

ROOMER

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PLOUGH MONDAY AND THE LAW

Idwal Jones

One fruitful area for research into many folk customs is the examination of local newspapers. Revivals of customs often appear to be newsworthy but, with the notable exception of Local Notes and Queries columns, long-standing traditions seem to elicit little editorial interest until they start to cause a nuisance to respectable citizens. Reports of court cases inevitably tend to concentrate on the nature of the legal transgression alone, but some details of the custom can sometimes creep in.

The following three extracts all concern customs in Lincolnshire on or about Plough Monday. None of them specifically mentions a play, but all three are from locations where plays have been recorded.

1) The Retford and Gainsborough Times Friday Jan. 14th 1881, p.2

"POLICE INTELLIGENCE : BRIGG PETTY SESSIONS : TUSEDAY

LARCENY BY MORRIS DANCERS - George Henry Crampton, Geo. Jackson, John Wm. Richardson, Geo. Altoft, agricultural labourers, and George Woodcock, pot hawker, all of Messingham, were brought up in custody charged with stealing or receiving, knowing to have been stolen, two tins of preserved fish, the property of Thomas Holden Wright, grocer, New Brumby. Mr. Geo. Wright, the first witness, deposed that he was assistant to his brother, who kept a shop at New Brumby. On Thursday last four or five men came into the shop dressed as morris dancers and disguised. They asked for a copper or two, but he (witness) declined to give them anything, and they then went away. Very shortly afterwards he missed two tins of preserved fish, and he gave information to the police. ...John Tindall said that on Thursday last he went out with the four prisoners...They were dressed as morris dancers. They visited Holme, Raventhorpe, Scunthorpe, Frodingham and New Brumby. The others went into a shop at New Brumby, but he stayed outside. They all returned to Messingham the same night. ...The prisoners were apprehended on Monday, and they all pleaded guilty to the charge, but in extenuation said that they were under the influence of drink at the time, a quantity of liquor having been given to them during the day ...Crampton and Jackson were fined 10s. and 16s. 8d costs; Richardson £1 and 16s. 8d costs; Altoft £1 and £1 3s. costs; and Woodcock 10s. and £1 3s. costs".

Examination of the Register of Brigg Petty Sessions for 1881 at the Lincolnshire Archives Office gives no further information other than that the tins of preserved fish were lobster and salmon! Four of the defendants can be identified in the 1881 census, which describes them as unmarried agricultural labourers, aged between 21 and 28.

2) The Retford and Gainsborough Times Friday Jan.20th 1882 p.2

"POLICE INTELLIGENCE : GAINSBOROUGH PETTY SESSIONS : TUESDAY

A PLOUGH MONDAY FROLIC - Jas. Houghton, David Linton, Jas. Hudson, John Butler, Geo.Murlin and Geo. Rawson, all of Willingham, were charged with maliciously damaging a quantity of plants, value 5s., the property of Fredk. Sutton, surgeon, Willingham. Mr. Bescoby defended. Prosecutor said on Plough Monday, January 12th, a plough went through five asparagus beds, then through a celery row, and some raspberry canes were also destroyed. Cross examined: He had not been asked to give the ploughboys anything.

...Defendant (Houghton) then said "...if the others had not pulled, I should not have ploughed up the canes". Linton and Hudson both admitted pulling, and Butler said he only went "cadging" and he did not pull. Rawson said, "I neither pulled nor ploughed, but I was whip", and Murlin admitted participation. Bescoby said these people were plough fags, and when they did not get any money they imagined they had a right to plough across the garden. The costs were said to be 8s. each, and the damage 5s, and this was ordered to be paid between them, 8s. 10d each".

Records of Gainsborough Petty Sessions are held at the Lincolnshire Archives Office but they only begin in 1910.

3) The Retford and Gainsborough Times Friday Jan. 14th 1887 p.8

"SHOCKING DEATH OF A 'PLOUGH JAGGER' IN THE SNOW

An inquest was held by Mr. Deputy Coroner Bladon at the Butcher's Arms Inn, West Halton, on Tuesday, touching the death of Henry Fowler, an agricultural labourer, aged 25 years, who was found dead in the snow. It appeared, from the evidence of Albert Henry Robinson, that the deceased was a married man, with a wife and three children. On the 7th inst. deceased and several other men went out 'plough jagger' visiting from house. They started at eight in the morning, about 14 of them, and went to Winterton and other villages, drink having been given them at different places. Deceased had never more than a pint at a time, and "did" pretty well before they got to Burton Stather, where they called at the Ferry House. They returned towards Alkborough, and when about half-way from Burton Stather deceased "seemed to turn bad", having previously complained of being hungry. He laid down in the snow, and seemed to lose the use of his limbs. The witness Robinson and two others tried to help him along, but he could not walk and they could not carry him, and he seemed very useless and helpless. Deceased's nephew said "Let's leave him; he's acting", and deceased said "All right, William", these being the first words he had spoken for some time. They then left him, laid down by the side of the road.

