

BERKSHIRE  
MUMMING  
PLAYS

A  
GEOGRAPHICAL INDEX  
AND  
GUIDE TO SOURCES

Stephen Roud  
and  
Malcolm Bee

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## INTRODUCTION

This index includes all references to traditional mumming performances in Berkshire, in both published works and manuscript collections, known to us at the time of writing. Generally, references are quoted in full, but some lengthy records have been summarised and, with the exception of three samples, complete texts have not been reproduced. The index supersedes earlier ones contained in Bee (1984) and Roud (1980).

Berkshire is fortunate in that the mummers' tradition survived locally until quite recently (in several locations performances continued into the interwar period) and also in that the tradition in the county has received attention from several collectors and researchers. Therefore, a substantial volume of material has been preserved, including not only many texts but also considerable information on the context of their performance. (Interpretation of the material must, however, recognise the fact that much of it relates to a fairly narrow time period during which the tradition was in decline.)

As compilers of this index, our debt to the many people who have contributed to the collection and preservation of records is self-evident. We acknowledge the efforts of the early collectors who recorded much information at a time before its significance was widely appreciated: by their foresight, much has been preserved which would otherwise have been lost. We also offer our thanks to the more recent researchers who have generously made their collections available to us. (Roly Brown's extensive fieldwork in west Berkshire deserves particular notice.) Finally, we acknowledge our debt to the pioneering work of Chris Cawte, Alex Helm and Norman Peacock, whose English Ritual Drama set a pattern for all subsequent work. Although English Ritual Drama contains only bare references to mumming plays in 48 Berkshire locations, and modern interpretations of the tradition's significance challenge that implied in the title of their work, the magnitude of the task which Cawte, Helm and Peacock undertook must surely be recognised by all those who have subsequently followed along the trail which they forged.

There is still work to be done. Further manuscripts and photographs probably exist and searches in local newspapers will certainly provide additional material. But most important, and urgent, is the interviewing of people who took part in the custom or witnessed the performances. We would be very pleased to hear from anyone who has further information on mummers in Berkshire, and we hope that this publication will stimulate interest and research in the subject.

## Note on Geographical Scope

The 1974 reorganisation of county boundaries in Britain resulted in a large area of northern Berkshire being reallocated to Oxfordshire. The present publication retains the pre-1974 boundaries, but entries for locations now in Oxfordshire are marked (OX).

GEOGRAPHICAL INDEX

ABINGDON SU 4997 (OX)

- 001 Berkshire Book (1939) p.112: "On Christmas Eve or Boxing Day there is a visit from the Mummers; this still takes place; but the Mummers now come from Sunningwell, not, as formerly, from Abingdon (the Vineyard). The play, a Christmas Mumming Play, which they act, is traditional. Their dresses are made of long strips of paper."
- 002 Berkshire Book (1951) pp.115-6: "On Christmas Eve or Boxing Day there was a visit from the Mummers; this continued up till 1939. Their play was the traditional Christmas Mumming Play, much the same as the one recorded by Mrs. Ewing in 'The Peace Egg.' The dresses were made with long strips of paper, and most of the head-dresses too, but the Doctor wore a tall hat."
- 003 Yarrow (1952): Bare mention only.

[See also Drayton, entry 072, and Sunningwell, entry 122.]

ALDWORTH SU 5579

[See Compton, entry 055]

APPLEFORD SU 5293 (OX)

- 004 Carpenter Collection : Text from "Ezrael Edwards Greenough, Hill Farm Appleford; (Whiteleys Farm, North Moreton); learned from one of mummers; 50 years ago; never saw in print." Handwritten note: "E. Greenough's version came from Gad [?] Greenough; Bert Greenough & Newborough."

APPLETON SP 4401 (OX)

[See Cumnor, entries 058 and 061.]

ARDINGTON SU 4388 (OX)

- 005 Hammond (1983): "Until some ninety years ago the traditional form of Christmas Mummers' Play was performed in the villages [Ardington and Lockinge] and following the final performance the villagers set the play down in writing for the benefit of posterity..." [See Lockinge, entries 092 and 093 for Hammond's likely source.]

