

Dancing Spies: Nazi attempts to infiltrate the English Folk Revival

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In August 1938, a young man attending the English Folk Dance and Song Society's Annual Summer School at Stratford-upon-Avon attracted quite a lot of attention. A good dancer, he made rapid progress through the various graded courses and was apparently very keen to come back again the following year.¹ His enthusiasm was unusual. By the later 1930's, people in England were voting with their feet as attitudes to the Folk Revival changed. The excitement of discovery that fostered participation in the early decades of the century had faded. Attendance at classes organised by the English Folk Dance & Song Society in London, was falling significantly² and other forms of involvement were under pressure. "The Society's great need," Lady Amptill noted in her "Opening Remarks from the Chair" at the Society's Annual Meeting on 3 December 1938, "was for more members". Senior staff were disheartened - Douglas Kennedy, Director of the English Folk Dance & Song Society was reported to be considering "emigration to America, which seemed to offer more prospects for revival".³ An earlier judgement, now seemed to have become the general opinion - "These old songs and dances have a certain antiquarian interest, and there is no harm in collecting information about them, nor in reproducing some of them as curiosities or as physical exercises for the young. But when we get a 'revival' of them, when we have pale-faced intellectuals warbling and capering under the delusion that they are restoring the simple gaieties of Old England, the thing becomes ludicrous."⁴

Outside England, however, attitudes offered a marked contrast. Coming to power in 1933, Germany's Nazi⁵ government accorded the highest political significance to folklore - folk

dance formed part of the programme of activities for Party members and traditional dances performed by groups of men were held to be especially ideologically important. These policies were developments of longer-standing ideas. From at least 1902, German nationalist historians, anthropologists and folklorists had linked the view that "primitive" peoples "always had some form of male fellowships [*Männerbünde*]" with proposals that these groups also had "their own religious cults, where the members embodied the souls of dead warriors with weapon dances and masked or painted faces."⁶ This formulation was then employed to conjure up an extended history through which customary performances - and particularly sword dances - became symbols of a biologically, linguistically and culturally united Germanic people whose continuity and uncontaminated existence could be traced from pre-history via the classical descriptions of youths in German tribes leaping among swords provided by Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (c.55-117), through medieval records of Shrovetide processions to village performances in the modern day.⁷ Such claims of ancestral unity extended beyond mainland Europe. Customs found in the north, midlands and south of England - Sword and Morris dances, even the Jack-in-the-Green - were very quickly integrated into this *germanische Kontinuität*. In an appendix to *Mysterium und Mimus im Rigveda* published in 1908, Leopold von Schroeder (1851-1920) proposed:

The mimetically presented weapon dances of the *Maruts*, the Germanic sword dances, the dances of the Roman *Salier*, of the *Curetes* and *Corybants* in Greece and Phrygia, when considered comparatively, lead us to the seemingly irrefutable assumption, that in

Aryan prehistory the young manhood of the nation, at certain festival times, performed weapon dances in which the dancers ... represented the departed spirits of the tribe, especially the souls of dead warriors. The characteristic costume of the Germanic sword dancers were white shirts which were often decorated with coloured ribbons and were provided with bells, which we know to be so characteristic for the dances of spirits and gods in Mexico. But the appearance of these dancers can also be black, as is evident from the morris dancers in England, who have been so readily connected with Moors [*Mohren*] and *Moriscos*. The many soot-blackened figures taking part in the vegetation processions also belong to this, in which the chimney sweeps and the smiths' guilds also often play a role.⁸

Traditions presented in Britain as the essence of Englishness were thus reconfigured as incontrovertible evidence of "the essential unity of all Germanic tribes and peoples"⁹ and offered as a rationale for political reconnection to a greater geographical whole. Applying their political interpretation to Folk culture, Nazi Folklorists claimed to demonstrate that English customs were Germanic, that this "historical continuity" transcended current national boundaries and provided "an uncompromising affirmation of the eternal values of the Nordic race".¹⁰ Folklore had been transformed into an ideological weapon - the 1934 Nazi Party publication, *The Hundred First Books for National Socialist Libraries* [*Die hundert ersten Bücher für Nationalsozialistische Büchereien*], listed Folklore publications in the same category as those dealing with racial theory, demography, and "the science of defence".¹¹ Noting these developments, as early as 1935, the Swedish folklorist Sigfrid Svenson (1901-1984) wrote an article for the Copenhagen press to warn that "The Nazis are combining Folklore with the politics of expansion."¹²

So significant was the role of Folklore [*Volkskunde*] within Nazi political theory that two rival organisations within the Party fought to control the field. First was the "Rosenberg Bureau" [Ampt Rosenberg/ARo] founded in 1934 by Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), who developed many of the Nazi's

racial and religious theories. The Rosenberg Bureau oversaw surveillance and cultural policy for the Party. In the following year, Herman Wirth (1885-1981), a Netherlands-born specialist in folksong and ancient Germanic 'folk religion' and Richard Walther Darré (1895-1953) advocate of a 'Germanic aristocracy of the soil', founded the *Ahnenerbe*, [Office of Ancestral Inheritance]. These two were, however, rapidly sidelined by the *Ahnenerbe's* third co-founder, Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), Head of the SS [*Schutzstaffel*] and one of the most powerful men in Germany. Among a far wider range of objectives, the *Ahnenerbe* aimed to control all aspects of research, teaching and publication relating to Folklore, History and Germanic culture. The extensive overlap of interests between the Rosenberg Bureau and *Ahnenerbe*, coupled with the colossal ambitions and vehemence of their adherents, provided ample scope for vicious in-fighting between them.¹³

