We found that such investigation is of great value in adding to our knowledge of individual circumstances and those of their local communities at the time. It also helps to address, albeit retrospectively, criticism of the Opies' publications that they give insufficient attention to the actual usage of the items presented, and the wider socio-cultural context in which they occur (e.g. Grugeon 1988). Research with contributors also enables them to be reunited with their original contribution.

### **The Opie Books and the Archival Collection**

The relationship between the archival collection and the Opies' publications has yet to be mapped but even a superficial comparison reveals that the former has data on a range of topics, such as football, hula hoops, menstruation lore, and sexual and scatological items, which has not been studied or published. Another fascinating source within the collection are the hundreds of essays submitted to the Camberwell Public Libraries Competition from 1951–56, and 1961, written by children aged 8–12 (Bodleian Libraries, Opie Boxes 23–29). These cover topics on diverse aspects of children's lives, set as part of the competition, such as 'Why I like television', 'Three books on a desert island', 'All about my neighbourhood' and 'On a trip to the Moon'.

A perennial issue for the Opies was that the appearance of one of their books naturally prompted a stream of correspondence containing further examples of the materials just published. These were duly added to the existing working files or to designated 'School Adds' files where again they have been largely untapped in subsequent research. My own study of a clapping game, 'Eeny meeny dessameeny', benefited from drawing on just such an item (Bishop 2010). I had encountered the game in Sheffield in 2006 and subsequently documented it in 2009 at another primary school in Sheffield. While I could find a good many versions of the game in the United States, collected from the late 1970s on, the earliest examples from Britain that I could locate were from the 1990s. Furthermore, the relevant Opie book, *The Singing Game* (1985), contained only a glimpse of the game, quoting a US version comprising the opening four lines (1985, 446). Consulting the Opie papers at the Bodleian Libraries, I discovered that the Opies had taken the verse from a press cutting in the *New York Herald Tribune* of 2 August 1964 (Box 238).

Meanwhile, the cataloguing of the Opie audio collection had revealed that it contained a recording of the game (British Library Sounds, Opie Collection of Children's Games and Songs, C898/02). This had been recorded by Iona from girls of 8 and 9 years old at the American School, London, in July 1975. Disappointingly, the words were almost impossible to transcribe with certainty. However, following on from the *New York Herald Tribune* clipping in the Opie papers, was a transcription of the sound recording, made by Iona herself, together with a description of the clapping pattern which accompanied it (Figure 8). This is the earliest documentation of the game that I can find in Britain. In addition, the context in which Iona recorded it, at the American School, coupled with the existence of earlier recordings of the game in the US, lends weight to the theory that the game travelled from the US to Britain during the 1970s. Meanwhile, the very next page of the Opie papers contained a press cutting from the *Times Educational Supplement*, dated 13 January 1984, quoting the full text as performed among girls at North London primary schools, together with the prescient observation, written in Iona's hand, 'now naturalised in North London'.

### **The Legacy of Iona and Peter Opie**

Many of us have undertaken research into children's folklore in the post-Opie era. Few, if any, of us have done so without consulting the Opies' publications. I hope it is clear that their archival collection has an equal but complementary importance compared to their publications. Among other things, it can help us to evaluate the Opies' published findings, including the observations which seem to resonate so strongly with those being expressed today and which were presaged by Douglas fifty years ago:

If children's games are tamed and made part of school curricula, if wastelands are turned into playing-fields for the benefit of those who conform and ape their elders, if children are given the idea that they cannot enjoy themselves without the 'proper' equipment, we need blame only ourselves when we produce a generation who have lost their dignity, who are ever dissatisfied, and who descend for their sport to the easy excitement of rioting, or pilfering, or vandalism. (Opie and Opie 1969, 16)

### ***Beyond Text: A Multimodal Approach to Play and Children's Self-Curation***

Let us return at this point to the example we heard about from Katharine Briggs at the outset of the lecture. She described the way in which children performed a play to a Scottish ballad, and had adapted the more usual line 'turned her round and made her stand' into 'turned her round till she could not stand', whereupon one child was 'birlled' or spun round by the other

until she fell to the ground. Thus the children embedded the widespread game, sometimes known as ‘Dizzy Dolls’, into their enactment of the song. It is an obvious example of the form of play which Caillois terms ‘ilinx’ or ‘vertigo’ (1961).