Hammond does not substantiate his assertion that Ardington men performed alongside those of Lockinge, but as the two villages are contiguous, and since both, in the 1880s, formed part of the Loyd-Lindsay estate, joint enterprise does not seem improbable. The account is accompanied by extracts from Lowsley's 'Mid-Berkshire' text - see entry 162 - though no evidence of the relevance of this text to Ardington and Lockinge is offered.

ASTON TIRROLD/UPTHORPE SU 5585/SU 5586 (OX)

006 Berkshire Book (1951) pp.163-4: "The good old customs have become things of the past, mumming and May Day garlanding. Christmas would hardly have been Christmas without the mummers who helped to make merry at that season. In wonderful paper-fringed coats that rustled and hissed as the wooden swords clashed, King George and Slasher dealt each other many deadly blows, but the slain were quickly brought to life again by Dr. Jack Finny who could cure a magpie with the toothache, and all ended happily with a friendly dance."

007 Bee Collection: In an address to the village branch of the Women's Institute, in 1921, a Mrs. Fuller of the Manor expressed regret that the mummers no longer visited. [Information from an Official of the W.I.]

[Reference to Arston [Aston] in a comment on the Carpenter Collection East Hagbourne text, [see entry 073] suggests the possibility that records of mummers at Aston relate to visiting teams.]

BARKHAM SU 7866

008 Ditchfield (1907): Writing of his "own Clerk", Ditchfield records, "His grandson still performs the Christmas Mumming Play."

009 Ditchfield (1910): Makes general comment on mumming plays and refers to "The performance, which some youths in my village are now rehearsing..."

[The Rev. P.H. Ditchfield was rector of Barkham at the time of writing the above comments.]

BEEDON SU 4878

010 Berkshire Book (1939) p.29: "The Mummers acted their Christmas play until quite recently."



- 011 Brown (1983): Reports failure of his enquiries in the village to bring to light any memories of mummers. "It may be that the reference in the Berkshire Book...is fanciful when it says 'recently'." [This opinion is confirmed by information given to M.B. by a local historian in the village who has failed, despite extensive enquiry, to obtain any details of mumming at Beedon.]

BESSELSLEIGH SP 4501 (OX)

- 012 Abingdon Herald (1887): "Drunkenness - George Basson of Cumnor, and James Coventry, of Besselsleigh, were summoned for being drunk and riotous at Besselsleigh on the 24th ult. Another man, named Moses Barnett of Appleton, had not been served. P.C. Hewitt stated that on Christmas Eve, about 10.40, he found the two defendants and Barnett drunk and making a disturbance outside the Greyhound public house. They were using bad language and Basson had his coat off to fight. They had been fighting before witness arrived. The men were eventually taken away by their friends. Defendants had been 'mumming' in the neighbourhood, and the disturbance arose out of it - A fine of 2s. 6d. was imposed, with 7s. costs." [Although the incident took place at Besselsleigh, and one of those involved came from that village, it is uncertain that the mummers were actually based there. See also Cumnor, entry 058.]

BINFIELD SU 8471

- 013 Cawte et. al., p.39: cite Alex Helm Collection for Binfield, but we have been unable to locate this reference.

BLEWBURY SU 5385 (OX)

- 014 Carpenter Collection: "Mr. Joseph Shaw, 80 yrs old Blewbury Bldg. Blewbury. States old mummers used to sword dance at end of acting. 60 years ago. Held swords crossed, danced around & around."
- 015 Helm Collection: Letter from Roy Dommett to Alex Helm, dated 17/8/66. "I have ...talked to Frank Jeal...He says that several of those involved have texts which at some time or other were copied from the book Lowsley 'Berks Words & Phrases' [entry 162] which it is claimed is the Blewbury play, at least in the village it is. Be that as it may the Blewbury mummers have been performing the mid-Berks play for many years using Lowsley as an aid memoire."

- 016 Bee Collection: Telephone conversation with Mr. M. Belcher, 1983: Mr. Belcher said that his father and grandfather were involved in the introduction of a mummings' play to the village in the 1920s. The side was short lived. The present Blewbury side was formed on the initiative of Mr. Jeal and a local historian, Mr. Underhill, was approached for a text. He provided text from Lowsley (1888) [see entry 162] and the Compton variation given by Lowsley was adopted, that village being close to Blewbury.

