

# ROOMER

The Newsletter of the Traditional  
Drama Research Group.  
Vol. 5 no. 3. 1985



WEST MALLING, KENT (TQ 6857)

Carl Willetts

With reference to the recent Roomer article (4:6, 1984, pp.61-64), another example of the use of a previously published text may not come amiss. As part of my search for Seven Champions mummers plays from Kent, my attention was drawn to Anthony Cronk's A Short history of West Malling, Kent (published privately, 1951), on page 41 of which the author mentions The Seven Champions and then gives the text of a play. This is the introduction to this text:

"Then at Christmastide, there was the genuine West Malling folk-play, The Seven Champions, which was regularly performed by local stalwarts right up until 1930, the players travelling round the taverns and private houses in the same manner as carol singers. The origin of such plays is obscure, but it is almost certain that they date from the time of the crusades. The actors wore outlandish costume, and all had blackened faces except St. George, who wore a brass helmet with a plume resembling that of a lifeguardsman. The text of the play was something like this, although the wording was apt to vary, due to the fact that it was never put in writing, but handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation".

Mr. Cronk was a former brickmaker and inhabitant of the town and is fairly uncritical in the material he quotes in his book, which was probably a retirement task. He does not indicate whether he heard the play first hand or who his informants were. The text that follows is in fact so close to the 'normalised' text in Chambers' English Folk Play (pp.6-9) as to have been almost certainly lifted straight from it. Particular evidence is his use of the words 'Presenter' and 'Quete' in the directions. The punctuation and layout are different and there are some differences in the text, as follows. The line references are to Chambers' version.

Line 15    What I do say  
Line 18    That noble champion bold  
Slasher is referred to as Bold Slasher throughout  
Line 64    Oh instead of O  
Line 75    hand I can staunch his blood  
Line 84    Nine devils in, I fetch ten out  
Line 87    the stuff within is elecompane  
Line 88    It'll bring  
Lines 91 - 94    Omitted  
Line 99    (direction) Enter Johnny Jack, carrying a bundle of dolls  
Lines 103 to end omitted. Replaced by:

"Enter Chimney Sweep

In come I, the Chimney Sweep  
All the money I gets I keep

All the bread and cheese that I receive  
 I roll it up my jacket sleeve  
 Ladies and gentlemen give me what you please

Quete (i.e. a collection)

All:

And now we must away, and away with good cheer,  
 A merry Christmas to you all, and a happy New Year"

Note that Cronk does not claim his play to be the West Malling play, just "something like". Most of the differences between Cronk and Chambers can be taken as clerical errors or minor 'improvements'. However, the major differences (i.e. nine devils in, the Chimney Sweep and 'quete' speeches) may indeed be interpolations of genuinely remembered West Malling lines into the otherwise 'normalised' text. Clues to the actual occurrence of a play in West Malling are contained in Cronk's introduction and there is no reason to doubt the general description of modus operandi and costume given. The title 'Seven Champions' is a common one in mid and west Kent, less so elsewhere, and the appearance of the Chimney Sweep also suggests a Kentish play. For instance, from Sutton at Hone we have:

"In come I Johnny Jack the Sweep  
 All the money I earn I mean to keep"

and from Bearsted:

"In comes I Jack Sweep  
 All the men I have to keep  
 Whether they're little or  
 Whether they're tall  
 It takes a lot of money to keep them all".

Thus, despite the initial disappointment that the text is mostly from Chambers, this version may indeed preserve some fragments of the West Malling play. It also serves to remind us, however, to be very critical about material reported by non-specialist authors.

#### DIRECTORY OF RECORDED SOUND RESOURCES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The British Library National Sound Archive (formerly The British Institute of Recorded Sound) is compiling information on all United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland recorded sound materials in order to make available, in a central register, information upon the nature and extent of recordings held in institutions and in private hands around the country.

The Archive recognises that it cannot and should not be a repository for all sound records and that its role must necessarily include providing information on where recordings not covered by its collection can be located. The idea of a central register is fundamental to the encouragement of a wider use of sound recordings.