Indeed, the ballad/game/enactment neatly highlights the multimodal nature of children’s play. It clearly involved gestures, dramatic actions and movements employed to enact the story (and perhaps to respond to elements of the music too), the arrangement of the children on the steps and their orientation to each other, the sensory communication and gratification in the spinning round and falling down, and the concurrent performance of the textual and musical elements of the song. To explore the nature of this play as experienced by the participants, then, we have to go ‘beyond’ the text, and consider the many modes through which communication is taking place. This involves embracing a conception of play as embodied. As Burn and Richards argue, the body of the child is central to the production of these modes and, at the same time, to the child’s experience of them too (Burn and Richards 2013, 236).

Exploration of a multimodal approach to play was a central theme of a research project entitled ‘Children’s Playground Games and Songs in the New Media Age’, funded by the Beyond Text programme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, in 2009–11. This involved attending to such elements as gesture, gaze, proxemics, choreographed movement, the built and natural environments, and the semiotic potential and transformation of objects and artefacts on an equal footing with the various linguistic and musical elements that folklorists have tended to privilege in the past (Burn and Richards 2013, 236). A social semiotic approach to multimodality represents a framework by which to investigate these dimensions of play holistically (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001). Burn’s analysis of a cheerleading-cum-clapping routine from the study, which he dubs the Wildcat Sailors in recognition of its references to both *High School Musical* and ‘A Sailor Went to Sea, Sea, Sea’, exemplifies the approach, which is particularly helpful in making sense of the fleeting and improvisatory practices children adopt in their play (2013). This focus on the multimodal can steer folklorists towards more nuanced insights into those twin dynamics of folklore, continuity and change, generating new understandings of variation and transformation.

Such an approach is obviously dependent on the technology available for data collection, particularly audio-visual methods such as film. Of course, new technologies of documentation are increasingly available to children too. Audio-visual documentation is within easy reach of those who have access to digital resources, via laptops with webcams, mobile phones, and tablet computers. In addition, viewing and sharing these films via the

internet has become an everyday practice for some. The video-sharing website, YouTube, which was launched in 2005, is now the second most-visited web entity (after Google) accessed by children aged 6–14, and has been for several years (Ofcom 2014, 231–33).

Whilst working as a researcher on the Beyond Text project, I became aware that YouTube was hosting dozens of home-produced videos showing children and young people playing various handclapping games. Many were from English-speaking countries but not all. Some were filmed by adults while others were evidently produced by young people themselves. Many seemed intended to celebrate the skill and fun of clapping play, and to teach and transmit the movements and associated songs and chants of specific clapping games. At the same time, I discovered that some of the children at Montenev Primary School in Sheffield, where I was carrying out fieldwork for the research project, were drawing on these digital texts as a source in their clapping play. This was in addition to learning clapping games in face-to-face situations, from each other, and from other friends and relatives (Bishop 2014a).

John Potter has proposed that the children who make and share such films are participating in what he calls ‘self curation’ (2012). This involves using digital media to exhibit and perform aspects of their experience. The metaphor of curation is intended to convey a process which goes beyond writing or producing, to incorporate collecting, distributing, assembling, disassembling, and moving media objects and content across different domains (Potter 2012, 31).

Let us consider an example of this. [At this point in the lecture, a clip entitled ‘My boyfriend gave me a apple (clap song)’, uploaded to YouTube in 2013, was played (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifGaHjKaDqM>)] Time precludes an in-depth analysis but we can at least glimpse the way in which localised practices become intertwined with global ones in ways that were not possible for previous generations or, at least, not at such speed. We can also begin to apprehend how the fluidity, performativity and creativity of children’s play are intertwined with self-curation using today’s digital resources. And we have still another form of evidence for play in both online and offline contexts, albeit one which challenges us as folklorists to extend our tools of analysis and to focus on the multimodal dimensions of our subject.