[See also East Hagbourne, entry 073.]

BOXFORD SU 4271

- 017 Huntley (1970): "...the Mummings would come, plodding their way perhaps through the mire of Pine Hill to the Hughes farm house or holding their clothes from the dampening snow. The play they enacted had for its central theme death and resurrection. It was always introduced by St. Nicholas. The play was really an ancient vegetation rite from the days when it was thought that the corn spirit died in the buried seed and rose in the growing corn. The doctor represented the medicine man or priest. Our play originated from Hoe Benham and is eight hundred years old. It has been played recently by the Women's Institute at their Old Folks' Party in 1966.

MUMMERS' CHORUS

(Sung before entering house)

1. God bless the master of this house  
I hope he is within  
And if he is pray tell us so  
And soon we will begin.

Chorus: With a hey dum-dum, with a hey dum-dum  
With a hey dum dum de derry  
For we be come this Christmas time  
A purpose to be merry.

2. I hope the mistress is within  
A sitting by the fire  
Apitting we poor mummings here  
Out in the dirty mire.
3. We don't come here but once a year  
And hope 'tis no offence;  
And if it is pray tell us so  
And soon we will go hence.

On entering, the Mummers would perform their Christmas play. The play ends with

'Let's sing a carol to plaze 'em all  
Of work-a-days and Sabbath Rest  
Come on mummers, zing yer best.'

and refreshments followed."

- 018 Brown (1983): Short note on problems of interpretation of evidence concerning Boxford performances. "Mr. Pocock suggests that the Hoe Benham play, given to Mrs. Hilda Batson by one Thomas Tucker [see entry 084], is actually the Boxford play. Personnel included Joe Huntley...Bert Brown, Billy Butler, and Thomas Tucker..."
- 019 Brown (1985): Further attempts to unravel confusion surrounding reports of mummers' performances at Boxford. The Weston Mummers are known to have visited Boxford [see entry 153] and Huntley suggests that the Boxford play came from Hoe Benham [see entry 017]. However, fragments of text quoted by Huntley do not correspond with known text of Hoe Benham. Brown gives information imparted by a Boxford resident who "saw the Boxford Mummers on the Rectory lawn (Boxford House) around 1925 and that the group had been re-constituted from a pre-First World War one. The group wore costume, not rags, and there may have been a whistle - but no other music. A bell was rung to summon each character." Conflicting evidence leaves unanswered the question of whether "there was a regular tradition or just a series of revivals."

BRACKNELL

SU 8769

- 020 Helm Collection: "14/10/1959 Inf. from K. J. Holland from a man in the Prince of Wales, Harefield, Middx., May 1959. Remembered Mummers at Bracknell."

BRIGHTWALTON

SU 4279

- 021 Lowsley (1888): "The Brightwalton Mummers have Molly given the title of Queen Mary."
- 022 Ditchfield (1896): "At Bright-Walton, Molly is known as Queen Mary, possibly a corruption of the Blessed Virgin. The play in this village is performed in most approved fashion, as the Rector has taken the matter in hand, coached the actors in their parts, and taught them some elocution. It is acted in the school-room in a village entertainment, where it affords great delight to the

rustics, no less than to the performers themselves."

[Information repeated in Ditchfield (1926), with qualification that play was "probably" still performed.]

- 023 Cope (1939): "...Mummers still enliven the Christmas season at Brightwalton."
- 024 Yarrow (1952): "...at Brightwalton Molly becomes Queen Mary." [The information appears to be taken from Ditchfield (1896), entry 022.]
- 025 Roud Collection: Telephone conversation (1981) with former resident who recalled visit by mummers to her grandfather's house about 1920. The mummers also visited the house of the school teacher. Informant said that she was a little scared of them, even though she knew who they all were. The play was spoken in broad Berkshire dialect. There was a battle, then the Doctor came in.

"Pills and potions, powders lotions  
I know how to mix.  
Sticking plasters for disasters  
I know how to fix.  
Ointments, tonics, for poor chronics  
I can make them all."