No area of Folklore study was immune from their intervention. Attempting to maintain a career and see research win some benefit from the 'booming business' that was Folklore in Germany after 1933,¹⁴ John Meier (1864-1953), Chair of the League of German Societies for Folklore [*Verband deutscher Vereine für Volkskunde*] prefaced League meetings with speeches in praise for National Socialism and its *Führer*.¹⁵ Despite this, in 1934, he found himself threatened with imprisonment in a concentration camp by a leading figure in the Rosenberg Bureau over a paper he had presented at that year's League meeting which did not precisely accord with Rosenberg's theories on Folklore. Meier's reaction was to seek protection via collaboration with Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*. This had a decisive impact on scholarship. The League's main output, its Journal, was taken over by the *Ahnenerbe*, who replaced Meier as Editor and turned the entire publication over to the propagation of Nazi *Volkskunde*. Meier's life work, the German Folksong Archive in Freiburg was also manoeuvred into the *Ahnenerbe's* control.¹⁶ Folk dance was even more deeply corrupted - many researchers were already steeped in Germanic and National Socialist thinking

when the Nazi government came to power. Karl Haiding (1906-1985), who was the Working Community for German Folklore's specialist in dance at its founding in 1937, had joined the Nazi Party as a teenager in 1923, was Head Post Leader in the Cultural Office of the Reich Youth Leadership in Berlin and already well established with the Rosenberg Bureau. Haiding held many important positions under the Nazi government, including Director of the Institute of German Folklore and was later given responsibility for "re-establishing pure German life" by removing "decadent" and "foreign folk elements which were dangerous for the Reich and German folk" in "re-claimed" areas beyond Germany's previous eastern borders.¹⁷ In the newly-formed and expanded university Folklore departments the Nazis set up to promote their ideology – and notably in Austria where men's customs and Sword dance were major fields of study – staff were almost entirely drawn from members of the *Ahnenerbe* and Rosenberg Bureau.¹⁸ Richard Wolfram (1901-1995), a lecturer at the University of Vienna who wrote widely on Sword dances, was a member of the Nazi Party from 1932 and "at the pinnacle of influence" in Folklore in the *Ahnenerbe* - eventually serving on Himmler's personal staff. Both Haiding and Wolfram were themselves folk dancers. What was seen in England as 'warbling and capering' were in Germany – and very soon elsewhere – not academic studies or hobbies but active components in a deadly serious conflict.

Even as the basis of perverted racial theory, however, Folklore seems an unlikely means of pursuing an aggressive foreign policy. How did the Nazis use folk dance, custom and tradition to support their strategies for expansion into their hypothesised greater Germanic homelands in Nordic and Baltic areas and Western Europe? It was thought that "non-political" adherents were more likely to influence their fellow-citizens than members of local forms of Nazi parties, so – as with other types of pre-War Nazi outreach - much effort went into identifying potential sympathisers among researchers and enthusiasts for traditional performance to

prepare the way for successful later occupation. Pan-European societies and their publications provided productive sources for support. Bodies like the International Association for Folklore and Ethnology [*Internationaler Verband für Volksforschung*], which was founded in 1935 with the active involvement of the Rosenberg Bureau, brought together professional scholars from the "Germanic" countries of Europe. It was headed by the Dutch ethnologist, Jan de Vries (1890-1964), who was also Editor of its journal, and by 1938, the subject of concern among Netherlands Folklorists because of his "sympathy" for Germanic theory. Many non-German members of the Association became collaborators with the *Ahnenerbe* when their countries were over-run - De Vries himself becoming a *Förderndes Mitglied* [Supporting Member] of the SS after the invasion of The Netherlands.¹⁹ For folk dancers, international festivals were particularly favoured means of establishing links – Dirk Jan Van der Ven (1892-1973) a Folk Life specialist involved in the founding of the *Nederlandsopenluchtmuseum*, and his wife Elise Ten-Bensel (1892-1982), a leading teacher and proponent of folk dance in The Netherlands, participated in many European festivals, including taking a Dutch team to the performances in Hamburg which accompanied the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Despite German violation of their country's neutrality by invasion in May 1940, within weeks the Van der Ven-Ten-Bensels invited the SS representative of the *Ahnenerbe* in The Netherlands to visit their home, where he was given a "friendly reception" and taken on a tour of the *Openluchtmuseum*. Van der Ven was, the SS man reported, "fluent" in his command of Germanic theories and was "completely adjusted to the new times. He'd become totally familiar with the terminology of nationalist thoughts and acts as though he's always been a National Socialist."²⁰ Dirk Jan Van der Ven went on to write articles full of Germanic theory for the new SS-funded folklore magazine, *Hamer*, whilst Elise Ten-Bensel involved herself in the process of "Germanifying" Dutch culture with works aimed at the popular market which set out the

ancient Germanic roots of Sword and figure dances. In keeping with Nazi policy, she also produced a book of “Community and Mens’ Dances” [*Gemeenschaps- en Mannendansen*] and wrote in praise of the “new folksongs” the Dutch Nazi Party [*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging in Nederland/NSB*] produced for its youth organisations.²¹

