



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Intro:

Welcome. You've got...Digital Folklore.

[Sound of Perry setting up his personal audio-journal recorder]

Perry Carpenter:

April 24th, 2023. I am beginning to get a little worried.

[Phone rings... Perry picks up without shutting off his audio recorder]

Perry Carpenter:

Hello, this is Perry Carpenter.

Oops-a-Knife Customer Rep:

Hi, this is Stephen from Oops-a-Knife, the street disposal and cleanup services.

Perry Carpenter:

Yes.

Oops-a-Knife Customer Rep:

This is just a customer satisfaction follow-up call. How many bodies?

Perry Carpenter:

Oh, just the one. One body. Yeah.

Oops-a-Knife Customer Rep:

Ok. Great. Thank you. Cause of death?



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

I guess officially death by van crushing. Twice if that matters. I went forward. There was screaming, still a little bit of movement, so I backed over him again.

Oops-a-Knife Customer Rep:

Okay, and was the van repaired to your satisfaction?

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. All the cracked glass, the dents, the roof, all that was fixed up great. You would never suspect a thing, and I've not heard anything from anybody.

Oops-a-Knife Customer Rep:

Ok. And, uh, thank you, sir. One final question. How satisfied were you with the technician we sent over?

Perry Carpenter:

They seemed great. They showed up fast. They kept the onlookers busy, and I haven't seen any mention of it in the newspapers. So, I'll definitely be using your services again.

Oops-a-Knife Customer Rep:

Thank you. Thank you. Glad to hear that. Have a nice day, and thank you for choosing Oops-a-Knife at oopsaknife.com.

Perry Carpenter:

Yep, thank you. Bye-bye.

[Sound of phone hanging up and Perry moving his audio recorder back into position]



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

Okay. April 24th, 2023.

I am beginning to get a little worried.

Things seem to be getting progressively. I don't even know how to explain it. The only word I can think of is weirder. Ever since we started this podcast and started digging into all these concepts around folklore and especially analyzing these Creepypastas, these really strange occurrences have been picking up. I don't know if something followed us out of the woods, all the way back in episode one. We still haven't figured out that missing time thing with Todd, this hook-handed man on the roof of the Volkswagen, and now, Mason called me and said that the TV we bought from Todd started spewing black flames, and it wrecked the tape for this week's episode. So, I'm going to keep this audio journal just in case something happens to me.

I'm still at the Airbnb right now, and things, for the most part, outside of all this madness, things have been pretty calm on my end. Oh, except the owners barging in unexpectedly every now and then because they keep forgetting things that they left here, and it is disturbing when some weird people you haven't met show up at 3:00 a.m. in their bathrobes in the middle of the night, but I mean, all that is manageable in comparison. Maybe it's normal for Airbnbs, but anyway, between all this strange phenomena and the fact that the listeners in our [Discord](#) keep telling us that there's somehow messages hidden inside the podcast, I'm starting to suspect something may be stalking me and Mason.

I know it sounds ... God, it sounds stupid to me, and I don't even want to bring it up to Mason yet, but my gut tells me that something weird is going on here. Something's just, for lack of a better word, wrong.

So, I'm going to go out on my own for a minute and call up someone who I know understands exorcism and talismans and religious rituals and demons and history and all of that stuff. I want to talk to him just in case he might have some kind of knowledge that could come in handy. I'm going to pause this recording real quick and call him up and then once he's on the line, I'll roll tape again.

[Sound of personal journal shutting off. Cut straight to interview space]



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

...All right, and we are recording.

Can you give me your name and a little bit of background on who you are?

Dr. Francis Young:

I'm Dr. Francis Young. I work on the history of religion and belief and also on folklore. I'm interested in a whole variety of subjects in that area including the history of magic. I'm interested in the origins and meaning of fairy belief, exorcism mostly across the United Kingdom and Ireland and also in the Baltic region. So, those are the areas that I work on.

Perry Carpenter:

So, how does one get into that academically? What is the path of saying, this is what I'm going to focus my life on? What is the academic carve-out for studying that, publishing it, finding a community of other people who talk about the same thing, all of the stuff that comes with that? What does that look like?

