

Stewart Forson Sanderson, 1924 – 2016

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Stewart Forson Sanderson, who passed away peacefully at home on October 14, 2016, was born of Scottish parents in Nyasaland, now Malawi, in 1924 but his education and early career gave him an attachment to Edinburgh and to Scotland which he retained until the end of his life. He was appointed to the staff of the School of Scottish Studies early in its foundational first decade and helped to set in train working approaches and methods which continue to this day.

He was schooled in Scotland, at Madras College in St Andrews and at George Watson's College in Edinburgh. He excelled in classical and modern languages and music, playing the piano and organ, conducting the school orchestra and taking up dance band music too. He was Dux of the school and won a bursary to study Classics at the University of Edinburgh in 1943.

He deferred his university place to serve in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve from 1943 to 1946, first as a Sub-Lieutenant and later as a full Lieutenant RNVR, in postings across the Mediterranean: Gibraltar, Taranto, Naples, Malta, Alexandria and Leros. His perceptive approach to the needs of local populations in post-war planning is illustrated by his recommendation that the naval bases established by the occupying powers in the Dodecanese Islands should be transferred at the end of the war to the communities in which they were located.

When he entered the University of Edinburgh Stewart altered his registration to English Language and Literature with Italian and British History. He was active in student societies and in a range of musical activities, developing keen editorial skills on *The Old Quad Review* and *The Student* newspaper. He graduated with First Class Honours and a medal in Italian in 1951, winning travelling scholarships to Italy.

Angus McIntosh, who had been appointed Forbes Professor of English Language and General Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh in 1948, was instrumental in the creation of the School of Scottish Studies in 1951 and the following year Stewart was appointed its Secretary-Archivist. He furthered the vision of McIntosh and those who supported him at the time from Ireland and, through Ireland, Sweden, in a programme of field recording and archival work which remained at the heart of its teaching, research, publications and outreach. He participated in field collection himself when possible, with a focus on fishing and maritime traditions. In 1957 he became a Senior Research Fellow and was an Assistant Editor of the journal *Scottish Studies*, inaugurated in the same year.

Stewart reached out to many for whom the new institution was a welcome focus for their interests. Donations to the School's research library were encouraged from many

¹ The author thanks Professors David Sanderson, John Widdowson, and Clive Upton and others for material included here.

sources and journal exchanges were established. The result is a resource which is unique for Scottish and comparative ethnological studies. He befriended the German ethnographer Werner Kissling, who had settled in Scotland. Kissling became a part-time fieldworker for the School and made a major contribution to its growing photographic archive. Sound collections made before 1951 were acquired and from the start; but particularly after 1954, when its base moved to premises in George Square, the School became a lively and important meeting-place for those active in Scottish Studies of many kinds. Its walls were characterised by Scottish paintings gifted by supporters or bought for a song at Edinburgh's famous 'lane sales', held behind the New Town auction houses.

Those early days saw useful visits by scholars from many places eager to assist the new School. Stewart married Alison Cameron in 1953 and together they created a welcoming home in Duddingston, a historic corner of Edinburgh. They offered hospitality to scholarly visitors, many of whom became close friends. The inauguration of the cross-disciplinary Northern Scholars' Scheme at the University of Edinburgh, which continues to foster practical links with Scandinavian, Finnish and, more recently, Baltic institutions, was a direct outcome of the School's initiatives in the 1950s. Stewart's earlier involvement with student publications had shown him the value of press publicity and the School felt its benefit as its aims and activities were chronicled for the wider public.

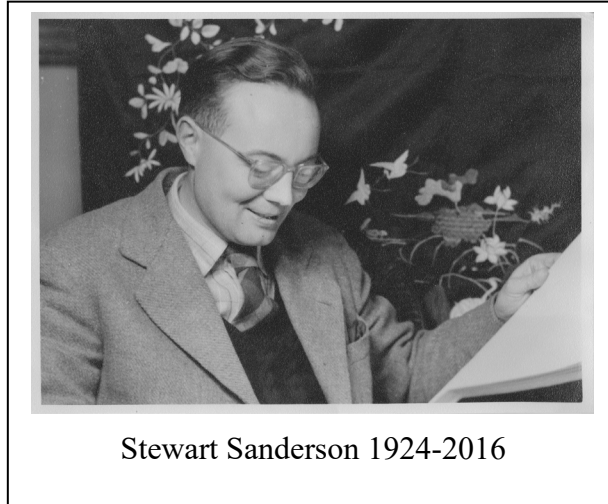
Stewart never lost his love of the Italian language and the people and culture of the Mediterranean. He enjoyed its cuisine and formed friendships with the families from Italy engaged in Edinburgh's culinary scene, who offered colour and pleasure in a city emerging from the austerity of post-war rationing, and revelled in revived and new forms of internationalism such as the Edinburgh International Festival. The column in *The Scotsman* which he co-wrote under the pseudonym 'The Gastrologue', incorporated a good deal of this spirit. The School played its role in reaching out to colleagues beyond this country through engagement in the folklore and folklife networks which were emerging after the hiatus of war. Stewart encouraged this heartily.