Given the level and scope of these infiltrations in Continental Europe, how did the English Folk Revival avoid similar attempted approaches? Were we uniquely untouched by Germanic theorising and proto-collaboration? Not in the least. As might have been expected, the Nazis followed up their claims to English customs with a wide variety of initiatives aimed at identifying potential sympathisers or collaborators. Their attempts came at a time when comparative studies were a standard methodology, so for serious researchers international meetings were particularly attractive. Some academic organisations, however, recognised the sinister background to these gleaming offers of scholarly discussion. Urged by its Hon. Editor, George Robert Gair (1907-1996), who had strong political and theoretical links with Germany, in 1935, the recently formed Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society began a series of initiatives that connected the Society directly with Nazi funded organisations for Nordic, Baltic and Western European Folklore co-operation. Fortunately, the membership of longer established bodies, such as The Royal Anthropological Institute [RAI] highlighted the “doubts in England” about the “political influence dominating” the main front grouping - de Vries’ International Association for Folklore and Ethnology. They had “fears of Nazi domination”, noting the Association’s anti-Semitic tendencies and that its publications were funded by the German government. More bluntly, leading members of the RAI, John L. Myers (1869-1954) and Charles G Seligman (1873-1940) reportedly described the Association as “a clandestine international Nazi organisation, and its board was prepared to serve the Nazi research ideology, under German leadership.” Their remarks, a later commentator dryly observed, “led to strained relations between IAFE and

Royal Anthropological Society in London”.²² But their action raised the awareness of groups like the Folk-Lore Society, who had key members such as Harold Coote Lake (1878-1939) and Roderick Sayce (1890-1970) in common with the RAI and may have prevented many otherwise innocent researchers being compromised.

Folk dancers, however, were rather less fortunate. Members of The English Folk Dance Society [EFDS] had already been exposed to the content, if not the full implications of Germanic theorising. Rolf Gardiner (1902-1971), who had become involved in folk dance at school, attended classes at Chelsea Polytechnic supervised by Cecil Sharp (1859-1926) and danced with Cambridge Morris whilst at University, had been a member of the EFDS from 1919. Gardiner was a persistent critic of Sharp’s and the EFDS’s approach to performance. As the general membership were only rarely given opportunity to dance outside classes preparing for the Society’s graded examinations, Gardiner’s objections were justified. But his extended arguments against Sharp’s view that although “traditionally a man’s dance”, “none but the pedant” would bar women or children from performing Sword or Morris dances as part of the Folk Revival, introduced entirely new areas for the supposed “origin” of customs. Gardiner proposed that Morris and Sword teams were a *Blutbruderschaft* [blood brotherhood] and that – as a result of the Revival – Morris was “languishing in its artificial soil, it has been taken up by women and totally lost its true character under their influence.”²³ Diverging significantly from Sharp and into developing Germanic theory, Gardiner discerned “sun signs” in Morris dance figures and proposed that Morris was an “ancient, magical or priestly” dance, “essentially selective magic” performed by a “peculiarly fitted and trained elite” “to gain mastery over the living forces or potencies of the earth”. In highlighting the deaths of the “ancient heroes” of the Oxford University Morris team in the First War and their replacement in the 1920’s by “the younger bloods” of Cambridge University Morris, he even managed to advance Shroeder’s “irrefutable assumption, that in Aryan

prehistory the young manhood of the nation, at certain festival times, performed weapon dances in which the dancers ... represented departed spirits of the tribe, especially the souls of dead warriors". A pre-Nazi advocate of Germanic theory, he also took a deep personal interest in Longsword performances and particularly in the North Skelton team from Yorkshire, who provided the guard of honour at his wedding in 1932 and whom he took on several trips to Germany including to the World Congress for Leisure-Time and Recreation which accompanied the Berlin Olympics in 1936. His programme note for the Olympiad performances is studded with key words and references to Germanic theory, maintaining that they represented "the old Nordic sword dance", "also known throughout Germany and the neighbouring lands". "The old German music and the old English folk-dance tradition appeared to be very closely related to one another in their form," he wrote, "for in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England and Germans alike lived together in one great common western civilization, and with one common Germanic will."²⁴ Notably charismatic and persuasive, Gardiner's reasoned critiques of the style and limitations of the EFDSS's approach to dance, over time gave credence and access to other, less desirable arguments.