Dr. Francis Young:

Well, I started out as a more conventional historian. I was interested particularly in the history of Catholicism in England, but the thing about Catholicism in England is that it was always a rather fringe survival. England obviously undergoes the reformation in the 16th century, and there's an attempt to kind of stamp out Catholics and their beliefs. Catholics were often vilified as superstitious for their superstitious beliefs.

So, I became fascinated by this concept of marginalized religious beliefs or indeed non-religious beliefs, beliefs in things that might be vilified by people as superstitious, dismissed as silly, and yet all these beliefs, they have a history. That's really what I'm into. I'm into the history of these strange beliefs that are a little bit marginalized and off-center.

Yeah, I have found a community of people who are interested in that. I mean, via social media, it's great. You can walk into social media and talk about absolutely anything you want to, and you can find a group of willing people who are willing to discuss it with you and usually not make fun of you. It's the dream for people who are interested in strange things. There's an academic community out there as well, but



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

I'm passionate about sharing this and increasing knowledge of strange beliefs and the history of strange beliefs with the public at large.

Perry Carpenter:

So, I'm interested in flashing back to specifically the Catholic piece of this and thinking about cathedrals and some of the more grotesque and demonic figures that you may see embedded in that type of architecture. What is the significance of that and how does that gel with the faith of the people that are going into that church? Because it seems like from an Americanized point of view, that those things would be separate in some way, and you'd want to keep them separate. If you had a poster of that in your child's room, you might worry about them a little bit. So, how does that come to be?

Dr. Francis Young:

I think the answer to that is popular Christianity, and this to me is a key concept when it comes to studying any period of any religion, but particularly when it comes to the Middle Ages, particularly when it comes to Christianity. There is an official version of the faith, which is usually enforced, in this case, the Pope, the bishops, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. There's a grassroots version of that religion. I think there was an older view, which has now largely been discarded among scholars who would say that Christianity in medieval Europe never quite replaced and stamped out paganism. When we find these grotesque medias, they're resurgent or surviving paganism that's under the surface. In the vast majority of cases, that's probably not true.

What we're actually looking at is a popular religion that deals with evil, that deals with protection from evil in ways that are not officially sanctioned by the church. They're still grounded, broadly speaking, in a Christian worldview, but it's not necessarily one that the authorities had approved of. So, for example, when it comes to grotesque images in churches, they are, and most scholars would now say, they have an apotropaic function. In other words, they are these deliberately ugly images that are there in order to protect against evil.

It's something that we find cross cultures. I mean, it's very prominent in the far East, for example, of the portrayal of these kind of hideous masks, but they're actually a positive thing because they are there in order to scare away, if you like, the real demons, the real spirits. So, it's a kind of sympathetic magic, a kind of a way of supplying a deterrent to these demonic forces. So, yeah, I would say it arises from popular religion.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

I know there's so many branches we could take here. I want to jump into some digital branches in just a minute, but I know that some of the things that you focused on with this religion hat on are things that are considered darker, more esoteric things like exorcism. So, tell us a little bit about your study of that. I don't want to front load any expectations about what you may have there, but what got you into the study of that, and what have been some of your most interesting findings when you think about exorcism?

Dr. Francis Young:

Well, exorcism is directly there on that frontier between religion and magic. It's a particularly contested subject in the sense that the form that exorcism often takes, considered from an anthropological point of view, is clearly within the realm of magic and in particular, kind of magic of protection or magic that's directed in order to relieve people of evil, which is something we find across the cultures all over the world, and yet, exorcism is jealously claimed by many religious organizations as being something that is most definitely on the religion side of the line, and so it's something which is not magic from the point of view of those who are performing it usually. They would not imagine it in those terms at all.

So, when you look at exorcism, you find these tensions between religion and magic. They are there at their most intense. One form that that takes is the tension between charismatic exorcism and a kind of rules-based exorcism. I've looked in particular at exorcism within the Roman Catholic Church and also within the Church of England. What you find in both of those contexts is that there's a strong tradition that exorcism is something, which you kind of make up as you go along. So, it's a skill that's acquired by long experience, by priests who claim to be spiritually gifted or psychically gifted, that they have this particular skillset, which makes them the only people who can really do this effectively.