Stewart's appointment in 1960 as Director of the University of Leeds Folk Life Survey, which evolved into the Institute for Dialect and Folk Life Studies, drew on the experience gained in the Edinburgh years and heralded a significant period in study, research and publication in these disciplines. Though university cutbacks brought the closure of the Institute in 1983, its achievements during his tenure deserve very high praise. The Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture (LAVC) in the Special Collections section of the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds is one of his several legacies.

Stewart brought to Leeds his familiarity with the Linguistic Survey of Scotland (Gaelic and Scots), begun shortly before the founding of the School. He became intimately involved in the Survey of English Dialects (SED) initiated in 1947 by Professor Harold Orton with Professor Eugen Dieth of Zurich. Before and following his retirement in 1983, when he was made the first Honorary Harold Orton Fellow, he took the SED project forward in accordance with Orton's wishes, ensuring the publication of the *Linguistic Atlas of England* (1978 [1996]) by securing Leverhulme Trust funding, and promoting with the publishers the creation of several other indispensable volumes including *Studies in Linguistic Geography* (1985) with John Kirk and John Widdowson, a smaller atlas entitled *Word Maps: A Dialect Atlas of England* (1987 [2015]) with Clive Upton and John Widdowson, and the *Survey of English Dialects: the Dictionary and Grammar* (1994) with Clive Upton, David Parry and John Widdowson. He sought expert advice from colleagues in the British Isles and

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continental Europe and a commitment from the publishers Croom Helm to fund the analysis and inputting of data as well as providing other essential support.



His appointment also gave him scope to develop the first university courses in Folk Life Studies in the UK, with options for undergraduate BA students in English and full MA, MPhil and PhD programmes for postgraduates. A one-year postgraduate Diploma was offered for students interested in careers in museums or archives. Here and elsewhere graduates of these remember with gratitude the careful guidance they received from Stewart, his staff and visiting lecturers. His personal experience of living and studying far from home gave him an empathy with his students from abroad, many of whom continued to keep in touch. The data gathered by students contributed to the rich store of material available in the LAVC.

Stewart's facility with languages, his commitment to collaboration and his keen interest in research of a comparative nature made him ready to engage in projects which crossed borders. These included committee work for the International Commission for the Atlas of European Folk Culture and the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, and membership of the editorial boards of several journals. The Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy for Swedish Folk Culture appointed him a Corresponding Fellow. From 1979 to 1983 he was a governor of the British Institute of Recorded Sound and an advisor to the British Library National Sound Archive thereafter.

In 1982 he was awarded the Coote-Lake Research Medal of The Folklore Society, which he served as a trustee between 1968 and 1979 and as president from 1970 to 1973. In 1981 he gave the Society's inaugural Katharine Briggs Lecture on "The Modern Urban Legend". He wrote in a range of journals and his edition of *The Secret Commonwealth*, a treatise on fairy beliefs and second sight compiled by the 17th century Scottish minister and Gaelic scholar Robert Kirk, published by the Society in 1976, has been a boon to scholarship.

On retirement he and Alison returned to Scotland, which again became the home base for their children, Mariot, David and Gavin and their families. They committed energy and creativity to their communities in the Bowmont Valley and Town Yetholm and to Scotland more widely. Stewart chaired the Scottish Arts Council's literature and grants to publishers panels for five years, a period which saw much formative activity in Scottish publishing. Recording talking books and a regular newsletter for the visually impaired were amongst

Stewart's contributions in these years. He never lost his love of the cultures of those countries where he had served as a young naval officer. Closer to home, he relished opportunities to cast a line in favourite Borders waters.

Stewart Sanderson's devotion to folklore and folklife studies arose from a deep understanding of the value of these in the lives of all involved. He was generous in assisting many in publishing their research. Importantly, he documented the state of these subjects as they took their place in the curricula of our institutions of higher education. His essay on 'The Work of the School of Scottish Studies' in the first issue of the School's journal *Scottish Studies* in 1957 (pp 3-13) and a version the same year in *Folklore* (Vol. 68, No. 4, pp 457-466), 'The Present State of Folklore Studies in Scotland', are required reading for historians of Scottish Ethnology. These concentrate on current activities and aspirations for the future. But in a paper which appeared in the *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society* in 1960 (Part 60, Vol. 10, pp. 21-34), 'Yorkshire in a new folk-life survey', he points out the wide relevance of our subject in the contemporary world and its nature as a humanistic science. 'Our study is indeed a proper one for this day and age... Whether we be interested in speech, in customs, in beliefs, or in practices, let us never forget that our subject is man, and the common lot of humanity. The human figure must dominate our minds: our greater duty is not to academic techniques but to our fellow men and women' (33, 22).

At Stewart's funeral, one of his six grandchildren, also called Stewart Sanderson and an acclaimed Scottish poet, read the poem "Tradition Bearer" from his recent collection *Fios*. It opens 'When I was born the man downstairs/put a pound under my pillow, said/ *dae richt*'. These two words make a fitting epitaph for his grandfather and his life and work.