The Directory of Recorded Sound Resources in the United Kingdom and The Republic of Ireland will constitute an invaluable new tool for all researchers and for administrators of sound-recordings. It will assure good publicity for both well-known and less well-known resource-centres and provide more than just basic information to help the researcher. The emphasis will be on non-commercial and specialist materials, but information of any kind which improves access to collections will be listed.

For further information contact Jeremy Silver, Research Office, British Library, National Sound Archive, FREEPOST, London. SW7 2YZ Tel: 01-589 6603/4

*Strange Rural Customs*

# Rollicking Plough Boys

Plays That Represented Seasonal  
Hopes and Prospects

“TIMES” READERS’ RECOLLECTIONS



BURRINGHAM PLOUGHJAGS dressed in the character costumes in which they toured the villages.

From The Hull and Lincolnshire Times (Jan. 20, 1934), 10.

The above cutting is from the Ethel Rudkin Collection of papers on traditional drama, copies of which are deposited at The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language. The following note has been appended to the original item:

THE BURRINGHAM PLOUGH TEAM 1934

<u>Front row</u>	<u>Middle row</u>	<u>Back row</u>
The Doctor	The Lady	Hobby horse
Collector	Groom	Soldier
Groom	Collector	Elsie Belsie Bug
	Joe Straw	Tom Fool
		Hat Man
		Hat Man
		Besum Bet
		Sergeant
		Hobby Horse

Key to the photograph from Mr. A. Lingo, Burringham

It is difficult to realise in this age, when there is always so much to command our attention, how great is the interest which is still being taken in the things of the past. Particularly is this so in the case of the arts and crafts of our fathers, which until a few years ago had every appearance of having died a natural death, to be lost sight of for ever. But this is not so, as I found from the large number of interesting letters I have received this week from readers on the subject of plough jags or baggans, as they were called in some parts of the county.

Several readers have given me portions of the particular play of their locality as they remember it twenty or more years ago, and it is remarkable that while the theme of the play is similar throughout, the words are different, though often expressing the same meaning.

From the secretary of the Lindsey Rural Community Council I have the almost complete play of the Lusby plough boys, but unfortunately it is too long to reproduce here, so what I intend to give are numerous extracts, comparing them with others I have received from readers who remember something of similar plays from the villages of Kirmington and Barnetby.

#### ENTER "TOM FOOL"

In the case of the plays of Lusby and Kirmington it was the fool who was the first to enter a house or wherever else the play was to be given. At Lusby he was known as "Tom Fool" and at Kirmington as "Bold Tom."

Mr W. N. Bell, of Grimsby, informs me that Bold Tom had sufficient straw stuffed under his coat to make him look as broad as he was tall, and here we have a connection with Burringham, where he was "Joe, stuffed with straw."

The introduction by Tom Fool (Lusby) was as follows:

In comes I that's never been before;  
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen all.  
As Christmas time is a merry time  
It makes me so bold to call.  
I hope you will not be offended at what  
I've got to say.  
For in a short time there will be come  
little boys this way.  
Some can dance and some can sing;  
By your consent they shall come in.  
There's Osman Pasha, France and Spain,  
In comes our Sergeant, all the same;  
Stir up the fire and shine a light,  
And you will see this gallant nor to-night.  
As his name implies, Bold Tom (Kirmington) has a little more confidence in his opening lines:

In comes I, Bold Tom,  
A brisk and nimble fellow;  
Fourteen gallons of your best ale  
Will make me nice and mellow.  
A slice of your pork pie—  
Believe me, I am telling you no lie.  
For we are all hungry as well as dry.

#### BARNETBY PLAYERS

The recruiting sergeant then states his mission, of which there are slight variations. The sergeant of the Barnetby players gives them as:

All those that follow horse, cart or plough,  
Tinkers, Tailors, Pedlars, Nailers,  
while the sergeant of Lusby changes pedlars for pealars, and continues:

All at my command advance;  
The more I hear the music play  
The better I can dance.

