

ROOMER

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MUMMERS AT HAMSTALL RIDWARE, STAFFS. (SK 1019)

Derek Schofield

In the 1930 issue of the Journal of the English Folk Dance Society, Douglas Kennedy gives the texts (some in fragmentary form) of nine mummers plays, including that from Hamstall Ridware in Staffordshire (1). Mr. Kennedy remarks that "This version was sent to me in October 1924 by Mr. J. Turner of Bernard Street, Walsall", and then quotes from Mr. Turner's letter as follows:

"I believe that Hamstall was the last place in Staffordshire to perform Mumming Plays. The late rector, Rev. J.O. Coussmaker, many years ago, fearing that the words would be forgotten, wrote them down and deposited them in the iron chest in the rectory. There I found them this year and, with the present rector's permission, made a copy of them".

In June 1981 I examined the manuscript book in which the mummers play text had been written, and which is still in the possession of the parish church of Hamstall Ridware (2).

Interspersed with fragments from Shaw's History of Staffordshire, historical and contemporary incidents in the life of the parish were recorded by the rector, John Octavius Coussmaker.

Douglas Kennedy reprints the play text almost exactly, but does not include Coussmaker's introductory remarks to the play. As these remarks contain background information on the play, as well as a lesson for all folklore collectors past and present, I quote them in full:

"Mummers.

Sixteen years ago (i.e. 1884) it was the usual custom on New Year's Day for one's Hall door to be suddenly thrown open, without any knocking, singing, or other ceremony, 5 or 6 young men dressed in any eccentric or gay clothing they could get hold of (an old soldier's coat was especially prized), would enter & then proceed to act a little rough play in the Hall. They were always very careful not to do any harm, though they pretended to be very wild fellows indeed. After a year or 2 they ceased to come, & their place was taken by a few village school boys, & now these are all grown up & have left the village, & the mummers come no more. Seeing that the custom was likely to die out, like many another relict of the past, I obtained the following words of the play, which I here append. In one or two places the meaning is not very clear, but I write it down as it was

given to me, well knowing that in the text of the Greek Testament the more difficult reading is usually the more correct one, & so it may well be here. And if we amend the text to suit our own imagination, we may lose some valuable old allusion".

Alas, either Douglas Kennedy or Mr. Turner failed to take heed of Coussmaker's advice, because in the text published by Kennedy, there are some slight differences from the original manuscript text.

The first four lines printed in italics are not given in the manuscript, and must be either Turner's or Kennedy's rewording of the original. Some of the text has been set out in rhyming couplets, whereas Coussmaker wrote the whole text in continuous prose. The punctuation has also been altered and 'tidied up' in the printed version.

Textual alterations are as follows (line numbers refer to the text as printed by Kennedy):

- Line 3 MS : "I'll stand before"
Kennedy: "I'll stand or fall"
- Line 5 MS : "I am put off the ragged set"
Kennedy: "I have put off the ragged set"
- Line 10 MS : "I've just sprang"
Kennedy: "I've just sprung"
- Line 18 MS : "I didst slay"
Kennedy: "I did slay"
- Line 20 MS : "For a fair body"
Kennedy: "For her fair body"
- Line 20 MS : "Think I come here"
Kennedy: "Think I came here"
- Line 29 MS: "I would lose my precious blood"
Kennedy: "I'd lose my precious blood"
- Line 47 MS : "He is the best man"
Kennedy: "He's the best man"
- Line 48 MS : "In comes old woman Beelzebub"
Kennedy: "In comes I, Beelzebub"
- Line 50 MS : "Dripping tin"
Kennedy: "Dripping pan"
- Line 51 MS : "A merry old lady"
Kennedy: "A merry old man"
- Line 54 MS : "There are 1,2,3..."
Kennedy: "Here are 1,2,3..."

Although most of the alterations are fairly trivial, the alteration of the sex of Beelzebub is more significant. Clearly, either Turner or Kennedy had never come across a female Beelzebub in a mummers play before and, perhaps believing it to be a mistake, changed the words to suit the supposed norm. The female Beelzebub occurs elsewhere in Staffordshire, for example at Armitage, Brereton, Burntwood, Darlaston, and Upper Tean (3), whereas at other locations (e.g. Uttoxeter), there is a character 'Old Mary Ann' who speaks some of the usual Beelzebub lines.

NOTES

1. Douglas Kennedy, 'Observations on the Sword-dance and Mummers' Play', Journal of the English Folk Dance Society 2nd series, No.3 (1930) pp.13-38. The information on Hamstall Ridware is on pp.33-35.
2. I am grateful to the churchwarden, Mr. Mike Reynolds, for allowing me to examine the manuscript book.
3. See the references listed under these locations in E.C.Cawte et al, English Ritual Drama (London: Folklore Society, 1967).