### ***Breathless Conclusion***

Rather uncannily, Norman Douglas seems to have had a premonition of my interest in his work:

And I can see some product of our future mechanized age, some horribly dehydrated apparition calling himself – herself, more likely – by the old-fashioned name of anthropologist, if this book should survive to fall into [her] hands, poring over its text... ‘Street Games? An unsavoury crowd of imps,’ [she] may reflect. ‘Hardly human. What can their parents have been about?’ (1946, 72)

Dehydrated apparition or not, I am urging that we should not only pore over these books, but also these archival collections and the rapidly expanding universe of relevant digital sources. I am also advocating folkloristic consideration of performance and communication in an expanded multimodal sense, wherever we have documentation to allow this.

It is clear that we have more information about children’s play in this country in the second half of the twentieth century than at any other time in our history. This is what Lauri Honko calls ‘thick corpus’, that is, ‘a “thickness” of text and context through multiple documentation of expressions of folklore in their varying manifestations in performance within a ‘biologically’ definable tradition bearer, community or environment’ (2000: 17). There is a pressing need to surface all this information and understand its provenance and biases, and its relationship with other earlier, later or contemporary collections, such as the 1973 Department of the Environment study of ‘children at play’, based on over fifty thousand observations of children’s outdoor activities around areas of social housing in Sheffield, Coventry, Durham, and various parts of London (Department of the Environment 1973).<sup>9</sup>

These historical resources can make a contribution to the emotional as well as the physical wellbeing of children today. Taken in combination, they provide triangulation for each other and a richly detailed database from which to gain a thoroughly grounded knowledge of childhoods and play in the past and to inform current debate about the importance and value of play. Work has begun on making the Opies’ collection available, with support from the British Academy, and through the collaboration of the Universities of Sheffield and London, and the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, working closely with the Folklore Society and British Library.<sup>10</sup> It is to be hoped that the necessary support can be found to make all of this a reality in the near future.

## References cited

- Allan, Michael, [ed.]. *Dear Doug!: Letters to Norman Douglas from Eric Wolton, René Mari, Marcel Mercier, and Ettore Masciandaro and a Selection of Letters from Emilio Papa*. Graz/Feldkirch: W. Neugebauer, 2008.
- Barnes, Peter. 'Iona Opie: Distant Relations and 'the Kindness of Friends''. *International Journal of Play* 3 (2014): 316–20. DOI: 10.1080/21594937.2014.976029.
- Bernstein, Basil. Review of *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. *British Journal of Sociology*, 9 (1960): 178–81.
- Bishop, Julia C. "'Eeny meeny dessameeny": Continuity and Change in the "Backstory" of a Children's Playground Rhyme'. Unpublished paper, presented at the 'Children's Playground Games and Songs in the New Media Age' interim conference, 25th February 2010, London Knowledge Lab. Accessed 23 August 2015.  
[http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/research\\_workshops.php?i=35&p=Children%27s%20Playgro und%20Games%20and%20Songs%20in%20the%20New%20Media%20Age](http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/research_workshops.php?i=35&p=Children%27s%20Playgro und%20Games%20and%20Songs%20in%20the%20New%20Media%20Age)
- 'The Working Papers of Iona and Peter Opie'. *Oral Tradition* 28 (2013): 205–216. Last accessed 2 November 2015. <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/28ii/bishop>
- . "'That's how the whole hand-clap thing passes on": Online/Offline Transmission and Multimodal Variation in a Children's Clapping Game'. In *Children's Games in the New Media Age: Childlore, Media and the Playground*, edited by Andrew Burn and Chris Richards, 53–84. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014a.
- . 'The Lives and Legacies of Iona and Peter Opie'. *International Journal of Play* 3 (2014b): 205–23.
- Bock, Susie R. Guide to the Norman Douglas Collection: GEN MSS 88. New Haven, Connecticut : Yale University Library Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1993, revised 2010.
- Boyes, Georgina. 'Alice Bertha Gomme (1852–1938): A Reassessment of the Work of a Folklorist'. *Folklore* 101 (1990): 198–208.
- . 'The Legacy of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie: The Lore and Language of today's Children'. In *Rhyme, Reason and Writing*, edited by Roger Beard, 131–46. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995.
- . 'Alice Bertha Gomme (1852–1938)'. In *Women and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists*, ed. Carmen Blacker and Hilda Ellis Davidson, 65–83. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000.
- . "'A Proper Limitation": Stereotypes of Alice Gomme'. *Musical Traditions*, article MT074, 2001. Available at <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/gomme.htm>.
- Bradley, Rose M. 'Some London Children at Play'. *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 61 (1907), **XX**.
- Briggs, K. M. 'Ballad of Babylon'. *Notes & Queries* 191.2 (July, 1946), 34.