He then sings; but in the Kirmington version it is Bold Tom who gives us a song, the first verse of which is:

One day I tried to stop a pig, sir,  
And what a lark we had;  
The pig went "Och," and away he ran  
Right thro' my stunning leg, sir.  
("Stunning," here, must mean "knocked senseless by the blow.")

(By "RAMBLER")

At this point the lady enters, followed by her husband in the Lusby version, and he is enlisted by the sergeant. In the others the lady is alone, deploring the fact that her lover has spurned her. She is, however, seeking for another sweetheart, and Beelzebub offers himself, at the same time asking if there is anyone who can stand before him, to which the sergeant (Lusby) answers:

Yes, I can, I will hash thee and dash thee  
As small as flies.  
I'll send thee to Jamaica to make mince  
pies;  
Mince pies hot and mince pies cold.  
I'll send thee to Jamaica before you're  
three days old.

They fight, Beelzebub falls dead and the doctor is called in, who, in the Barnetby, Kirmington and Burringham versions, seems to have travelled widely for his experience, while we get an absolute contrast in that of Lusby, for in it he has only gone:

From the fireside to the bedside and  
From the bedside my old grandmother's  
Cupboard, where I've made many a bit of  
Pork pie, that makes me such a noble  
fellow.  
As you see I am.

#### ONLY A TRANCE

However, at Kirmington and Lusby, the doctor found he was not dead, but only in a trance through having swallowed a horse and cart "and the wheels won't digest," yet with black jacks at Barnetby and at Lusby

Three drops of this medicine out of this  
little bottle  
Down his old throttle  
were all to no avail, and the story again turns to the lady in search of love. She finds it with Tom Fool at Lusby and Bold Tom at Kirmington, and in both cases invitations to the wedding are given, though, with a certain amount of bluntness, Tom makes it quite clear what they are to expect:—

Tom Fool:  
Well, let's shake hands in wedlock  
hands,  
And we'll be wed to-morrow.  
We've come out to-night to ask a few  
of these ship-me-jacks and cock-me-  
dolls to me and my wife's wedding.  
What they like best they must bring  
along with them, for what me and  
my lady likes we shall have, that is,  
a leg of a lark and a farthing loaf,  
and after that a plumping great  
toast.

Bold Tom naturally did not have the same menu, though the invitation is much the same.

#### REMEMBER THE PLAYERS

Bold Tom:  
There will be the leg of a louse,  
And a lop fry,  
Barley chaff dumpling, buttered with  
wool  
And them that can't nagg it will have  
it to pull.

Here they all began to sing, while the fool drew the "stakes," or in other words, went round with his hat. The song, while it thanks the audience for listening, gives sufficient indication of the real object of the play.

The Kirmington, Barnetby and Lusby versions are all very similar.  
I give a few lines of that from Kirmington:—

Good master and good mistress,  
As you sit round your fire,  
Remember us poor plough boys,  
Who plough the muck and mire.  
The muck it is so nasty,  
The mire it is so strong,  
Remember us poor plough boys,  
Who plough the furrows along.

Of course, by this time Tom has added

something to the hat and is anxious to try elsewhere. The others follow as quickly as possible, after making this excuse:—

So now our song has ended, and our  
Tom Fool has gone.  
We always make it our business  
To follow him along.  
We thank you for your civility and  
What you've given us here.  
We wish you a merry Christmas  
And a happy New Year.

The last two verses are from the Lusby play, which was presented at Christmas time. It is thought that the slaying of Beelzebub and his revival by the doctor may represent the death and resurrection of the old year, or the slaying of a victim before sowing the corn to ensure a good crop. Whatever may have been their origin, it is certain that they have been presented annually from the very earliest times and they are not without their interest to-day.

CORRESPONDENCEFOLK DRAMA AS A SCIENCE

From Dr. E.C.Cawte, 51 Station Road, Ibstock, Leicester.