There's also a tradition that you can't just get anybody to do an exorcism by saying the right words. In fact, you need somebody who is a person of upstanding life and deep spirituality and mysticism who will actually perform the exorcism most effectively. You see this kind of thing in the film, *The Exorcist*. You got to get the big guns in. You got to get the guy in who has a reputation for being really good at exorcism, and that's the charismatic tradition of exorcism, but the church of course doesn't see it like that at all. The church sees this as something, which needs to be regulated because if you allow people to run around and make a name for themselves, performing exorcisms, then they're kind of free from any kind of authority because they're able to do something that no one else is able to do. That shouldn't



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

be the case. The power needs to be concentrated in the right place and the right places up high in the hierarchy.

So, as far as the bishops are concerned, exorcism is all about following the rules, making sure that you follow this prescribed liturgy, that you do it in the correct way, that you always seek permission to do what you're doing, that you have the correct permissions and licenses and so forth. So, you've got these tensions in the history of exorcism of the church itself constantly intervening to stop exorcisms from happening or to restrict exorcisms, but at the same time, wanting them to happen because exorcisms are a way of proclaiming the church's power, for example, a way that one denomination can show that it's more powerful than another, a way that Christianity can show that it's more powerful than other competing religions in a missionary context and so forth. So, it's a very, very complex and very kind of paradoxical phenomenon. Exorcism.

Perry Carpenter:

That's fascinating. I want to get perspective on one thing. I mean, you mentioned within the more liturgical church like the Catholic Church that there are even systems that would require somebody to have a certain license for exorcism. I don't ... Is that the case? Do you have an exorcist license or a little badge that you can ... and I don't mean to trivialize it. Is there like specific paperwork that somebody gets or training that they have? Is it part of that?

Dr. Francis Young:

Oh, sure. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the way that the contemporary church works this is that in order to be an exorcist, you need to be specifically trained. There's something called the International Association of Exorcists, which provides training in Rome and around the world, and you need to be appointed by your bishop as a diocesan exorcist.

In the case of something big, so a major exorcism, that is to say you believe that someone is actually possessed by an evil spirit and not just things that go bump in the night, full-on bodily possession, in that case, in many diocese, you do need to seek bishop's permission specifically for that to take place. Yes, a lot of paperwork is involved. There have been a couple of cases that have ended up in court, and as a result of ending up in court because somebody's been injured or died as a result of the exorcism, all of that paperwork has actually been made publicly available, whereas mostly, it's secret. It's something, which is not accessible, but we do know from those few cases how that works.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

So, one other question on that line then, when you get to things like exorcism and the demonic, what differences do you see in the legitimacy of certain types of phenomena? By that, I mean what is the source of certain things like a demon that might need to be exercised or you mentioned things that go bump in the night. There are certain branches of Christianity that would say ghosts are not real, everything is demonic if that's happening. Would other branches say that there could be some kind of entity that's not necessarily evil in nature, but might be more benign?

Dr. Francis Young:

Yes, absolutely. There's huge debate and disagreement about that between individual exorcists within one denomination, let alone between different denominations. I think it's something which isn't openly discussed in the way that other doctrine liturgies are because I think it's considered a bit embarrassing. It's considered a bit of a fringe subject within the Roman Catholic Church with a huge amount of variation in approaches.

I mean, I wrote a book, last year actually came out, and it was about the Catholic Church's approach to witchcraft today, particularly the approach to exorcist's take to witchcraft in different countries and whether they think that it's real or whether they think that it's really a danger or whether they think that it should be dealt with by exorcism and so forth. There's no agreement. I think it's because it's a fringe subject. It doesn't have a definitive answer.