THE FOLKLORE SOCIETY

Founded 1878

c/o University College London
Gower Street WC1E 6BT
01 387 5894THE FOLKLORE SOCIETY - ANNUAL AWARD OF RESEARCH GRANTS

The Folklore Society has now established a series of annual grants for research in the field of folklore studies to the total maximum value of £500 in any one year. The grants are available for research in all aspects of cultural tradition but particular encouragement will be given to projects concerned with areas of United Kingdom folklore not at present satisfactorily explored.

Applications for the Research Grants are invited from members of The Folklore Society of at least one year's standing, subject to the following conditions:

- a) Applicants are United Kingdom residents aged 18 years or over.
- b) The Society is satisfied that there is no possibility of applicants receiving grants from elsewhere to fund the project.
- c) All projects are designed with a view to publication.

The following research costs will be considered for funding:

Travel expenses

Stationery, films, tapes and other consumables

Postage

Copying documents

Only in exceptional circumstances will grants be made towards equipment.

Applications accompanied by an up-to-date curriculum vitae and detailed research proposals must be made no later than 30th November in any year, on forms provided by the Society. All applications will be considered by the Research Sub-Committee who will then make recommendations to the society's full Committee for final adjudication. The decision of the Society's Committee will be made known no later than the date of the Annual General Meeting.

For full details and application forms, please write to the Research Sub-Committee at the above address.

THE JAMES MADISON CARPENTER COLLECTION

Field recordings, papers and pictorial material relating to British and American folk music, late 1920s-1930s

Archive of Folk Song: Library of Congress, Washington, U.S.A.

The following description of the collection is to be found in Annette Melville, Special Collections in the Library of Congress: A Selective Guide (Washington: Library of Congress, 1980) p.57.

'James Madison Carpenter began collecting British-American folklore in 1927 as he compiled material for his Harvard doctoral dissertation "Forecastle Songs and Chanties." A Sheldon fellow, he returned to England and Scotland from 1929 to 1935 and amassed important collections of sea chanties, ballads, and folk plays before accepting a teaching position at Duke University. His entire collection of field notes, transcriptions, recordings, and photographs was purchased by the Library in 1972. Included are over one thousand ballad texts and 850 tunes of the Francis Child canon, 500 sea chanties, 1,000 other ballads and songs from Britain and America, 200 children's singing games, riddles, and nursery rhymes, and 300 British folk plays which Carpenter pieced together using descriptions provided by spectators and participants. For several mummer and sword dance plays, he recorded actual performances and obtained drawings of the players. The Library has taped the 223 discs which Carpenter prepared from his cylinders in the early 1940s (AFS 14,830-15,052). A concordance is on file in the Archive of Folk Song. In an interview recorded in 1972, Carpenter described his collecting activities in England and Scotland (AFS 14,762-14765). The Carpenter manuscripts measure approximately four linear feet and, for the most part, have been microfilmed. The Archive of Folk Song prepared a preliminary inventory for the material.'

Microfilm copies of this collection are held in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and the Archives of The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language.

FIELD TRIP — XXVIII

by JOHN CRANE



Gettin' dolled up in this poofy gear might be traditional - but 'im callin' me darling and pinchin' me bum definitely ain't!

Reproduced, with acknowledgements, from Folk Review 7:1 (Nov. 1977) p.15.



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LET US KNOW HOW MANY OF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND AND WHAT DANCES OR
PLAYS YOU DO. PLEASE RESPOND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SO THAT
THE APPROPRIATE ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE MADE.

TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP - RESEARCH GUIDES

Enclosed in this issue of Roomer is a copy of the first Traditional Drama Research Group Research Guide: Basic Questions to Ask. Compiled by Peter Millington, the guide aims to provide a brief introduction to the main questions which should be asked during any interview. Although it has been prepared with traditional drama in mind it will also be of interest to others conducting folklore research. Further copies of this guide are available from the Traditional Drama Research Group on receipt of an A4 s.a.e.

Further guides are currently being explored and include Biographical Information, Surveys through Newspapers, Photographic Collections and Newspaper Resources.

PUBLICATION NEWS

Emily Lyle, 'Galoshins: A New Year Play from Kippen', Tocher 36/7 (1982) pp.380-383.

Stanley Brandes, 'The Posadas in Tzintzuntzan: Structure and Sentiment in a Mexican Christmas Festival', Journal of American Folklore 96 (1983) pp.259-279.

Loring M. Danforth, 'Tradition and Change in Greek Shadow Theater', Journal of American Folklore 96 (1983) pp.281-309.