Dear Sir,

I read the paper by Craig Fees (Roomer 4:5, pp.41-51), with interest and agreement. Only in the first two pages do I feel he lacks the historical scale which he later recommends. As this kind of argument has appeared before, it may be helpful if I try to reconstruct our state of mind in the 1950s when English Ritual Drama was conceived. The milestones were the two works by Chambers, one by Tiddy, and one quite different one, the Geographical Distribution of the Ceremonial Dance by Joseph Needham in 1936. 'The Index' which started in 1956 covered a range of customs which for a while were studied in parallel, but it soon became clear that efficient progress required that we deal with one subject at a time. The index of dances in 1960 followed Needham, and it was logical that the second in 1967 (but largely completed in 1965) followed Chambers.

When we started we were alone. The Folk-Lore Society regarded these subjects as lying in the field of the EFDSS, which in turn was even less interested in research than it is now. The preceding publications had appeared when I was an infant, and when the oldest of us was still at school, and by 1956 their authors were dead or had changed interests. No one else was studying these subjects in our way, no one else could help. On such elementary a matter as citation of references we did not receive consistent advice from professional librarians. We had to explain, not merely why we needed to use grid references, but what they were. The editor of Folk-Lore omitted them from one paper. The received opinion was that the work had already been done by Chambers and Needham, and that all that could remain was a little tidying up. Even within the team it was seriously suggested that we could complete the entire index, May customs and all, with dissertations, for the 75th birthday of Maud Karpeles in 1960.

We, too, hoped to be 'excellent burrowers, excavators, and accumulators of sources', but unlike Chambers we did define our terms, and in ERD we stated on pages 13 to 16 precisely what we were studying in that part of our index, and on the title page that it was 'A Geographical Index'. We mentioned one other type of drama which would be studied later, and I kept my word; personally I would have had the Top Plays in ERD, but I was in a minority. In his first two pages Craig Fees suggests a steady surge of misguided scholarship from 1891 onward, but I suggest rather that there were episodes of hiccups, often at intervals of twenty years or so, and the individuals do not seem to have met, let alone discussed their work. There had been such a quiet gap of twenty years when we started.

Yes, we did play the old tune of death and resurrection on eight of our 132 pages, it was the only theory around, but we also read Johnson, and Kirke, and removed them from the field. We defined locations, traced back to original sources instead of quoting the usual later compilations, cut out the dead wood of traditional titles which had made people refer to different types of play, and tried to summarise data with clarity. We regarded what we did as a start, not a finish. We defined what we meant by Ritual Drama, and that is what we looked at on that occasion. Craig Fees does not like our definition, which is his privilege, but he does not produce one of his own. Without definitions a subject can be disputed without end.

Maybe we did not achieve a lot after inventing the wheel, but it is a pleasure to see so many people out on their bicycles these days, not to mention hobby-horses. I have only two regrets; that ERD tends to be looked at without the accounts of other dramatic actions in the publications which went before and after it, and that no one seems interested in looking for origins for some of these customs, other than the improbable prechristian fertility rites. I attended a real prechristian fertility rite myself in 1958, so maybe I am biased.

CRAIG FEES replies:-

"I am grateful that Dr. Cawte, whose power of argument was demonstrated in his gentlemanly demolition of E.T.Kirby in the Journal of American Folklore in 1972/74, agrees with the majority of my paper. The immense labour in, and consequent impact of ERD, needs no defending, and the stature of the work only grows by clarifying the conditions in which it was produced. No group working in Traditional Drama, not even the TDRG, has produced a work to match its influence..

Furthermore, if I have conveyed the impression of a "steady surge of misguided scholarship", it is out of the immaturity of my own thinking. I would rather have outlined the place of ERD within the framework of a scholarly tradition which it both ratified and revolutionised. That I am not content with that tradition, and am part of it by default - it dominates literary sources and has had a significant impact on the performance tradition I am studying - means that I feel compelled to come to grips with it and try to understand it in the way that I, as a folklorist, feel compelled to understand any tradition impacting on my life. But understanding is not compatible with prejudice, and if I were to arrive at the conclusion that the scholarship was 'misguided', it would be through a failure of insight. We are not here to judge traditions, but to penetrate to their essences: to understand them as they would understand themselves if they were capable of such radical self-reflection. And there is no a priori reason why they shouldn't be able to do so.