...Deceased was said to be of intemperate habits, and he had a heavy fall during the plough jaggings, when running after some boys at Winterton.

...The Coroner summed up...They had before them the fact that deceased had been left at six in the evening lying on the road, in extremely cold and inclement weather and left there exposed during the whole of the night, until found by a person casually passing by at about eight o'clock the next morning...The Coroner then directed the attention of the jury to the medical evidence, from which it appeared that death had not resulted from or even been accelerated by exposure to cold, but from compression of the brain from rupture of a blood vessel, the result of a fall on the back of the head, where there was a recent contusion.

...The jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence, and expressed their opinion that the two companies of deceased, by whom he was left on the road, should be severely censured for their conduct".

Records of Coroner's inquests from 1867 for this district are deposited in the Lincolnshire Archives Office, but are closed to public inspection for 100 years after the date of the inquest. I will return in 1987!

DOCUMENTING TRADITIONAL DRAMA - II

Paul Smith

The following printed questionnaire on Traditional Community Concerts was originally designed for use in the Department of Folklore, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada and is reproduced here by kind permission of Dr. David Buchan and Professor Herbert Halpert. To compress the questionnaire for this article the response spaces have been omitted.

Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive

Questionnaire Q80B: Traditional Community Concerts

The subject of this questionnaire is community concerts, particularly those organized and produced by the community as a whole and held as traditional yearly community occurrences. Although not as commonly encountered today as in the past, such concerts were once common to most parts of the province. They are made up of songs, skits or dialogues and recitations, and they are major happenings in the communities.

The questions are provided to assist you and/or your informant in recalling details about the concert. They are by no means all-inclusive and are not meant to be treated as an official form to be filled out from beginning to end. Although questions are phrased in the past tense ("Who organized?", we are also interested in the way people put on concerts today, and in changes between past and present.

An informal essay and/or a tape-recorded interview would be much appreciated. We are particularly interested in the skits (dialogues) and songs used in the concerts. Any fragments of these should be recorded along with the description (however brief) as to how it was acted.

Thank you, and please add any other details which you would like to share.

Name	Date
Birthdate	Birthplace
Present Address	Telephone
Home Community	Bay
Religion	Ancestry (for example, English, Irish)
Occupation	

Please provide information about your informant(s):

Name	Age	Address
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A. GENERAL

1. Are concerts still being held in your community?
If not, were they ever, and when did they stop?
If so, at what time(s) of the year did they take place?
2. How long were the concerts? What time of the day did they usually start?
Did a dance or time follow the concert?
3. Did you ever participate in the community concert?
When?
What did you do?
4. Did your informant ever participate in a concert?
When?
In what capacity?

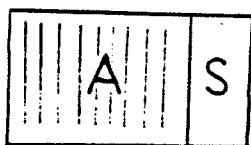
B. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONCERT

1. Who usually organized? (Individuals, Church, Lodge, Community Group).
2. How long before the event did people start getting the concert ready?
3. Who was in charge of the concert?
Did he/she select the people to be in the concert?
4. Who made up the programme? (The person in charge, the group).
How did he/she/they select what songs, recitations, dialogues, etc. were to be included?
5. Was the programme kept secret from people not in the concert?
Where were the practices held?
6. Was there someone in your community who always played (plays) in the concerts? Who?
7. Who was considered a good actor or actress?
8. Can you explain why such persons were regarded as good performers?

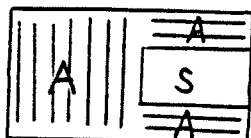
9. How did someone get a part in a concert? (Volunteer? Asked to do something specific?)
10. How many people were usually in a concert?
Men? Women? Children?
11. Was there a master of ceremonies or more than one?
Who were the masters of ceremonies? Give names if possible?
How were they selected?
12. a) Did the Master of Ceremonies introduce each concert piece? Do you remember how he/she used to do it? ("The next thing on the programme...").
12. b) Did he ever praise in advance or make some humorous comment? (Give examples).
12. c) Did he ever comment on a piece after it was performed? (Examples).
13. Were the concerts advertised? How?
14. Were the concerts from one community presented in other communities?
Where?
Do you remember any incidents that occurred while doing this?
15. Were there people from St. John's or other distant parts of the island ("strangers") who travelled to various communities presenting concerts?