- Burn, Andrew. 'The Case of the Wildcat Sailors: The Hybrid Lore and Multimodal Languages of the Playground'. In *Children, Childhood and Cultural Heritage*, edited by Kate Darian-Smith and Carla Pascoe, 55–73. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.
- Burn, Andrew, and Chris Richards. 'Conclusion: Forms, Functions and the Ethnographic Challenge.' In *Children, Media and Playground Cultures: Ethnographic Studies of School Playtimes*, edited by Rebekah Willett, Chris Richards, Jackie Marsh, Andrew Burn, and Julia C. Bishop, 212–39. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Caillois Roger. *Man, Play and Games*. Translated by Meyer Barash. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.
- Chambers, Robert. *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1841.
- Cott, Jonathan. 'When the Voices of Children Are Heard on the Green: Iona and Peter Opie'. *Pipers at the Gates of Dawn: The Wisdom of Children's Literature*, 241–309. New York: Random House, 1983.
- Cross, Nigel. *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Curtis, Mavis. 'Iona and Me.' *International Journal of Play*, 3 (2014), 326–33. doi: 10.1080/21594937.2014.976032.
- Daiken, Leslie. *Children's Games throughout the Year*. London: Batsford, 1949.
- . *Children's Toys throughout the Ages*. London: Batsford, 1953.
- . *Out Goes She! Dublin Street Rhymes*. Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1963.
- Department of the Environment. *Children at Play*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973.
- Douglas, Norman. 'In Our Alley'. *English Review* 5 (Nov 1913): 540–48.
- . *London Street Games*. London: St Catherine Press, 1916.
- . *Some Limericks: Collected for the Use of Students, & Ensplendour'd with Introduction, Geographical Index, and with Notes Explanatory and Critical*. [Florence]: Privately printed, 1928.
- . *London Street Games*. Rev. and enl. London: Chatto and Windus, 1931.
- . *Late Harvest*. London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946.
- Douglas, R. Cowan. *Traditional Singing Games from Scotland and the Border, Collected by R. C. Douglas and K.M. Briggs*. London: n.p., 1933. Revised edition, London: Girl Guides Association, 1955.
- Factor, June. 'A Forgotten Pioneer'. In *Child's Play: Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children*, edited by Kate Darian-Smith and June Factor, 1–19. Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2005.
- Folklore Schools 1937–38. Accessed 15 September 2015. <http://digital.ucd.ie/view/ivrla:30350>
- Gillington, Alice E. *Old Isle of Wight Singing Games*. London: Curwen, 1909a.
- . *Old Hampshire Singing Games and Trilling the Rope Rhymes*. London: Curwen, 1909b.