One of the characteristic prejudices of our colleagues in the older Folk Drama Scholarship was that the performers themselves were incapable of this or any comparable insight. Thus, Dr. Cawte says that "death and resurrection...was the only theory around", without taking into account any possible folk-classifications, the self-definitions of performers and audiences within the living folk-play tradition. It should be said too, referring to a more academic level, that there are very few original ideas in the world: it is not that there were no other theories around, but that within the Tradition to which ERD belongs, there is only the one theory logically available. This theory, as I attempted to indicate in my paper, was built upon a web of unexamined prejudices and assumptions - i.e. upon a genuine traditional knowledge. It was "logical" to turn to Chambers because the Tradition rejected alternative turns, such as a radical inquiry into its primary tenets, e.g. passive transmission of ritual action through cultural space and time; or the less radical turn to an altogether different approach to Folk Drama, such as that of C.R.Baskerville (still oddly estranged from general Traditional Drama Scholarship).

None of this demeans the contribution of ERD which, by crystallising the Tradition, has led to the current reaction against it. ERD threw up a powerful challenge to the old Folk Drama Scholarship by taking it seriously and giving it the tool to prove its value. Dr. Cawte tells us that ERD was meant to be a beginning, and it was: it forced the Old Scholarship to its logical end, and by bringing the Old Scholarship to that end, has in effect led to the clearing of the field for the reconstruction of a new scholarship with different procedures and different ends. As I pointed out in my paper, there is no guarantee that this new scholarship is less blind to its prejudices and assumptions: here criticisms will be and are continually helpful. As Dr. Cawte has just pointed out, I mistakenly pictured the old Folk Drama Tradition as a "steady surge", whereas traditions are marked by "hiccups" - individual efforts that renew and reaffirm traditions even when they revolutionise them.

I was concerned in my paper with scholarship as such, not with definitions, and it is not quite right that I disagree with the definition of the Folk Play in ERD. Simon Lichman has shown in what sense it might be taken as correct (The Gardener's Story and What Came Next: A Contextual Analysis of the Marshfield Paper Boys' Mumming Play, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1981, p.105), and I do not think the possibility the ritual-origins definition contains should be rejected until it has been properly tested. The new comparative mythology of Georges Dumézil should set us against too easily dismissing what is possible in cultural transmission, which - along with the nature of historico-cultural Time itself - is still a mystery. My disagreement with the ERD definition is that it is Traditional, it is taken straight out of past scholarship and although it effectively defines what past scholarship was concerned with, it is not a definition of what is carried on by the folk. It prescribes, rather than describes; it is a complete theory of history and

and meaning, and it is for this reason that the index remains "an extended illustration" rather than a breakthrough into science. A theory needs to arise out of the material being studied, and not vice versa.

I defined Theatre-as-such, and for my purposes 'folk drama', in my master's thesis. I outlined this approach again at the start of 'Folk Play and Analgues', a paper given at the Traditional Drama Conference, 1983. I am working very hard on the definition for the beginning of my doctoral dissertation, which is in the throes of being written (April 1985).

Dr. Cawte, on the other hand has apparently rejected the 'pre-Christian ritual' theory of the folk play. Since this is intimately bound up in ERD's definition of the English folk play, it leaves Dr. Cawte's current working definition unarticulated.

I would also be interested in the bias that Dr. Cawte carries over from his attendance at a pre-Christian fertility rite, and did he know at the time that the performers were going to convert?

### CORRESPONDENCE

From Ron Shuttleworth, 41 Morningside, Earlsdon, Coventry CV5 6PD

Surveys through Newspapers (TDRG Research Guide 4, Roomer 5:1 (1985): There is one point which I would like to make here. It holds good for press articles and probably applies to letters also. If a piece is too long, it is almost always cut from the bottom. You should therefore cover all the really important points as early as possible.

The Quack Doctor and the Cheap Jack (Roomer 5:1 (1985): The following extracts may be relevant to this topic:-

From Merrie England in the Olden Time by George Daniel (New Edition; London: Frederick Warne & Co., n.d. - but introductory 'Advertisement' dated October 1841) pp.198-199.