I think, yeah, when it comes to exorcism, yeah, absolutely. There are some Christians who they would say that exorcism actually is not required, or they would say that the only way in which exorcism can be performed is through prayer and fasting. That's one tradition. However, I think the influence of global Pentecostalism has really led to a resurgence of the idea of deliverance ministry as it's sometimes called within a lot of churches, even within mainstream Protestant churches that a hundred years ago wouldn't have dreamt of engaging in something like exorcism. It's become something more acceptable, more mainstream.

A hundred years ago, 200 years ago, exorcism was almost dead in all of the mainstream Christian churches. It all was a dying phenomenon. It was something that was being rejected, and yet from the 1970s onwards, in some cases, a little bit earlier, exorcism has come back big style. It's huge now, not just in the Pentecostal churches but also in the Roman Catholic Church, even in the Church of England.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

You don't necessarily associate Church of England as being the most wild of Christian denominations, and yet, exorcism is actually quite a big thing. So, yeah, I think attitudes have changed. I think the influence of global Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have been really significant even on the most state of mainstream denominations.

Perry Carpenter:

So, within that same context then, what is the place of, and I know it's broader than just that time period, but what is the place of ritual in any type of religious context?

Dr. Francis Young:

Yeah. Ritual is a fascinating thing because it exists both as something religious and as something non-religious or religious. Perhaps we could say existing kind of in parallel to religious practice. There certainly are a great debate among anthropologists of religion about the extent to which religion gives rise to ritual, or is it the other way around that ritual gives rise to religion, that ritual is something more fundamental to human behavior than religion itself?

I think there's a great deal in that in the sense that ritual is not an intellectual activity. It's not something, which is based on a specific consciously realized belief. Take superstitions for example. Whatever you want to pick, not walking under a ladder, throwing salt over your shoulder, avoiding black cats, whatever you want to talk about in the way of superstition, people do these things without thinking about them. Sometimes, they're not even aware that they're doing them because they've kind of become ingrained behaviors.

Therefore, ritual is something which seems prior to religion, if we are to understand religion as this kind of more complex collection of belief systems and practices and behaviors and rules for life and moralities, all these kind of things that we find within religion. When it comes to ritual and religion, we don't know which came first. I think that a lot of anthropologists and archeologists would say that it is ritual, which gives rise to religion in the sense that ritual is something that we see in both religion and magic. Magic, sometimes, it's imagined as the dark twin of religion in the sense that it shares many of the characteristics outwardly of religious behavior, and yet inwardly, the intent and motivation of magic is very alien to the kind of intents and motivations that we're supposed to see within religion.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Yeah, that's one view, but another view would be to say, well, religion doesn't have to be ritualistic, and therefore, why would you say that religion must arise from ritual? But I think that's rooted in a particular view of religion that emerges from the reformation as something which is kind of free from ritual or pretends to be free from ritual. I think that's really quite a recent development in the history of humanity.

Certainly, it's hard to imagine people being particularly interested in that. Before the advent of printing, before the advent of mass literacy, the idea that religion is a matter of the heart, the idea that religion is a matter of sincere belief in a Holy Scripture and so forth, it's not something which could really exist in a kind of pre-printing and pre-literate world, so ritual is absolutely central to community identity. It's central to not just religious or magical acts but also things like the agricultural year in pre-industrial societies. So, it's got a very important function in the preservation of an arc of memory, an oral tradition, and therefore, it's kind of in the realm of folklore as well as merely the realm of religion and the realm of magic.

Perry Carpenter:

This may be a weird question but maybe a little bit of a tangent real quick. In your opinion, where do things like fandoms come in? Do you think that they get close enough to the line to be considered some kind of religion in some way?

Dr. Francis Young:

Yeah, I mean, there was a big debate last year, I think it was, and maybe going back a bit further, about fandoms. Are fandoms religions? Do they have the characteristics of religion? I mean, I think part of the problem is that religion is just one of those conceptual terms that we use all the time, but nobody can give a convincing definition of what it is. So, that allows it to be kind of applied to other things.

