

ROOMER

An occasional newsletter for researchers
in Traditional Drama. Vol 1:1 Sept 1980



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Research in any field is, as often as not, hampered by the lack of communication between individual researchers, and traditional drama is no exception. We are acutely aware of the fact that there are many people doing valuable work all over the country who have little or no contact with others in this field and, consequently, no opportunity to compare notes or air their views. Roomer then is designed to fill this gap by providing an informal forum.

Our brief is wide and we intend to include notes and queries, details of publications, out-of-the-way texts, information on work in progress, in fact anything that may be of interest to individuals working in the field of traditional drama. As such it will obviously rely heavily on participation by subscribers and contributors and we welcome any information you would like to forward.

In addition, we hope to prepare a series of occasional publications dealing with various aspects of traditional drama research. Suggestions for suitable topics or items for inclusion in this series are most welcome.

We hope you find this first issue of Roomer useful. If you would like further details please contact the editors.

A Battle amongst the Christmas Mummers

Rivalry amongst teams of mummers, whilst often mentioned briefly by performers, is one aspect of the tradition that has had little serious attention. With this in mind, in an attempt to stimulate interest in this topic, we offer the following detailed, if somewhat coloured, account of a battle that took place between the rival teams from Melksham (ST 9063) and South Wraxhall (ST 8364) in Wiltshire.

From a so-far unidentified newspaper cutting in the museum of the Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society, 41 Long Street, Devizes, Wilts. (Cuttings 22-346) : probably from the Wiltshire Gazette Dec. 1965.

Article entitled The Week in Wiltshire by 'The Gleaner', headed by a photograph of the Marshfield Mummers (Glocs.).

"...the following news item reproduced from our issue of December 23rd 1865.... Here is the story from Melksham, reproduced exactly as it first appeared under the heading "A BATTLE AMONGST THE CHRISTMAS MUMMERS".

Time out of mind Christmas has been ushered in with music and with song... one of the oldest carols begins:

Now lordlings, listen to our ditty
 Strangers coming from afar:
 Let poor minstrels move your pity
 Give us welcome, soothe our care

The following incident will show that the mummers who visited our town on Saturday evening (rather early to usher in Christmas) if they sang the above ditty moved emotions other than pity in the breasts not of the lordlings but of the underlings of Melksham: received a welcome they did not look for; and went away with their cares unsoothed.

It has been the custom here, and in the neighbouring village of Wraxhall, at this time of year, for youths of the plebian class to array themselves in the ragged remnants of some paperhanger's workshop, equip themselves with wooden swords - sorry representatives of the mummers of the "good old times" - and perambulate the locality in search of all they can get in the shape of eating or drinking - a decided preference being shown for the latter - in reality, taking advantage of the time-honoured custom they attempted to represent - to beg.

Some two years ago a party of these ragged relics of by-gone custom went from our town to Wraxhall, but the Ragged Wraxhall Regiment objected to the intrusion on the ground that the Melksham Mummers came to poach on the Wraxhall preserves; and the consequence was that the intruders were unceremoniously ejected from the village and compelled to return home beerless.

This year the Ragged Regiment of Wraxhall returned the visit...the Unicorn public house was the headquarters they honoured with a visit and the news of their arrival having been noised abroad among the rejected ones of 1863, the muster-roll was called to repel the invaders.

Boniface was only too glad, on sniffing the battle from afar, to get rid of the bedizened Wraxhall warriors, who were holding a council of war in his taproom; and so they were turned 'sans ceremonie' into the Queen's Highway, there to face the wrathful rejected of 1863, who might have mustered at the Lion to stimulate themselves for the fray.

For a time it was difficult to tell on which side the chances of war laid, as nought could be seen but the wretched rags of the Wraxhall regiment flying in all directions - they found their paper armour no protection from the fury of their assailants; but they sold their rags as dearly as possible by a vigorous use of their wooden swords, with which they effected some ugly cuts on the faces of their enemies.

The battle extended to the Town Bridge, where the advance of the invaders was hotly contested, and the bridge was quickly strewn, not with corpses, but with the remnants of Wraxhall paperhangings.

The Lion and the Unicorn were fighting for the crown
 The Lion beat the Unicorn up the bridge and down
 None gave them white bread, none gave them brown
 The Lion beat the Unicorn completely out of town.

For once the nursery rhyme was literally fulfilled, much to the terror of that part of Melksham called "the city", who were puzzled to understand this novel "paper war".