Rolf Gardiner had spent much of his childhood in Germany – his mother, Hedwig von Rosen had family roots in the Baltic area and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, his father, Alan was an Egyptologist working in Berlin. Unsurprisingly, Rolf read Modern and Medieval Languages at St John's College, Cambridge. He had taken groups of folk dancers on tours of the Continent from 1922 and increasingly combined this with promoting Germanic theories on Folklore. His support for "more ambitious fields of action" which did "not merely stop at folk-dancing", but were "stepping stones" to a North Sea and Baltic "union of the younger generation in northern Europe" did not find favour with fellow dancers in Cambridge Morris Men. But his proselytising for a *Blutbruderschaft* bringing together a dancing *Männerbünde* of "male fellowships"

achieved success in the founding of The Morris Ring - set up in 1934 to "bring into contact all existing Morris Men's Clubs or sides, and to encourage the formation of others."²⁵ Expressing his satisfaction at this "rescue" of the custom in a letter to the members' magazine of The English Folk-Dance and Songs Society, Gardiner highlighted the correspondence between this new grouping and the latest German academic work on theories of dance and *Männerbünde*:

"And the Morris will become itself again, the dance of men, sworn to manhood, fiery ecstasy, ale, magic and fertility!... It will become the communion rite of clubs and "secret societies," of lazy rascals, roisterers and scallywags, of princes among these....

....As Richard Wolfram has written in the first published part of his great book "Schwertanz und Männerbünde" (Sword Dance and Men's Clubs): "We want life and not a museum. Therefore let us see how much of the old stock can take root in those new and growing communities of which we to-day are members. And let us be mindful of our responsibility."²⁶

Gardiner's activities and quotes from Wolfram's writing were not the only channels for ideas to pass between the English Folk Revival and Nazi theories of Folklore. Members of the *Ahnenerbe* and their associates were regular visitors to England and provide real examples of "dancing spies". During his early Continental tours with English dancers, Gardiner usually stopped off at *De Meihof*, near Arnhem in The Netherlands – home of "two eminent folklorists", his "friend and ally" Elise Ten Bensele and "our friend Van der Ven". The couple had obviously made an impression at their meeting with Gardiner - Elise being invited to contribute an article to his magazine *Youth* in October 1923, Dirk Jan in Summer 1924. Encouraged by Gardiner, the Van der Ven-Ten Benseles visited Cecil Sharp in England in 1925 and began introducing English folk dance to The Netherlands. Their relationship with the EFD(S)S was close – teams of dancers led by the Society's Director, Douglas Kennedy (1893-1988) regularly gave displays, taught and examined

courses at *De Meihof* and Richard Callendar (1893-1949), one of the EFDSS's main teachers is credited with "building up 'De Meihof Morris Mannen'" who were probably the first foreign team to join The Morris Ring.²⁷ Elise made regular visits to England, taking all the EFDS courses necessary to become a Society-accredited teacher of folk dance. Well-connected and accepted by the Society's top administrators – she is listed as a 'Foreign Corresponding Member' of the National Advisory Council throughout the 1930's - Elise was among the "principal lecturers" at Society Summer Schools, attended Annual Staff Conferences, wrote articles and reviews for the Society's members' journal. And when the Society initiated a conference to run alongside their International Folk Dance Festival in London in 1935, Dirk Jan van der Ven and Elise van Ten Bensel both gave papers and took part in discussions.

Richard Wolfram also began to input Germanic theories directly to EFDSS membership at a key point for male dancers. As a number of Morris teams were considering the formation of The Morris Ring, Wolfram, the most prominent member of the group of Austrian Folklorists who "presented the notion of militant, secret men's unions as the basis of Germanic culture and society, with sword dances as their initiation rites",²⁸ provided a paper on "Sword Dances and Secret Societies" for the first journal of the newly conjoint English Folk Dance and Song Society. Outlining a geography for later aggression, he claimed that "a Sword-dance map of Europe would show the surprising fact, that nearly all dances of the "hilt and point" type are concentrated in the Germanic districts: England, Scandinavia, Holland, Germany Austria and Switzerland" and adding dances from "near the borders" in Czechoslovakia, France, Italy and Yugoslavia" and German-speaking parts of Romania and the Carpathian Mountains. Wolfram reiterated Germanic theories on *Kontinuität*, on all male dance groups and secret societies, concluding that Sword dances were not the only dance of secret societies - "the Morris-dance is probably no [*sic*] other than a dance of these societies" – deliberately

adding in brackets and with an exclamation mark "(Morris clubs!)".²⁹ Then, in the same issue of the *Journal*, the Society's almost entirely unwitting membership received a second dose of Germanic theory in a detailed review of Kurt Meschke's, *Schwerttanz und Schwerttanzspiel im Germanischen Kulturkreis* [*Sword Dance and Sword Dance Plays in Germanic Culture*] written by Elise van Ten Bensel. Elise put forward criticisms of the limitations of Meschke's book but ended her review with a recommendation of a "closely related" and "illuminating" pamphlet, *Robin Hood and Hobby Horse* written by Richard Wolfram.³⁰

What EFDSS members made of this incorporation of significant genres of English dance into a foreign history and culture at this point is unknown, but there was comment from the Society's hierarchy. Frank Howes, Editor of the Society's *Journal*, referred to Wolfram's contribution as a "stimulating (but not, be it whispered, conclusive) lecture", going on to praise Violet Alford's clear (and unideological) paper on the form and distribution of the Farandole in Spain, Portugal and Southern France which was in the same issue. Setting the tone for later developments, however, he wrote that the Editorial Board wanted to take the opportunity presented by the papers "to declare in a practical manner our belief in the value of the comparative method in all questions of folk-lore and in the international significance of national folk-art". What was more, the Board also intended to extend the scope of the Reviews section of the *Journal* "so that our members may obtain from it a fair idea of all the contemporary research in folk-music and the allied arts which may be going on in the world year by year."³¹