So, I think there's a sense in which it's a little bit too easy to say fandoms are religions or online trends like manifesting are religions because, yeah, you can call anything a religion, and there's a sense in which you are bound to be right because religion doesn't have any agreed definition. I think it's more profitable and more fruitful to actually look for the more specific characteristics that we see in things that are manifesting online and what they might represent within a particular religious practice.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

I think that certainly, when you look at something like manifesting, for example, it does share certain characteristics with magical traditions and I think also certain things that people do within fandoms, yet they do share commonalities with religious traditions. The whole problem of people getting hit up about debates about the canon. I mean that very word, canon, which you get a lot in forums discussing cult movies, cult books, TV series and so forth is, of course, a religious word. It comes from the concept of the canon of scripture.

There's this kind of debate about what is authentic? What is the authentic scripture? Yeah, it does have this quasi-religious feel to it. Now, whether that means that the fandom itself is a religion, I would say not really because overall it does not have the structure of religion, but I'd say that there are individual things within it that have this very kind of religious resonance often.

Perry Carpenter:

When we think about the digital world, what interesting things do you think that this unlocks for us, and what potential threats do you think that you see as somebody who studies the wide range of things that you focus on?

Dr. Francis Young:

I think one immediate impact that we see from the digital world and the discussion of belief and magic and folklore in that kind of digital realm is an internationalization. It's something, which perhaps makes it harder to hold onto specifically local traditions. If you're interested as I am in historical folklore studies, so looking at what people believed in the 19th century and earlier, is the highly localized nature of this, which is both a gift and a problem. It's a gift because it allows you to find these highly distinctive ways of understanding the world that seem to be specific to ordinary people in one part of Britain or one part of Ireland or wherever, but the trouble is you then have this question, how does this relate to what people believed in other areas? What are the common threads here? Are these beings of folklore the same as these beings of folklore that share a slightly similar but also slightly different name and all this kind of stuff?

Whereas, I think when you look at online folklore, it is heavily internationalized. You've got figures like Slenderman or Mothman, and particularly creatures from Japanese folklore that have become widely spread in international understanding of creepy beings. It does have this kind of internationalized and undifferentiated character to it.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Now, that, I think is fine because that is what happens when you create an online community. That online community is not going to be bounded by any geographical restrictions whatsoever, but it's interesting to look at how humans then behave when they are within this kind of virtual realm where they're not bounded by the physical or by landscape because folklore, certainly when you look at it historically in Britain, for example, is deeply rooted in place and online is somewhere where you don't have place. So, how does folklore work when it's kind of released from place, when it's released from landscape? I don't have an answer for it. I think it's too early to say. It's only really since the 1990s, isn't it, that the internet, the worldwide web has existed in any meaningful sense for ordinary people, and therefore, 30 years, it's just not long enough to really be able to say.

Perry Carpenter:

I think at the same time though, we do see interesting differences in permutation of different things that we might call lore within different silos of the internet. The things that I am exposed to if I were to go on 4Chan are different than the things that I might get exposed to on TikTok. The things that I'm exposed to even on 4Chan are different than the things that people are exposed to if they go on 8kun, where all of a sudden, the purity of different pieces of folklore or the disturbing nature of different pieces of folklore bring themselves to bear differently within the folk groups that tend to cluster in those different avenues. Do you think that's similar to the localization issue?

Dr. Francis Young:

I think in a way, it must be because you're talking about different populations, and I mean, presumably, there is some overlap of populations of people who are using different platforms, but on the other hand, people do tend to be quite loyal to one particular thing. I am very loyal to Twitter, and so yeah. It's kind of, in that sense, it is because you've got a law that has developed within a population, and in the same way that in the physical world, you'll get population exchange between countries and therefore, there will be a shared folklore crossing boundaries and stories being shared, but it would be fascinating, for example, to have a look at online folklore, digital folklore and to examine it in terms of tale types.

The Aarne-Thompson index, famous approach that was adopted by traditional folklorists where you essentially classify stories according to their basic plot characteristics. For example, Rumpelstiltskin, a classic story of lazy girl marries the king. She has to undergo this test of spinning wool in an impossible



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

amount of time and receives assistance from this goblin-like creature who refuses to give her his name. If she knows his name, then she can liberate herself from the curse that he's going to place her under.

