

Theo Brown Folklore Collection

Theo Brown was adopted at the age of two and raised by the Langford Brown family of Barton Hall, Kingskerswell, Devon. Her natural father was a Welsh scholar later head of a Department at the British Museum. Her adopted father, Hercules Langford Brown (1866-1936) was a magistrate and member of the local gentry; her adopted mother Dorothy (nee Reed) originally trained as an artist, exhibiting at the Royal Academy, and was also interested in pixies on Dartmoor and nature, particularly flowers. Theo took up painting as a result of her mother's encouragement and exhibited as a member of the Kenn group of artists.

Theo was educated at Beaufront School, Camberley, Surrey. During the Second World War she served as a petty officer with the Fleet Air Arm, training at the Moorfield Training Establishment at Plymouth and was stationed at Royal Naval Air Stations at Yeovilton and Henstridge, Somerset. On leaving the Wrens, she was resident in Chudleigh with her mother for many years from 1950, before eventually moving to Broadclyst where she spent the rest of her life. A chance encounter after the war with W F Jackson Knight of the University College of the South West (later the University of Exeter) started her career as a folklorist. In 1952 she took over from Knight as recorder of folklore for the Devonshire Association, and continued researching 'local traditions, strange legends, eccentric characters and Otherworld beliefs' for the rest of her life. She was elected to the Council of the Folklore Society in 1957, and was also a member of the Psychical Research Society and a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. She became a Research Fellow at the University of Exeter (Departments of Theology and History) in the 1960s. In 1971 she organised a colloquium entitled 'The Journey to the other world' and contributed a paper on West Country entrances to the Underworld. This was later published, as was her own books 'The Fate of the dead' and 'Tales of a Dartmoor Village'. She suffered a stroke in 1978, but continued working and occasionally teaching at Broadclyst Primary School. In 1983, she was awarded the Coote Lake Medal by the Folklore Society for outstanding research and scholarship.

The collection not only contains Brown's personal and research papers and letters to Theo Brown about her research but papers belonging to her mother Dorothy Langford Brown.

Archives and Rare Books Resources Held by the University of Exeter

EUL MS 105	Theo Brown personal and research papers, 38 boxes (1920s-1993)
EUL MS 94	Papers of William Francis Jackson Knight: letters to Theo Brown, and photographs, cards and cuttings of relevance to her research, one box (1945-1968)
EUL MS 266	Papers of Dorothy Langford Brown (nee Reed), artist and mother of Theo Brown, one box (c 1903-c 1938)