In 1931, joining the trend for international conferences and folk dance festivals and becoming more open to contemporary research from across the world might have appeared to offer a gateway to outward-looking scholarship and progress. Through the rest of the decade, however, this access brought the Society and its members into increasing contact with ideas and individuals offering greater opportunity for reputational

damage than benefit. Acting on their new policy, the Society participated for the first time in the Annual Gathering of Northern Folk Dancers in Denmark in July 1931. Easter 1932 saw the EFDSS Headquarters Team on tour in The Netherlands, taking in a visit to the Van der Ven-Ten Bensels at *De Meihof*; in July 1933, led by Richard Callendar, the Headquarters Rapper Side performed at the International Folk Dance Festival in Finland, whilst there was a further Easter School at *De Meihof*.³² For some of those involved, these visits were merely manifestations of co-operation and friendship across borders, but questions were beginning to be raised about the intentions of others. From at least 1932, tours like Gardiner's "men's expedition to the Baltic" were the subject of reports to the Foreign Office³³ and aspects of the Society's own international festivals had disturbing implications. At the Conference accompanying the EFDSS International Folk Dance Festival in 1935, it is clear even from the brief accounts of the questioning after the presentation of papers that Richard Wolfram and the Van der Ven-Ten Bensels used every opportunity to give expositions of Germanic theory.³⁴ Familiar with a range of English traditions, Wolfram made his own contribution, "Ritual and Dramatic Associations of Sword and "Chain" Dances", particularly relevant for the Society's membership by frequent use of English examples. So the sword dancers from Sleights in Yorkshire and Plough Monday performers were tortuously reconfigured as "fertility demons" representing the surviving "belief of primitive peoples" that "the ghosts of the dead possessed power over fertility" and "Thus representatives of the dead, the league of men, also carried out many fertility customs". And demonstrating his positive relations to its hierarchy, he supplemented his wider ranging thoughts on the occurrence of Aryan symbols across the Germanic world with an acknowledgement to the personal insight of the Society's Director – "Mr. Douglas Kennedy drew my attention to this figure in the dances of Ampleforth and Haxby, and suggested that it is a symbol of the sun..."³⁵ As a result, both the acceptability and shortcomings of Germanic

theories were made more obvious. Within and outside the Conference, controversy arose around the use of the word "magic" in various papers and – particularly – the issue of "secret societies". Kenworthy Schofield (1901-1960), who was an Assistant Director of Performances at the Festival and a leading member of the Morris Ring was also a lifelong Freemason, who interpreted his membership of both organisations as inter-related. But sceptical voices were also raised. Wearying of many references to "initiates" and "secret societies", Violet Alford (1881-1972), the specialist on continental dance and custom enquired, "Why did we continue to speak of *secret societies* when everyone knew of their existence?"³⁶

Nazi attempts to identify potential support among Folklorists and folk dancers were not limited to contacts at international festivals and conferences. By using existing allies, they could place key representatives at the heart of organisations and even base them at culturally significant locations. Which brings us back to the English Folk Dance and Song Society's Annual Summer School at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1938, where the newly arrived dancer was causing a stir. Although it was his first attendance at the School, he was not a novice but had taken up folk dancing as a student – at home, he was regarded as quite an expert. What's more, he had the social advantage of a direct "in" to the Society's leadership – Dr Elise ten Bessel was close at hand to smooth the path of this colleague of Dr Richard Wolfram. That the young Hans Ernst Schneider (1909-1999) had also been Head of the Reich Federation for Physical Education in Berlin and was already a member of the SS was probably not mentioned when introductions were exchanged. He was at Stratford on the instructions of Richard Wolfram, his SS superior – ordered to attend various folk dance meetings and congresses abroad "to observe and politically assess" the participants for possible collaborators and report back to Berlin with any prospects. Schneider had ample opportunity then and at later meetings to "observe and assess" the foremost representatives of the English Folk Revival –

as well as the School at Stratford in 1938, he attended two courses at *De Meihof* in Oosterbeek in 1939. The first, at Easter, was in English traditional dance and led by members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society – the dances “reflected their general Nordic sensibility”, he reported, adding that he knew the teachers themselves from his earlier visit to England; his second trip, in late August, was for a course on Netherlands’ dance led by Elise Ten Bensel. In early August 1939, Schneider was also present at the International Folk Dance Festival in Stockholm, where he reported to Berlin that Douglas Kennedy, the Director of The English Folk Dance Society, who was also attending with a team of dancers, had “personally invited him” to the Society’s next Summer School at Stratford. Schneider was, he wrote, “the only German with such good, personal and institutional contacts with folk dance circles in The Netherlands and England and would like to follow them up.”³⁷