The battle and the breeze it necessarily occasioned in the usually quiet town of Melksham soon got to the ears of the "Queen's Blues", but as the Wraxhall regiment was in full retreat, with scarcely a rag to cover them, and as their pursuers had been sorely punished with the wooden swords, and as moreover none of the good citizens of Melksham had been annoyed beyond the mere hubbub which this novel encounter had for the moment created, Saturday night moved on the even tenour of its way without any necessity of filling the police cells with fugitives from the fray, the result of which, we presume, has established and set at rest the question of territorial rights of both parties for ever".

Each of us must spend an inordinate amount of time checking through endless periodicals and newspapers for accounts of performances of plays. With this in mind, it would seem logical to pool our efforts. This can be done very simply by anyone who is, or has been, involved in searching periodicals and newspapers forwarding to the editors a list of the papers examined, the issues and dates covered and details of the types of information for which you searched. In addition, please indicate if only papers for certain times of the year were searched, e.g. December.

Similarly, if anyone is planning a visit to the British Museum or the Newspaper Division at Colindale or, if you would like small details, such as page or column numbers checking, please contact the editors and they will attempt to organise some reciprocal co-operation.

* TRADITIONAL DRAMA 1981

A One Day Informal Conference on Aspects of Current Research on Traditional Plays of the British Isles

University of Sheffield - Saturday, 10th October, 1981

In 1978 the first conference solely devoted to Traditional Drama was sponsored by the Division of Continuing Education and the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language at the University of Sheffield. The papers presented suggested a range of alternative and new approaches and, as a result of the encouraging response, it was decided to make the conference an annual event.

In 1981 we wish to expand further the varieties of topics covered and, consequently, we would like individuals interested in presenting papers or chairing discussions to submit a title and short abstract no later than 30th March, 1981.

For further information regarding papers or conference details contact:
Paul Smith, The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield. S10 2TN

Co operative Indexing Scheme for Traditional Plays and Related Customs

Cawte, Helm and Peacock's "English Ritual Drama" has been one of the most influential books dealing with traditional plays to appear in recent years, if only for its extensive bibliography and geographical index. Since its publication in 1967 however, much more material has come to light and, unfortunately, this has not yet been covered by a comparable work. As a result it is now becoming increasingly difficult to discover just what material other people have located, and no doubt there has been much duplication of effort in searching through publications and collections. In addition, researchers now find they require much more detailed information than is given in "English Ritual Drama". In the hope of improving this situation we therefore propose a co-operative indexing scheme.

The scheme, which we have been developing for several years, is based on three worksheets, dealing with the following:

- a) Published works
- b) Unpublished works
- c) Analyses of the individual traditions described in a) and b).

The initial proposal is to circulate, periodically, photocopies of all completed worksheets to participants in the scheme. Then, if this proves successful, the next stage would be to produce a regular publication which would also include indexes to locations, authors, collectors, characters, dates, etc. Ultimately, as the amount of material increases, we envisage using computers to speed processing and index compilation. We would also like to see a parallel collection of the indexed source material, housed in a suitably central location, and available to all participants.

For further details contact Peter Millington, 6 The Pingle, off Derby Road, Long Eaton, Nottingham.

This handbill is bound as the cover of an adapted version of the chapbook
THE PEACE EGG, OR, St. George's ANNUAL PLAY, FOR THE AMUSEMENT OF YOUTH.
PRESTON: PRINTED BY J. HARKNESS, CHURCH STREET. The text is a combination
of a cut up chapbook and copious manuscript additions including music to the
inserted songs.

Source: Tyler Collection of Materials Relating to Traditional Drama
Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield.

THE PACE EGG

An Ancient Drama, a survival of the old Mystery Plays, with the
Ancient Songs, will be presented by the Band-of-Hope Children

IN THE

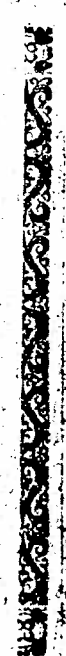
HOULDSWORTH SCHOOLS,

On Saturday in Easter Week, April 11th, 1885,

AT SIX O'CLOCK,

ENTRANCE 2D.

To be Followed by a Full and Varied Entertainment.



