

folklore

Folklore is often regarded as a lesser but harmless branch of history, or as mere fireside storytelling in thatched cottages in rural Ireland. To treat the subject in this condescending way is to misunderstand the value of folklore.

Folklore is not a licence to invent or embellish history: it is the people's lore - the distillation of the everyday experiences of the generality of men and women. It combines the study of work and play of the ordinary people and the influence on their lives of custom, tradition and religion. And, contrary to the widely held belief in Ireland, folklore embraces both urban and rural life.

Much valuable work has been done in the field of Irish folklore, but there has also been much neglect and uneven treatment. For instance, while a good deal of the lore of the countryside has been collected in the last two centuries, the rich store of town and city life has not received the same degree of concentration.

Before the age of modern transport, mass production and global communications, each community had its own unique and distinctive folklore. And despite the pressures and change of today's world, remnants of the old culture continue to survive in their alien surroundings.

Limerick has been fortunate in having produced one of the finest Irish folklorists of this century. Kevin Danaher has been student, teacher, writer, scholar and historian. His books and articles represent the very best examples of their kind.

In January of this year Kevin Danaher retired from the Department of Irish Folklore at University College, Dublin. The occasion was marked by the publication of a beautiful book of folklore studies in his honour, titled "Gold Under the Furze". It is fitting that one of the editors of this book was another Limerick man, Daithi O hOgain.

Kevin Danaher did not ignore his native country. His many studies of Limerick life, especially his pioneering work on the agricultural labourers, have provided us with a many-sided picture of our own place and its people.

By his life's work Kevin Danaher has demonstrated the value of folklore, not only as a discipline in itself, but also as a useful corrective to historical interpretation.