There was of course, no EFDSS Summer School at Stratford in the next year. But by August 1940, as we’ve already heard, *Untersturmführer* Schneider was back in The Netherlands, receiving a warm welcome from the Van der Ven-Ten Bensels and being shown round the *Nederlandsopenluchtmuseum*. Promoted to SS *Hauptsturmführer*, he went on head the *Germansicher Wissenschaftseinsatz* (GWE), a special *Ahnenerbe* department working with Folklorist collaborators in The Netherlands, Flanders, Wallonia, France and Norway to disseminate the great Germanic idea (*grossgermanischer Gedanke*) and the pan-European ideology of National Socialist Germanic theory. If the invasion of Britain had succeeded, his English base was – it’s said – to be in Stratford-upon-Avon.³⁸

Were English folk dancers attracted by the Germanic theorising they heard? In the case of an invasion would anyone have collaborated as a result? Despite their acceptance of a *Männerbünde* in the form of The Morris Ring, few members appear to have recognised that Germanic origins lay behind the basis of their grouping; even fewer – as Gardiner admitted – showed any interest

in closer political links with Germany or the Nazis. It’s possible that some of the individuals involved in the English Folk Revival would – like their European colleagues – have collaborated with the *Ahnenerbe*, especially if they had already become acquainted at international meetings. Certainly there was official awareness of the potential for collaboration. By July 1939, MI5 was reporting that even at “the Summer Schools of singing” organised by Rolf Gardiner “no opportunity was lost of ‘putting over Nazi propaganda’” and in August, just before War was declared permission was given for all post addressed to him to be intercepted. He was also placed on the Suspect List of individuals to be imprisoned in the event of a German invasion.³⁹ Fortunately, this least reported aspect of pre-War espionage was never put to the test and these “dancing spies” years of infiltration of the English Folk Revival came to nothing. But Ben Macintyre’s description of the morris dancing activities of Walter Praetorius, Anglo-German exchange student at Southampton University and later of the SS suggest that Richard Wolfram, the Van der Ven-Ten Bensels and Hans Ernst Schneider may not have been the only Nazi who attempted to dance their way into a successful German occupation.⁴⁰

End Notes

1. Douglas Kennedy (1893-1988), former Director of The English Folk Dance & Song Society letter to Ewart Russell (c1914-1989), former Editor of *The Morris Dancer*, 7 November 1984 published in *The Morris Dancer*, III (February 1999), 190-191.

2. *English Folk Dance and Song Society Report 1938 to 1939*. Margaret Russell (1874-1957), Lady of Bedchamber to Queen Mary, wife of Arthur Villiers Russell, 2nd Baron Ampthill. Founded by Cecil Sharp in 1911, the English Folk-Dance Society [EFDS] amalgamated with The Folk-Song Society in 1932 to become The English Folk Dance and Song Society [EFDSS]. The Folk-Lore Society, however, rejected “an approach” from The English Folk Dance and Song Society to form a conjoint National Centre

for Folk Arts based at Cecil Sharp House at this time.

3. Kenneth N. J. Loveless, 'Douglas Neil Kennedy, O.B.E.: An Obituary,' *English Dance and Song*, L:1 (April-May 1988), p. 3.

4. Anon., "Current topics: Morris Dancing," *Sheffield Telegraph*, 28 Sept 1926, p. 6.

5. *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei/NSDAP* [National Socialist German Workers' Party]. Adolf Hitler, leader of the Party, became Chancellor of Germany in 1933.

6. See Heinrich Schurtz, *Alterklassen und Männerbünde: Eine Darstellung der Grundformen der Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1902), p. iv quoted in Stefan Arvidson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, Trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), p. 208.

7. See my "Potencies of the earth": Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival," in Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley, ed., *Rolf Gardiner: Folk, Nature and Culture in Interwar Britain* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2011), pp. 65-94 for a detailed account of the development of these theories and their application within the English Folk Revival.

8. Leopold von Shroeder, *Mysterium und Mimus im Rigveda* (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1908) quoted in Stephen Corrsin, "'Spectral, Dancing Hosts of War': German-language Research on Sword Dancing before World War 1," *Folklore*, 119 (2008), 288.

9. Johan Theunisz, Chairman of the Volksche Werkgemeenschap quoted in Rob Van Ginkel and Barbara Henkes, 'On Peasants and "Primitive Peoples": Movements of Rapprochement and Distance between Folklore Studies and Anthropology in the Netherlands,' *Ethnos*, 68 (2003), 125.

10. Matthes Ziegler, "Folklore on a Racial Basis: Prerequisites and Tasks," in Hannjost Lixfeld, *Folklore and Fascism: The Reich Institute for German Volkskunde* (ed & trans. James R. Dow; Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 178-189 translated from Matthes Ziegler, *Volkskunde auf rassischer Grundlage. Voraussetzungen und Aufgaben. Deutsches*

Volksstum. Eine Schriftenreihe über deutsche Volkskunde für die Schulungs- und Erziehungsarbeit der NSDAP... (München: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1939).