NOTES

Mumming in Agersø, Denmark

For an interesting approach to the subject of mumming see:

Carsten Bregenhøj Helligtrekongersløb på Agersø (Twelfth Night Mumming on the Island of Agersø, Socially, Statistically and Structurally) København (1974)

I have spare copies of the English summary available. Please forward an A4 s.a.e. to Paul Smith

Reference Revisions

E. C. Cawte, A Guide to English Ritual Drama in the Carpenter Manuscripts
Cornwall: Fraddon should read FRADDAM (SW 5934)

E. C. Cawte et al, English Ritual Drama
Cornwall: Fraddon should read FRADDAM (SW 5934)
Penpont should read PENPONDS

Folk Review (March 1976 p.14)
Devon: Lumpstone should read LYMPSTONE (SX 9984)

Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland

University of Toronto Press are proving reluctant to reprint H. Halpert and G. M. Story (ed.) Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland (1969). If everyone interested in obtaining copies were to write directly to the Press this may perhaps persuade them to change their minds.

QUERIES

Staffordshire

In the early 1950s, the late William Everett, one of the principal collectors of material on the Lichfield morris tradition, collected several references to plays in Staffordshire. Most of the 'HelC' references in Cawte et al, English Ritual Drama derived from Mr. Everett's collections and I would be interested in hearing from anyone who knows the whereabouts of Mr. Everett's play manuscripts.

I am also interested in hearing from anyone who has references to, or has seen the Guisers of Uttoxeter, particularly anyone who has a copy of Denis Salt's notes on Uttoxeter and Stone plays which was deposited in the Vaughan Williams Library at Cecil Sharp House in the early 1950s, but which is now unfortunately missing.

Contact: Derek Schofield, 10 Addison Close, Wistaston, Crewe, Cheshire. CW2 8BY

Photographs

Can anyone help me trace the whereabouts of the following photograph collections, if they still exist? Contact: Steve Roud

PHOTOPRESS	A photo published in Crawford, Phyllis <u>In England Still</u> 1938
F R HINKINS & SONS	Photos included in PULBROOK, Ernest C <u>English Country Life and Work</u> 1922
PLANET NEWS LTD	Took photos of the Andover Mummers in 1949, used to be at 3 Johnson's Court, London EC4

Traditional Drama - Work in Progress

The editors of Roomer are compiling, for publication in Roomer, a list of work in progress. If you are researching on any aspect of traditional drama, please forward a detailed outline of your research interests and methods of approach to Steve Roud.

MORRIS RING - INSTRUCTIONAL WEEK-END ON MUMMING

QUORN (near Leicester) 31st October - 2nd November, 1980

The first attempt to run this event in March was cancelled due to lack of support. If this second effort fails for the same reason, we cannot expect the Ring to try a again.

If it is successful it could be the first of many. So, if you think that serious events for Mummers are something so far sadly missing then, it is vital to support this week-end if you can possibly do so.

As event organisers rarely book more than one Mummers' team, teams tend to exist in isolation and meet only by chance. Quite apart from anything else, an opportunity to get together and exchange views and ideas can only be of benefit to us all.

Further details from the Ring Squire, Ivor Allsop, 36 Green Spring Avenue, Birdwell, Near Barnsley, South Yourkshire. S70 5RY

PUBLICATIONS NEWSRecent Publications

Ann Burson, 'Model and Text in Folk Drama', Journal of American Folklore, 93 (July 1980) 305-316

A. E. Green, 'Popular Drama and the Mummers Play' in David Bradley (ed.) Performance and Politics in Popular Drama, C.U.P. 1980

Peter Harrop, 'Mumming at Bampton', Folklife 18 (1980), 38-48

Stephen Roud and Paul Marsh, Mumming Plays in Hampshire. A list of known Hampshire plays and sources. 7th Edition, approx 30 pages, xeroxed, £1.25 each.
Available from Steve Roud

Ian Russell, 'Here comes Me and Our Old Lass, Short of Money and Short of Brass: A Survey of Traditional Music in North East Derbyshire 1970-8', Folk Music Journal 3:5 (1979), 399-478.

Paul And Georgina Smith, 'The Plouboys or Modes Dancers at Revesby', English Dance and Song 42:1 (1980), 7-9.

Forthcoming Publications

Thomas A. Green (ed.) 'Folk Drama Special Issue' Journal of American Folklore
(No date fixed as yet)

Alex Helm The Life-cycle Drama Folklore Society (Expected 1981)

Paul Smith (ed.) Traditional Drama 1978 and Traditional Drama 1979, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield. S10 2TN (Expected January 1981)

Paul Smith, The Plouboys or Modes Dancers at Revesby: A Facsimile of an Earlier Manuscript of the 1779 'Morrice Dancers at Revesby' Play, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield. S10 2TN (Early 1981)

M. J. Preston, M. G. Smith and P. S. Smith, Chapbooks and Traditional Drama: Part II Christmas Rhyme Books, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield. S10 2TN (Early 1981)