

## Professor Séamus Delargy

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Professor James Hamilton Delargy, who was made an Honorary Fellow of the School of Scottish Studies in 1955, died in Dublin on 25 June at the age of eighty-one. This is not the place to attempt an evaluation of his enormous contribution to folklore studies in Ireland or even of the great influence he had on their development in England, Wales and the Isle of Man. But the part he played in the deliberations leading to the founding of the School of Scottish Studies merits special mention because it was crucially important and because he brought to bear on the problems involved a remarkable (and characteristic) combination of hard-headedness and of passionate devotion to the subject to which he had dedicated his life.

By the summer of 1949 there was already in Edinburgh a certain awareness of the desirability of embarking on the serious and systematic investigation of Scottish folklore and folk life but all the difficulties of bringing a workable university organisation into being lay dauntingly before us. At this point it became vital to turn for guidance and support to eminent folklorists elsewhere. Accordingly, at the end of that summer I wrote to Delargy in Dublin: he was at that time Professor of Irish Folklore in University College and Honorary Director of the Irish Folklore Commission. This led, on 11 October, to a warm and positive letter of encouragement and at the very end of that year I found myself staying as a guest in his home and discussing in detail and at length the numerous problems that lay ahead. There followed, in the summer of 1950, at the Viking Congress in Shetland, further talks with him and also with another warm supporter of the School, Professor Dag Strömbäck of the University of Uppsala. By the end of that year an exploratory committee had been set up in Edinburgh University and Delargy was invited to come over and give his views and advice to its members. He did this in late February and in his inimitable fashion succeeded in reinforcing in a powerful and fruitful way a sense of the urgency and importance of going ahead. The outcome need not be elaborated here.

Delargy took a continuing interest in the welfare of the School and, as was pointed out in his obituary in the *Times* on 4 July, its first archive accession was the gift of 10,000 microfilmed pages of folklore collected by the Irish Folklore Commission in Gaelic-speaking Scotland. Many members of the School, past and present, will have good reason to recall numerous less tangible and more personal gestures of assistance from him and of kindness.