11. Reichsstelle zur Förderung des Deutschen Schrifttums (Berlin), *Die hundert ersten Bücher für Nationalsozialistische Bücherein* (Munich: Zentralverl. d. N.S.D.A.P, 1934). See Christa Kamenetzky, "Folklore as a Political Tool in Nazi Germany," *Journal of American Folklore*, 85:337 (July-Sept. 1972), 221-235 for further discussion of folklore and political education and the use of selected aspects of folklore to assert the Germanicness of "re-claimed" areas of "Lebensraum" beyond Germany's previous eastern borders.

12. Sigfrid Svensson, "Nazism och folkenskap," *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 31 October, 1935 quoted in Petra Garberding, "Swedish Ethnologists and Folklorists and Nazi Race Politics," Paper from the Conference "Current Issues in European Cultural Studies", organised by the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS) in Norrköping 15-17 June 2011, p. 297. Conference Proceedings published by Linköping University Electronic Press: <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/062/032/ecp11062032.pdf> See the whole article for a valuable range of contemporary discussion.

13. Throughout this paper, I have chosen to use the single word "Ahnenerbe" rather than the rather unwieldy "Office for Ancestral Inheritance".

14. Helge Gerndt, 'Folklore and National Socialism' in James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld, ed. and trans., *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 4. For other comments on the Nazi government's rapid creation of teaching positions, departments of Folklore and amateur Folklore societies, see for example, Peter Assion, 'Eugen Fehrle and "The Mythos of our Folk",' *ibid.*, p. 112; Hermann Bausinger, 'Folk-National Work During the Third Reich,' *ibid.*, p. 88-95; Anka Oesterle, 'The Office of Ancestral Inheritance and Folklore Scholarship,' *ibid.*, p. 189-90 and extensive information in Lixfeld, *Folklore and Fascism*, pp. 35-55 and pp. 194-210.

15. For fuller details of this meeting and excerpts of Maier's speech, see Lixfeld, *Folklore and Fascism*, pp. 25-27.

16. James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld, 'National Socialistic Folklore and Overcoming the Past in the Federal Republic of Germany,' *Asian Folklore Studies*, 50 (1991), 122-23.

17. For further details on Haiding see Ursula Minder, "...in spite of not making any concessions and the fact that my Pan-German views are well-known among colleagues in the field...": Notes to Karl Haiding (1906-1985),' in Helmut Konrad & Stefan Benedik, ed., *Mapping Contemporary History II: Exemplary fields of research in 25 years of Contemporary History Studies at Graz University*, (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), pp. 319-338 and James R. Dow and Ulrike Kammerhofer-Agermann, "Austrian *Volkskunde* and National Socialism: The Case of Karl Haiding, born Paganini," *The Folklore Historian*, Vol. 22 (2005), 25-58. Haiding was born Carlo Cyril Paganini in Vienna, but subsequently Germanicised his name for ideological reasons.

18. For a detailed examination of these developments see James R. Dow and Olaf Bockhorn, *The Study of European Ethnology in Austria* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004).

19. See Archief Meertens Instituut: Notulen Volkskundecommissie 14-2-1938 quoted in Ton Dekker, *De Nederlandse volkskunde: De verwetenschappelijking van een emotionele belangstelling* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2002), p. 159; Lixfeld, *Folklore and Fascism*, p. 47 and extensive discussion in Horst Junginger, ed., "Introduction," *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, (Leiden: Koninklijk Brill NV, 2008), pp. 72, 74-5 and Willem Hoffstee, "The Essence of Concrete Individuality: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Jan de Vries and National Socialism," *Ibid.*, pp. 543-552.

20. See Dekker, *De Nederlandse volkskunde*, p. 226 for photo of Elise ten Bensel's Meihof dancers visiting the Museum of German Folk Culture during the 1936 Olympiad and pp. 203 and 207 for further details of Dirk Jan Van der Ven's association with the *Ahnenerbe*.

21. See my, "Potencies of the earth": Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival," in Jefferies and Tyldesley, ed., *Rolf Gardiner*, pp. 87-89 for additional detail and sources on the Van der Ven Ten-Bensel's activities at this time.

22. See the summary of related documents in the Royal Anthropological Institute Archive [RAI] at

<http://www.therai.org.uk/archives-and-manuscripts/archive-contents/scottish-anthropological-and-folklore-society-a109> . RAI quote from Lund University Library, Handschriftsamlingen. Letter from Å. Campbell to C. W. von Sydow, dated May 19, 1938 (translation B. Rogan), extensive detail of the many conferences and organisations drawn into this controversy and information on the *Ahnenerbe* and Rosenberg Bureau roles of various of the participants, see Bjarne Rogan, "From Rivals to Partners on the Inter-War European Scene: Sigurd Erixon, Georges Henri Rivière and the International Debate on European Ethnology in the 1930's," SIEF online publications, p. 292 and pp. 309-13 at <http://www.siefhome.org/downloads/publications/elibrary/Rogan-ARV.pdf>

23. See Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. MacIlwaine, *The Morris Book with a Description of Dances as Performed by The Morris Men of England*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Novello & Co., 1912), I, p. 42 and Rolf Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition: An Essay* (Hellerau bei Dresden: Neue Schule Hellerau, 1923), pp. 16 & 21.