You find this story where the goblin has different names. So, this is tale 500, tale type 500 in the Aarne-Thompson index, and it would be fascinating if you were to apply that to the digital folklore to stuff like Creepypasta because there's no reason why it couldn't be analyzed in exactly the same way that traditional folklorists were analyzing stuff collected by the Brothers Grimm, and yet of course, it might fit into as yet uncataloged and unnumbered tale types. So, that is a ... I don't know whether anybody's done that. There might well be somebody doing it right as we speak, but it's that kind of structural analysis of stories, which can be a fruitful approach in folklore studies.

Perry Carpenter:

I know that you see a lot of potential when it comes to categorization, archival, the ability to blend both digital and physical to do even better, more quality, faster research than has ever been done before. What are your thoughts there as somebody who really sees opportunity here?

Dr. Francis Young:

Yeah. I mean, the digital revolution has been a game-changer really for traditional folklore studies, particularly historical folklore studies. Certainly, when you look at the UK and Ireland, it's increasingly rare to find old style folklorists who will go out with a recording device and go down to the pub or go to the village and try and record stories, inventions that haven't previously been heard before because there isn't much of that stuff out there anymore. The sad fact of a heavily industrialized society that such things, since the Second World War in particular have fallen into abeyance.

So, most folklorists are working with earlier records of what people were saying to older folklorists, but the trouble is that a lot of this stuff was recorded in local newspapers. From the mid-19th century onwards, folklore is an obsession of editors of local newspapers. Now, until digitization, it was essentially impossible for any human being to really go through all of these Victorian local and national newspapers and find all the folklore and pull it out because it would've been the work of seven lifetimes. The way that these things were preserved was not very user-friendly at all.

Digitization, so things like the British newspaper archive, they completely changed that. So, they make it possible for you to do a keyword word search and to find everything that there is about folklore belief in



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

one particular region or one particular kind of folklore belief. For example, Simon Young, who works particularly on fairy belief but also boggarts in the North of England, he's a real pioneer of this, showing the potential of what this can do.

In the U.S., Chris Woodyard has similarly worked in this way, and it's an absolute gold mine. There's vast quantities of information found in these digitized newspapers, but there are also folklore collections, which previously had been languishing, completely unpublished in manuscript, huge folklore surveys, and they now can be made accessible through digitization, whereas publishing them would be unfeasible. You've got to get somebody to transcribe them, whereas of course, if you're taking photographic images, then it's a bit more straightforward.

A good example of that would be the Schools' Collection. So, University College Dublin has this extraordinary collection of material that was collected in the 1930s by a national campaign of the Irish government to essentially collect all of the Irish folklore that could be found mainly from children. That's why it's called the Schools' Collection, because children in school were asked, "Find your parents. Find your grandparents. Find your great grandparents. Ask them the stories that they know," and then the children would come into school, they would write it down. So, they're effectively using the children as the transcribers of all this folklore. Then, this stuff just goes into a massive archive in Dublin. Really, unless you are really determined as a researcher, you wouldn't find this stuff, but now, anybody can look for it. Anybody can search through digital search terms, so it's really opened up the folklore of Ireland.

Another example that I really love is obscure local magazines published in the 1970s, the things that were kind of home-printed magazines of local lore and weird stuff like UFO lore and things like that. It belongs to this kind of lost culture of shared pre-digital analog culture of shared interests among small groups of enthusiasts. Some of that stuff's been digitized as well, and I particularly love that. So, it really has opened up the frontier of what can be digitized.

Perry Carpenter:

I think that's super, super cool. The thing that I'm wondering in all of that is, as we get away from the original source material and we go to the digitized preserved versions of that, if there have been found any errors or maybe even intentional misrepresentations, has anybody tried to change the record to make themselves look better or make somebody else look worse in the middle of all that?



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Francis Young:

Perhaps not change the record, but I think that something like this, curation is crucial. As with any kind of archive or museum curation, who looks after it, what their priorities, what their agenda is, is going to affect the nature of the collection. What is considered worthy of digitizing? What should be digitized first?

