

23 Dec 2023

To the awards committee of the Curran Fellowship,

I would like to start by thanking the committee for this award. I publish extensively, with a modest income, on nineteenth-century folklore. But without your 'help' I would not have been able to open up a second front and look at this fascinating aspect of Victorian journalism. I am extremely grateful.

In early 2023 I was awarded a Curran Fellowship for 4752 dollars. My aim was to work on Local Notes and Queries columns (LN&Q) in the British press. As a resident in Italy I had hoped to visit several archives in Britain; use British libraries while there; and also gain access to digital archives at home in Tuscany.

My first visit to Britain took place 17-24 June. I stayed in an Airbnb accommodation in Sheffield. In those days I visited primarily Sheffield City Archives to go through the LC 1-204: 'Leader Collection'. The Leaders owned the *Sheffield Independent* at the end of the nineteenth century and I hoped to find material relating to their LN&Q column. This was perhaps the greatest single success of my research trips. There was a file that included a series of letters that were used in the LN&Q columns. Here I was able to see what I had long dreamt of: the way that editors interacted with LN&Q correspondents.

I also visited Leicester and Coventry Archives. In Leicester I looked at a LN&Q book (DE 2857/176). But this was a homemade effort, and while interesting for showing how knowledge was kept in the nineteenth-century, it was not particularly relevant to my project. Much more interesting were the archives at Coventry: PA919/36 'Local Memoranda from *The Coventry Times*, 1869-1871'. These are not available in the British Newspaper Archives (BNA) so I was glad to be able to go through them. However, to my astonishment I discovered that these were editor's proofs of the LN&Qs column with hand annotations. I imagine they had been kept with the hope of producing a book, a project that was never achieved. Here I saw again a side of editorial practice that is normally invisible to the historian.

In a second trip to the United Kingdom, I stayed in an Air-bnb in London, 19-25 October. My primary aim was to use the Folklore Society's Archives and particularly UCL0091588, 'TO66-TO67, Matthews Collection, particularly for Norfolk; and UCL0097297, and T300-332, Wright Cuttings for all Britain. The process for looking at these (in the National Archive) was rather tiresome and the Matthews Collection proved a disappointment. However, the Wright Cuttings were much more interesting and showed the way that (local) notes and queries were used in relation to one subject, folklore.

My secondary aim on the trip was to use a British copyright library to go through books and journals that I could not access in Italy. I found the British Library difficult to use

given the bulk of material I wanted to go through. Instead, I commuted up to the University Library at Cambridge whose great open stacks are ideal for this kind of work. Looking back I wish, in fact, I'd found a house in Cambridge and just gone down to London for the archives.

In Italy I worked for about two hundred hours to go through, page by page, a number of Local Notes and Queries columns. I've now finished eighteen columns and there are about thirty more to go: I'm half way through one of the longest from a Nottingham paper... It is extraordinarily interesting to go through these LN&Qs columns, but it is time consuming. Sooner or later, I need to decide whether I will make this into a couple of articles or do something more 'monography' (see below). If 'just' a couple of articles I can't realistically justify going through all thirty columns: another thousand hours? The Curran fellowship helped me buy a number of books, but above all access to databases including the BNA and Newspaper.com. These overlap but the second has material that has not been integrated yet into the first.

I have given some sense, I hope, here of my progress. My immediate plans are as follows. I want to write in 2023 an article on the LN&Q column in the Sheffield Independent. Philip Sidebottom is the editor of the *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society* which is very good at publishing Sheffield material. He has expressed an interest and I will submit something to him in the next months. For me this represents a dry-run for a bigger work. I will next move onto a more general article (the bigger work) on the culture of LN&Qs in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, perhaps for Victorian Periodicals Review. I would like finally to write an article for Folklore on the importance of LN&Qs for folklore collection in the country.

The timeline for these articles will depend on whether I really do read through all available LN&Qs or whether, at a certain point, I call a halt. As hinted at above, I have become convinced that there is a good book to be written on the idea of notes and queries (local, national and subject-based). I have been astounded by just how little writing there is on Thoms' *Notes and Queries*. (Why?) I am not sure if I'm the person to write that book though. I will see how the articles progress.

It goes without saying that I will acknowledge the Curran fellowship in any publications.

Thanks again for having faith in my work. If you wish to see my LN&Q excel file or any other material from the archives, please don't hesitate to get in touch! I will gladly supply them.

Yours gratefully,



Simon Young