24. See Rolf Gardiner, "Summer Tour in Germany, 1928" *North Sea and Baltic New Series* No. 4; (High Summer 1938), pp. 75, 100 and 101 [originally written in 1928] and Rolf Gardiner, "The Travelling Morrice and the Cambridge Morris Men", *Springhead News Sheet* (Winter Solstice 1961) copy held in Vaughan Williams Memorial Library P7145 As14 . The swastika is probably the most infamous of the figures Nazi folklore termed "sun symbols", for more information on the pseudo-scholarship associated with these see Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, "The Weigel Symbol Archive and the Ideology of National Socialist Folklore," in Dow and Lixfeld, *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline*, pp. 97-111. For Olympiad quotes, see Rolf Gardiner, "The Muses and the People in England," in International Bureau for Joy and Work, *Report: World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation Hamburg July 23 to July 30th 1936* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanst., 1937), pp. 150-51.

25. See Gardiner letter to Arthur Heffer, 1 April 1931 quoted in David Fowler, "Rolf Gardiner: Pioneer of British Youth Culture, 1920-1939," in Jefferies and Tyldesley, ed, *Rolf Gardiner*, p. 18 and my, "Potencies of the Earth," *Ibid.*, pp. 78-82 for details on the foundation of The Morris Ring

and pp. 92-93 for further details on Gardiner's family.

26. Rolf Gardiner, "Mixed Morris Sides," *English Dance and Song*, 1:2 (Nov. 1936), 27.

27. See Ivor Allsop, "The Squire Who Never Was!," *American Morris Newsletter*, 28:1 (May Day 2008), 4.

28. For further discussion of this group, see Stephen D. Corrsin, "One single dance form like the Sword dance can open up a whole lost world: The Vienna Ritualists and the Study of Sword Dancing and Secret Men's Unions between the World Wars," 8/28/09, Unpaginated [p.2] at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S10aJDZkkqUR3wimgw8lzxydrhdQSNvvuaWQHV6PQjs/edit> and Dow and Bockhorn, *The Study of European Ethnology in Austria*.

29. Dr. Richard Wolfram, "Sword Dances and Secret Societies," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1:1 (December 1932), 34-41 – for specific quotes see pp. 35-36, 38-39 and 41.

30. Dr. Elise van der Ven-Ten Bensel, review of Kurt Meschke, *Schwerttanz und Schwerttanzspiel im Germanischen Kulturkreis* (Leipzig & Berlin: Teubner, 1931), *Ibid.*, 65-67.

31. Frank Howes, "Editorial," *Ibid.*, vii. See also V. Alford, "The Farandole," *Ibid.*, 18-33.

32. For first attendance at Gathering of Northern Folk Dancers see *English Folk Dance and Song Society Report September 1st 1930 to August 31st 1931*, p. 8, others detailed in Ivor Allsop, "The Squire Who Never Was!," pp. 2-4.

33. See *WO 371 FO Series: 1932 R Gardiner: Activities of English and German Singers, Players and dancers – P1334/P2047/92/150*.

34. See for example the questions and comments from Dr J Van der Ven, Dr Elise Van der Ven-Ten Bensel and Dr Wolfram, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* II (1935), 72.

35. Richard Wolfram, "Ritual and Dramatic Associations of Sword and "Chain" Dances," *Ibid.*, 38.

36. *Ibid.* – see particularly pp. 77-78, pp. 112-113 and p. 48.

37. For further details of Hans Schneider/Schwerte's reports and activities see for example, Joachim Lerchenmueller, "Hans Ernst Schneiders/Hans Schwertes Niederlande-Arbeit in den 1930er bis 1950er Jahren," in Burkhard Dietz, Helmut Gabel and Ulrich Tiedau, eds; *Griff nach dem Westen: Die "Westforschung" der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919–1960)* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2003), II, pp. 1111-1140; Joachim Lerchenmueller and Gerd Simon, *Masken-wechsel: Wie der SS-hauptsturmfuehrer Schneider zum BRD-hochschulrektor Schwerte word und andere Geschten ueber die Wandigkeit deutscher Wissenschaft im 20 Jahrhundert* (Gesellschaft für interdisziplinäre Forschung, 1999); and Barbara Henkes, *Uit liefde voor het volk: Volkskundigen op zoek naar de Nederlandse identiteit 1918-1948* Amsterdam: Athenaenum-Polack & Van Gennep, 2005), pp. 90-94. I am most grateful to Eveline Doelman of The Meertens Instituut for copies of this very useful source and to Elaine Bradtke of The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library for her summary of events surrounding The English Folk Dance & Song Society's role in The Netherlands at this time.

38. See Horst Junginger, "Introduction," in Horst Junginger, ed., *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism* (Leiden: Koninklijk Brill NV, 2008), pp. 74-5.

39. For comments on Summer Schools see MI5 Report of 31 August 1939, PRO KV 2/2245 and references in Richard Griffiths, "Post-Facto Opinions on Rolf Gardiner's Attitudes towards Nazi Germany," in Jefferies and Tyldesley, ed., *Rolf Gardiner*, pp. 142-3, 146 and 148-9.

40. Ben Macintyre, *Agent ZigZag: Lover, Traitor, Hero, Spy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 2007), pp. 48-49.