"Joe Haynes was the first comedian who rode an ass upon the stage. He acted the mountebank, Waltho Van Clutterbank, High German, chemical, wonder-working doctor and dentifricator, and spoke his famous "Horse-doctor's harangue" to the mob. He challenged a celebrated quack called "The Unborn Doctor", at the town of Hertford, on a market-day, to have a trial of skill with him. Being both mounted on the public stage, and surrounded by a numerous auditory eager to hear this learned dispute, Joe desired that each might stand upon a joint stool. "Gentlemen" said Joe, "I thank you for your good company, and hope soon to prove how grossly you have been deceived by this arch-imposter. I come hither neither to get a name nor an estate: the first, by many miraculous cures performed in Italy, Spain, Holland, France, and England, per totum terrarum orbem, has long been established. As to the latter, those Emperors, Kings, and foreign potentates whom I have snatched from the gaping jaws of death, whose image I have the honour to wear (showing several medals), have sufficiently rewarded me. Besides, I am the seventh son of a seventh son; so were my father and grandfather. To convince you, therefore, that what I affirm is truth, I prognosticate some heavy judgment will fall on the head of that impudent quack. May the charlatan tumble ingloriously, while the true doctor remains unhurt!" At which words, Haynes's Merry-Andrew, who was underneath the stage, with a cord fastened to B----'s stool, just as B---- was going to stutter out a reply, pulled the stool from under him, and down he came; which, passing for a miracle, Joe was borne home to his lodging in triumph, and B---- hooted out of the town\*".

Some of Doctor Haynes's miraculous mock cures, were the Duchess of Boromolpho of a cramp in her tongue; the Count de Rodomontado of a billious passion, after a surfeit of buttered parsnips; and Duke Philorix of a dropsy - of which he died! He invites his patients to the "Sign of the Prancers, in vico vulgo dicto, Rattlecliffero, something south-east of Templum Danicum in the Square of Profound-Close, not far from Titter-Tatter Fair!".

\*A footnote on page 198 comments: "The Life of the late Famous Comedian, Jo.Hayns. Containing his comical exploits and adventures, both at home and abroad. London: Printed for J.Nutt, near Stationer's-Hall, 1701".

NOTES AND QUERIES

From Craig Fees, New Barns, Church Lane, Toddington, Glos. GL54 5DH.

I recently (Roomer 4:5, 1984, p.51) put forward T.F.Ordish's candidacy as father of the term "Folk Drama", which he presented formally to the world in an article of the same name in Folklore 2, 1891, p.314. Any challengers?

In 'Theatre of War: The Crimea on the London Stage 1854-5', Performance and Politics in Popular Drama (ed. David Bradley, Louis James, Bernard Sharratt, Cambridge 1980), J.S.Bratton writes: "In the additional material Added to The Battle of the Alma in February 1855 to represent Balaclava and Inkermann, the Stand of the Thin Red Line of Highlanders is commanded in dumb show by an officer 'supposed to be Sir Colin Campbell' whose white hair and hat without a feather are specified in the text. Campbell was, however, a sort of folk hero, the son of a Glasgow carpenter who made his way in the army without money or influence, and he would no doubt have had a great appeal for the Astley's audience" (p.136, fn.4).

Mackenzie Walcott, 'Hampshire Mummers', Notes & Queries, 3rd series, I, 25th Jan. 1862, p.66, speaks of an "act" which "now varies every year, and is furnished from London," in which Father Christmas speaks traditional lines, the actors wear traditional-sounding costumes, but the characters comprise Sir H.Havelock killing Mana Sahib, Sir Colin Campbell killing Tantia Toppe - characters from the recent Indian mutiny - and a physician. Are people aware of other historical personages shared by mummers plays and stage plays?

ROOMER: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP

ISSN 0262-4095

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:

Steve Roud, 18 Amberley Grove, Addiscombe, Surrey. CR0 6ND (01-654-6233)  
Paul Smith, Laburnum House, Main Street, West Stockwith, Doncaster. DN10 4HB (0427-890042)

The views expressed by the contributors to Roomer are not necessarily those of the editors or of the Traditional Drama Research Group.

© 1985 The Authors