C. STAGE

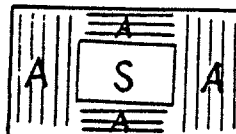
1. Where were the concerts held?
2. Was the stage permanent?
If not, was one built for the event?
3. Describe the stage. (Size, how high off the floor, where were the change rooms located, where did the actors come on to the stage from?)
A rough diagram or pictures would be helpful.
4. Which diagram best represents the stage (S) and audience (A) arrangement?



a)



b)



c)

5. Did you make any attempt at having special lighting on the stage; e.g., candles, lamps, etc.?
Was the audience-part of the hall darkened?
6. Was there a curtain or screen? What was its purpose?
7. Were costumes made especially for the concerts? Can you describe any of them?

8. What did the scenery consist of? (E.g. windows, doors, tables, a stove, boat, etc.).
Can you describe some of the scenery used in a particular concert? (Was it painted, how was it made, etc.).
9. Was the scenery changed during the course of the concert?

D. THE CONCERT

1. What kinds of things were done in concerts?
2. Were there printed programmes?
Do you have any that we could copy?
3. How was the concert opened? (Special song, prayer, etc.).
How was it closed?
4. Were songs, recitations, and dialogues written especially for the concerts?
Were they usually comical? (Examples).
Who were the authors?
Do you have copies of any locally written pieces?
5. Can you remember any of the dialogues (skits)? Record even the smallest piece, i.e. who was in it, who it was about, what they wore, what was on stage, etc.
6. Were some dialogues taken from dialogue books? Where did you get the books? Do you still have any?
7. Were the dialogues always funny? (Examples).
8. Do you recall any dialogues and other concert pieces that were serious?
9. Do you remember a recitation that was popular at concerts? (Record if possible).
10. Were recitations acted out while someone said them?
11. Were songs and recitations performed in front of the curtain while the rest of the people got ready for the next dialogue?
12. Were songs ever acted out? Can you recall one in terms of how it was done?
13. Did the audience ever sing along with the performers?
14. Were any people ever called on to the stage to sing or recite?
15. What songs were popular as concert pieces?
16. Do you remember a particularly good concert?
What are some of the things you remember about it?

TRADITIONAL DRAMA 1984 - CALL FOR PAPERS

The Seventh Annual Conference on Aspects of Current Scholarship in Traditional Drama

University of Sheffield - Saturday, 6th October, 1984

In the 1984 conference we wish to expand further the varieties of topics covered. Consequently, we would like individuals interested in presenting papers, chairing discussions or bringing exhibition materials, slides and films to contact the organisers by 1st August, 1984.

For further information contact: Paul Smith, The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield. S10 2TN (0742-78555 Ext.6296)

TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH IN NORTH AMERICA

The following information has been abstracted from Sue Samuelson (Ed.), Twenty Years of the Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania: A Dissertation Profile. (Occasional publications in Folklore and Folklife, No.1; Pennsylvania University, Dept. of Folklore, 1983). Copies of the publication are available from The University of Pennsylvania; Price \$3.

Lichman, Simon, 'The Gardener's Story and What Came Next: A Contextual Analysis of the Marshfield Paper Boy's Mumming Play'. 1981 xiii, 415.38 illus., 312 facsm., 2 maps, bibl. 81-27044

A contemporary mumming event is analysed in relation to its history, metalfolklore (text and action, words and character), setting (village community and its repertoire of celebrations) and the political implications of its message.

Welch, Charles Edgar, 'The Philadelphia Mummers Parade: A Study in History, Folklore and Popular Tradition'. 1968 xxii, 330, 13 illus., bibl. 69-15138

By using diaries, newspapers, public records and personal interviews the history of the parade is unfolded. The event is a composite of British, Irish, Swedish, Italian, Afro-American and white American cultural influences.

Published versions: Welch, Charles E., Jr. 'The History of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade', Pennsylvania Folklife, 9, No.1 (Winter 1961) 57-58.

'"Common Nuisances", The Evolution of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade', Keystone Folklore Quarterly, 8 (1963) 95-106.

'"The Blackface" Controversy in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade', Keystone Folklore Quarterly, 9 (1964) 154-165.

'String Bands', Mummers Magazine, n.v. (January-February 1966) (Magazine has no pagination).

Oh! Dem Golden Slippers, A History of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade (Camden, N. J. Thomas J. Nelson, 1970).

'The New Jersey Mummers Connection' (Cherry Hill, New Jersey) Courier-Post (December 29, 1979).

'The Music Man', Today Magazine. Philadelphia Inquirer (December 20, 1970) 4



Title Page from Walker's New Mummer or the Wassail Cup. For further details see - M. J. Preston, M. G. Smith and P. S. Smith, An Interim Checklist of Chapbooks Containing Traditional Play Texts (Newcastle: History of the Book Trade in the North, 1976) p.33.

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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