Steve Roud, 'Mummers at Vernham Dean, Hampshire', Downs Miscellany 1:1 (1983) pp.8-16 (available from Roly Brown, Ailsa Craig, Hampstead Norreys Road, Little Hungerford, Hermitage, Berks. - 70p incl. postage)

Thomas Pettitt, 'Early English Traditional Drama: Approaches and Perspective', in D. M. Bergeron (Ed.), Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama XXV (1982) pp.1-30.

Thomas Pettitt, 'English Folk Drama and the Early German Fastnachtspiele', in Leonard Barkan (Ed.), Renaissance Drama New Series XIII (1982).

Margaret E. McCormick, 'Newton-in-Furness Pace Egg Play', English Dance and Song 45:I (1983) pp.20-21.

ROOMER: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP

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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 that there are many people doing valuable work 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. It includes 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 those working in the field of Traditional Drama. As such it relies heavily on participation by subscribers. Therefore, if you have any potential contributions we would be most grateful to receive them.

Back volumes of the newsletter are currently available at the cost of the annual subscription. For further information regarding ROOMER and the work of the TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP contact:

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* Research Guide No.1 *
* *
* BASIC QUESTIONS TO ASK *

compiled by P.T.Millington

Many records of folk plays have inadequate documentation and/or contain confusing information. In some cases this is simply because the informant cannot supply clear information. However, in many cases it is either because the collectors have received inadequate guidance, or they have not fully appreciated the problems that their collecting habits can create for other researchers attempting to interpret their material. Furthermore, even experienced collectors may forget to ask the most routine questions on occasion.

To try and improve the situation, this guide lists the main questions which should be asked during any interview. Although it has been prepared with traditional drama in mind, it will also be of interest to other folklore researchers.

- (1) **Circumstances of the Interview**
 - (a) Date of the interview.
 - (b) Where the interview took place.
 - (c) Your own name, address, etc.
- (2) **Informant and Participants**

N.b. Ask for personal details with tact and respect.

 - (a) Informant's name (i.e. title, fornames and surname - also maiden name, nicknames, etc. if appropriate).
 - (b) Approximate age or date of birth.
 - (c) Home address & telephone number.
 - (d) Other background information (e.g. period of residence, occupation)
 - (e) Connection with the performance and/or participants.
 - (f) Age and sex of the participants when the custom was performed.
- (3) **Location of the Custom**
 - (a) Home village/town of the participants (add Grid Refs. later).
 - (b) Other villages, towns or special locations visited by the team.
 - (c) Type of venue visited (e.g. pubs, big houses, etc.)
- (4) **Date of Performance or Revival**
 - (a) Year or period of performance remembered by the informant.
 - (b) Time of year, festival or occasion of performance (e.g. Easter, Weddings, etc.)
- (5) **Names for the Custom**
 - (a) Name for the day of occurrence (e.g. Halloween, Handsel Monday)
 - (b) Collective name for the participants (e.g. Guysers, Tipteers)
 - (c) Name for the activity (e.g. Mumming, Souling, etc.)
 - (d) Other names by which the custom is known (e.g. "The Peace Egg")

(6) Text and Description of Performance

Document as fully as possible the play text and performance. Ensure that :-

- (a) All actions are adequately described; including methods of entry & exit, method of soliciting any reward, dance movements, etc.
- (b) All speeches are assigned to characters/performers.
- (c) Tunes are recorded for any songs and dances.

(7) Characters

For each participant record :-

- (a) Character name(s)
- (b) Function or role - especially if a non-speaking character.
- (c) Personal name of the actor who played the part (if possible).

(8) Costumes

For each character or participant record descriptions of :-

- (a) Clothing worn.
- (b) Any facial disguise.
- (c) Props and equipment.
- (d) Any special methods of manufacture, sources of supply, etc.

(9) Photographs and Text Sources

- (a) Does the informant have any photographs or other mementoes of the performance.
- (b) Where did the participants get their text, instruction, etc.
- (c) Has the informant written down the text, or possess a copy of the source from which it was taken (e.g. a printed text).

(10) Other Possible Leads

- (a) Details of other teams the informant knows.
- (b) Names, addresses, etc. of other people who may be able to help.

(11) General Points

- (a) Never assume even the slightest detail.
- (b) Always ask informants to confirm that any names or information used in your questions are actually correct for the custom he/she remembers.
- (c) Record firm negative evidence too (e.g. No facial disguise).

The points listed above should only be regarded as a very basic list of topics to be covered. For more detailed guidance, the following publications are recommended.

Traditional Drama : SLF Research Guide No.1. by G.Smith et al
University of Sheffield, 1972, 8 pp.

Ballad and Folksong : CECTAL Research Guide No.3. by M.E.Brown & P.S.Smith
University of Sheffield, 1982, 17 pp.

The tape-recorded interview : a manual for fieldworkers in folklore and oral history. by E.Ives
Knoxville, University of Tennessee, 1980