- . *Old Surrey Singing Games and Skipping Rope Rhymes*. London: Curwen, 1909c.
- . *Old Dorset Singing Games, with a Few from Wilts. and New Forest*. 1913.
- [Gilchrist, Anne G., and Lucy E. Broadwood.] ‘Notes on Children’s Game-Songs by Annie G. Gilchrist and Lucy E. Broadwood’. *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 5.2 (1915): 221–39.
- Gomme, Alice Bertha. *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland*. 2 vols. London: David Nutt, 1894, 1898. Reprinted New York: Dover, 1964.
- , and Cecil Sharp. *Children’s Singing Games* (5 sets). London: Novello, 1909–1912.
- Gray, Peter. ‘The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology on Children and Adolescents’. *American Journal of Play* 3 (2011): 443–63.
- Grugeon, Elizabeth. ‘Underground Knowledge: What the Opies Missed’. *English in Education* 22.2 (1988): 9–17.
- Hobbs, Sandy, and David Cornwell. ‘The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren: A Study of Scholars’ Reactions’. *Folklore* 102 (1991): 175–82.
- Holloway, Mark. *Norman Douglas: A Biography*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1976.
- Honko, Lauri. ‘Thick Corpus and Organic Variation: An Introduction’. In *Thick Corpus: Organic Variation and Textuality in Oral Tradition*, edited by Lauri Honko, 3–28. *Studia Fennica Folkloristica*, 7. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2000.
- James Madison Carpenter Collection Online Catalogue 2003–08. Last modified 25 September 2008. <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/carpenter/>
- Jopson, Laura. Unpublished Finding Aid for the Opie Working Papers. 2011. Accessed 3 October 2015. <http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/resources.html>
- Jopson, Laura, Andrew Burn, and Jonathan Robinson ‘The Opie recordings: What’s left to be heard?’ In *Children’s Games in the New Media Age: Childlore, Media and the Playground*, edited by Andrew Burn and Chris Richards, 31–51. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.
- Karl, Frederick R. ‘Joseph Conrad, Norman Douglas, and the English Review’. *Journal of Modern Literature* 2 (1971/1972): 342–56.
- Kelsey, Nigel. ‘Norman Douglas Revisited’. *London Lore* 1.10 (October 1983): 117–25.
- Kidson, Frank, ed. *One Hundred Singing Games, Old, New and Adapted*. London : Bayley & Ferguson, 1916.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold, 2001.
- Legman, Gershon. Introduction to *Children’s Humour: A Joke for Every Occasion*, by Sandra McCosh, vii–xlix. London: Granada, 1976.
- ‘Leslie Daiken: An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin’, n.d. Accessed 10 September 2015. <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/uthrc/00032/hrc-00032.html>

- Lichman, Simon. 'From Hopscotch to *Siji*: Generations at Play in a Cross-Cultural Setting'. In *Play Today in the Primary School Playground: Life, Learning and Creativity*, ed. Julia C. Bishop and Mavis Curtis, 152–66. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001.
- Marsh, Jackie, and Julia C. Bishop. 'A Study of the Relationship between Media, Commercial Markets and Children's Play in the UK between 1950 and 2011'. Unpublished final report for British Academy Grant SG111215, [2012]. Accessed 28 October 2015.  
<http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/resources.html>
- . *Changing Play: Play, Media and Commercial Culture from the 1950s to the Present Day*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2014.
- Nicholson, E. W. B. *Golspie: Contributions to its Folklore*. London: Nutt, 1897.
- Ofcom. *Children and Parents: Media use and Attitudes Report*. 2014.
- Opie Collection of Children's Games and Songs. British Library Sounds: Oral History, [2011]. Accessed 17 August 2015. <http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Opie-collection-of-children-s-games-and-songs->
- Opie, Iona. 'Iona Opie 1923–'. In *Something about the Author: Autobiography Series*, edited by J. Nakamura, vol. 6, 203–17. Detroit: Gale Research, 1988.
- Opie, Iona. 'The Making of Folklore Books: Chiefly the Experiences of Revd John Brand and the Opies'. *Folklore* 100 (1989): 53–62.
- . *The People in the Playground*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- . Foreword to *Play Today in the Primary School Playground: Life, Learning and Creativity*, edited by Julia C. Bishop and Mavis Curtis, x–xiv. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001.
- Opie, Iona, and Peter Opie. *I Saw Esau: Traditional Rhymes of Youth*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1947.
- . *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.
- . *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- . *Children's Games in Street and Playground*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- . *The Singing Game*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- . *Children's Games with Things*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997a.
- . *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. New ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997b.
- Opie, Iona, and Moira Tatem, ed. *A Dictionary of Superstitions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Potter, John. *Digital Media and Learner Identity: The New Curatorship*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Pugh, Edwin. 'Some London Street Amusements'. In volume 3, *Living London: Its Work and Its Play, Its Humour and Its Pathos, Its Sights and Its Scenes*, edited by George R. Sims, 266–71. London: Cassell, 1903.