The trouble with digitization projects, they're usually absolutely massive and take years, and therefore, decisions about priorities have to be made. Those decisions affect what we consider to be significant. One that I would like to highlight is the Folklore Library and Archive. This is a UK-based initiative. It has a physical headquarters, which is at Crediton Public Library in Dorset, but it's also got an online presence, and it's kind of mixed hybrid economy where you've got a collection of physical books and pamphlets and things like that, but you've also got things that are being uploaded online.

One of the interesting things about the Folklore Library and Archive, they focus particularly on things like ephemera and things like privately printed, locally printed, things that are smaller than a book and aren't an official journal or article, and things like that, the sort of stuff that in digitization projects, it can get overlooked because it doesn't have that official status. It doesn't have that formal status. Some of the most interesting folklore stuff is there. People who write books about their local ghosts, that's probably not going to be published by a mainstream publisher. It's probably not going to be a journal article in [inaudible 00:33:56] Journal, and yet it's going to be hugely important to the folklorists.

I think that this is the thing about folklore. It's a very, very diverse source base, much more so than a traditional history. Traditional history, you're doing Medieval history, you've got a fixed kind of manuscript source base. You kind of know where these things are. They're in the well-known archives, or you've got archeology. When it comes to folklore, well, the original sources are people. They're living people, most of whom are now dead. The only thing that we've got is the record that was made of their words, which of course, could be in the form of audio recordings. So, you've also got plans to digitize audio recordings, huge amounts of audio recording, or indeed something like the East Anglian Film Archive, which has digitized a lot of film of the East of England, particularly things like traditional crafts, traditional dances. There's not really much point describing a traditional dance in words because you won't be able to convey what it really was, so you need film in order to record that. Some of this stuff dates back to the 1930s, the 1920s, and so it's very valuable records of lost societies.

Perry Carpenter:



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

All right. That felt like it went well overall. Dr. Francis Young really knows his stuff, and I also don't think that he caught on to the real reason that I was calling, so that's good. Here's to hoping that this information helps, or maybe even more, that it doesn't have to help.

Oh, God, I really wish I hadn't booked such a big Airbnb just for myself. This place is starting to creep me out a bit. Anyway, I'm going to go try to relax. I'm halfway through re-watching Good Omens, and I just need to chill out and turn my brain off for a while. So, hopefully, I'll be back soon to make another entry. Until then, signing off.

[Theme music kicks-in for ending credits]

[Sound of Mason's voicemail activating]

Mason Amadeus:

You've reached the voicemail box of Mason Amadeus. Leave me a message, and I'll ignore it for six months and then text you and apologize for doing that. Worth a shot though. Here's the beep.

[voicemail beep]

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, Mason. It's Perry. I know it's super late, so you're probably going to get this in the morning maybe, but I just had an interesting interview with a guy named [Francis Young](#), and I'm going to need you to cut some in credits for me, so something normal. The thanks for listening to Digital Folklore. Special thanks to our guest on this episode, [Francis Young](#). Francis had a whole bunch of insight and expertise that he shared with us, so be sure to highlight that and make it sound really special so that we'll pull together some [links about](#) his [work](#) and all that. We'll throw it in the show notes.

Oh, don't forget to tell people about our [Discord](#), all the fun that people are having there, blah, blah, blah, all that in the show notes as well. Of course, if people like what we're doing, [Patreon](#), give us cash, all that kind of stuff. Then, depending on where the music is, if you want to say [Digital Folklore](#) is a production of [8th Layer Media](#), distributed by [Realm](#), all the normal stuff. You'll figure it out, I'm sure. All right. Later.



Digital Folklore

Season 1, Episode 8

*FOLK: The Folklore of Religion, Exorcism, Fandoms,
Online Communities, and more - Dr. Francis Young*

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

[Theme music ends --- sounds of a raccoon scampering (Digby???)]

[New sound. A server...somewhere... clicks to life. The automated voice is glitchy. This thing must be...*ancient*]

Automated Voice:

Activity detected... Subject group 35423.

Audio recording.

Transcription in progress... Keyword found... 'Francis.'

Flagged for containment.