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Between Scotland and Norway: From Life Reform to New Age Spirituality

Abstract by Steven J. Sutcliffe

One of Professor Gilhus' many productive interests has been making sense of the New Age movement in Norway (Gilhus *et al* 2017) and in particular making comparisons with examples of similar historical phenomena. In this paper I will not go as far back as the ancient Mediterranean world (Gilhus 2008) but instead will look at a much more proximate period, and a more local vector of influence: the life reform movement in Europe and the Nordic countries in the first half of the Twentieth Century. As a case study I will examine the visit to Hurdals Verk near Oslo by the Scottish 'simple life' practitioner and journalist, Dugald Semple (1864-1964) for the 1938 conference of the International Vegetarian Union. The conference was reported in the vegetarian press and also by Semple himself as President of the Scottish Vegetarian Society. Several delegates were significant participants in wider life reform networks (Sutcliffe 2021). Drawing in part on Semple's personal archive, the paper will describe life reform themes and attitudes displayed at Hurdals Verk, which anticipate New Age Spirituality after the 1960s. I will also probe the ambiguous politics of transnational Life Reform networks which contain both anarchistic and 'organicist' elements.