- Richards, Chris, and Andrew Burn. 'Postscript: The People in the Playground'. In *Children's Games in the New Media Age: Childlore, Media and the Playground*, edited by Andrew Burn and Chris Richards, 207–14. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.
- Ritchie, James T. R. *The Singing Street*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964.
- . *Golden City*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965.
- . 'The Bumble Bell'. Unpublished typescript in the possession of the author, n.d.
- , Nigel McIsaac and Raymond Townsend. *The Singing Street* [film]. Edinburgh: Norton Park Group, 1951. Now held at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, no. 0799. Accessed 20 September 2015. <http://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0799>
- Roud, Steve. 'Books worth (re)reading'. *International Journal of Play* 3 (2014): 349–51. DOI: 10.1080/21594937.2014.976038.
- Salmon, David. 'London Children's Outdoor Games'. *Notes and Queries* s11-I Issue 25 (18 June 1910): 483.
- Simpson, Jacqueline. 'Peter Mason Opie, M.A. (1918–1982)'. *Folklore* 93 (1982): 223.
- Steward, John. *Child Guidance in Britain, 1918–1955: The Dangerous Age of Childhood*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014.
- U.K. Parliament. *Play: A Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood*. [London?], 2015.
- Vogeler, Martha S. *Austin Harrison and the English Review*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008.
- Widdowson, J. D. A. 'Stumbling into Folklore More than 50 Years Ago'. *International Journal of Play* 3 (2014): 343–48.
- Willett, Rebekah. 'Everyday Game Design on a School Playground: Children as Bricoleurs'. *International Journal of Play* 4 (2015): 32–44. DOI:10.1080/21594937.2015.1017305.
- Williams, Roger. *Lunch with Elizabeth David*. London: Little, Brown, 1999.
- 
- <sup>1</sup> Katharine Briggs also narrates the experience in an interview with Hamish Henderson, recorded in 1959 (University of Edinburgh School of Scottish Studies archives recording SA1959.119; available at <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/17372/1>).
- <sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Steve Roud for bringing a number of these to my attention.
- <sup>3</sup> This relationship, in which Eric accompanied Douglas on several trips to Italy, is recreated in Roger Williams' novel, *Lunch with Elizabeth David* (1999).
- <sup>4</sup> Further details concerning the history of Mass Observation, and its revival in the 1980s, can be found on its website.
- <sup>5</sup> The British Film Institute gives the date of the film as 1957 (see <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/444380/>).
- <sup>6</sup> I have been involved in editing this draft for publication in due course, together with an appreciation of Ritchie's life and contribution to children's play research.
- <sup>7</sup> A further oversize envelope contains proofs of the distribution maps which appeared in the Opies' books (1959, 1969) and some material relating to Hone and Cruikshank.
- <sup>8</sup> In accordance with the terms of their gift to the Bodleian Libraries, Peter Opie's personal diaries cannot be made available until 2032.

---

<sup>9</sup> However, I have so far been unable to discover if the original data from this study are extant and, if so, where they are held.

<sup>10</sup> For further details of this British Academy Research Project, see the project website (<http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/>).