

University of Sheffield. *Special Collections and Archives*

Ref: **MS 457**

Title: **Alex Helm Indexes**

Scope: *A set of indexes created by Alex Helm, listing sources of folk plays, morris dancing and disguising throughout the British Isles*

Dates: c.1960

Level: Fonds

Extent: 10 volumes

Name of creator: Alex Helm

Administrative / biographical history:

The collection consists of ten volumes of index slips, divided into seven for mumming plays, one for disguising and two for morris.

In the 1950s, Alex Helm was living in Cheshire and a member of the EFDSS Manchester District, where he was an active dancer and caller within the district. It is uncertain whether he also danced with the Manchester Morris Men (MMM), but would have known the morris men, as most were also EDFSS members. Members of MMM were actively researching and reviving the North-west clog morris dances, and Alex was also “taking part in investigations into the North-western Morris”¹.

Other people were investigating and indexing other regional folk customs – for example, “Norman Peacock maintained an index of sword dances, and Chris Cawte a card index of folk customs”². By the late 1950s, Helm led and oversaw an indexing project, bringing many of these together in a set of linked volumes.

Enquiries have failed to identify how or when a copy of the Helm Indexes came into the possession of the MMM, but it may be that they came via Bernard Bentley, a fellow EFDSS member, folk dance caller and morris man, who was actively researching the NW morris. Some time before 1970³, this copy of the Helm Indexes was placed in the MMM Archives, to join the research notes, dance notations, team costumes, photographs, etc. of the North-west morris.

The Indexes were donated to the Special Collections Department at the University of Sheffield Library in 2015 by the Manchester Morris Men.

[Description compiled by Keith Ashman of the Manchester Morris Men]

Source: Donated in 2015

System of arrangement: As received

Subjects: Folk Drama; Mumming; Morris Dance

Names: Helm, Alex, 1920-1970

Conditions of access: Available to all researchers, by appointment

Restrictions: None

Copyright: University College London

Finding aids: Listed

¹ *quote from Sara Jackson, librarian of the EFDSS, at the time*

² *Eddie Cass, extract from his ‘Presidential Address to The Folklore Society, 28/3/2010’*

³ *none of the current MMM members has any knowledge of the Indexes being received or used since 1970*

MS 457 Alex Helm Indexes

Itemised list

- 457/1 Disguising
Bound volume, dark blue, hardback. Pages mostly green paper, with occasional white or orange/yellow.
17 x 14 x 3.5 cm.

“Given the size and colour of the pages, and based on Eddie Cass’s 2010^[1] notes, this is an ‘Old Index’”
- 457/2-8 Plays
Seven hardback volumes. Pages mostly pink paper, with some green and occasional white.
- /2 Angus; Berkshire; Berwick; Buckinghamshire; Cambridgeshire; Cheshire
Bound volume, dark blue. 17 x 15 x 3 cm.
- /3 Cornwall; Cumberland; Derbyshire; Devon; Dorset; Durham; Essex; Fife
Bound volume, dark blue. 17 x 15 x 3 cm.
- /4 Gloucestershire; Hampshire
Bound volume, dark blue. 17 x 15 x 3 cm.
- /5 Herefordshire; Hertfordshire; Huntingdonshire; Isle of Man; Kent; Kirkcudbright;
Lanarkshire; Lancashire
Bound volume, dark blue. 17 x 15 x 3 cm.
- /6 Lincolnshire; London; Middlesex; Midlothian; Monmouth
Bound volume, dark blue. 17 x 15 x 2.5 cm.
- /7 Norfolk; Northumberland; Nottinghamshire; Orkney; Oxfordshire
Bound volume, dark blue. 17 x 15 x 3 cm.
- /8 Stirling; Surrey; Sussex; Westmorland; Wiltshire; Worcestershire; Yorkshire; Ireland;
miscellaneous (presumably produced after the relevant county had already been bound)
‘Post & screw’ volume, grey/black. 17.5 x 16 x 6.5 cm.

“Given the size and colour of the pages, and based on Eddie Cass’s 2010^[1] notes, this is an ‘Old Index’”
- 457/9-10 Morris
Two hardback binders (pages loose). Pages are white, with the word ‘Morris’ and the county name pre-printed. Ordered alphabetically by county.
- /9 Bedfordshire - Lancashire
Tan/blue covers. 22.5 x 17 x 8 cm.
- /10 Leicestershire - Yorkshire
Tan/blue covers. 22.5 x 17 x 10 cm.

“Given the size and colour of the pages, and based on Eddie Cass’s 2010 notes ^[1], this is a ‘Master Index’”

[1] from Eddie Cass's 2010 notes :

".... Early sheets were approximately six and a half by five and a half inches. These smaller sheets were colour-coded according to which custom was being recorded. This was known as "The Index" or the "Old Index". Later, the page size was increased to eight and a quarter by six inches. The later sheets were, in the main, white. The first version of the index on these larger sheets was known as the "Master Index". The third version that came in the 1960s was known as the "New Index" ... but was never finished. "

Thanks to Keith Ashman of the Manchester Morris Men for the information in this listing.