And, spoken by Idle Jack:

"'ere comes I who's ent bin it  
With my girt 'ead and little wit.  
Brown shoes and yaller laces  
Now dancers take your places."

The play was followed by an impromptu dance, with music played by a blind mouth-organ player called 'Dikey.' The dance was "similar to morris dancing." The performers were all local lads. They included Tom Goatley, Fred Moss, Ern Ray and Ern Hazel. They wore bells on their legs for the dance. The mummers were dressed in "tatty old things" and had coloured streamers hanging from their hats. They performed on Christmas Eve.

BRIGHTWELL SU 5790 (OX)

- 026 Hammond (1972) pp.148-49: "By the war memorial I met a villager...[who] recalled...the Mummers in whose plays at some Christmas times he took part. He recited to me dozens of lines from the Brightwell version: there were all the usual characters - Molly, King George the gay French officer, Jack Finney here as a doctor, and a comic fiddler. In the opening lines Molly sets the stage for the audience, all eagerly awaiting the performance -

'A room a room I do desire for all my brave and  
gallant souls,  
 Stir up the fire and make a light and see and  
act this noble Knight.  
 Acted by age, acted by youth, acted on this  
stage tonight,  
 If you don't believe in what I say, walk in King  
George and clear the way.'

- 027 Berkshire Village Book (n.d.) p.25:  
 "Brightwell-Cum-Sotwell has a rich accumulation of  
 songs, rhymes and mummers' plays..."
- 028 Hammond (1974): abridged version of information given  
 in Hammond (1972), [entry 026.]
- 029 Colquhoun (1975): "...you could count on a visit from the  
 "Mummers" some time before Christmas. You might get a  
 warning by one of the party knocking and asking  
 permission to come in and perform their play, but you  
 might not. The door might be flung open and in trooped  
 the mummers, in very weird costumes usually made of  
 wallpaper and with faces blacked all over. Once inside,  
 without more ado they began acting their play. I have  
 only faint recollections of what it was all about and I  
 don't believe the words were ever written down, but I can  
 remember there was a duel between St. George and  
 something evil (maybe a dragon); a Doctor came into it  
 and a Sweep. I believe he used to sweep the floor either  
 before the play, to make a clear space, or afterwards, to  
 clear away any mess. At any rate, the mummers' Sweep was  
 always the local chimney-sweep, popularly known as Mattie  
 Warwick, another real village character, and the Doctor's  
 part was taken by one of the King boys, who brought the  
 milk round each morning. The name stuck to him and he  
 was known throughout the village as "Doctor" King. I  
 believe the mummers expected to be treated to a drink,  
 some light refreshment or a little money."
- 030 Bee Collection: Telephone conversation with  
 Mrs. I. Colquhoun [see entry 029], 1984. Isabel  
 Colquhoun, whose father was a member of the Brightwell  
 mummers' team before the First World War, recalls that  
 the mummers at that time wore curly black wigs and that  
 the Doctor revived King George by putting a cobweb on his  
 wound.
- 031 Bee Collection: A letter from a Brightwell resident,  
 dated 1984, relates that "six village men would dress in  
 smocks covered with wallpaper and with paper hats. They  
 would visit houses and ask if they could come in.  
 Sometimes admission would be refused owing to the amount  
 of snow on their boots."



- 032 Niven (1903): Gives text [omitting short section: "...I was going down a straight, crooked lane, etc., etc. (Some modern country wit which is not worth printing.)"] and description. "...I believe the lads extended their perambulation as far as adjoining and less talented or less enterprising villages; keeping up the run of the piece for quite a week...the performance took place as usual this (1902) Christmas. The troupe consisted of lads in their teens...The lads went to some trouble if not much expense in dressing for their parts. Beelzebub I think had blackened his face. The Doctor wore dark clothes and a tall hat, as befitted his profession, and much use was made of coloured paper. "Maery"...was also a boy in petticoats."
- 033 Ordish Collection: Manuscript text very similar to Niven's, with additions, in different hand, acknowledging Niven as source. The section omitted by Niven is included in this manuscript. [See also entry 034.]
- 034 Ordish Collection: Manuscript text signed "E. Tanner Buckland Marsh." The text bears a close resemblance to a Carpenter Collection text collected from Tanner, who "learned from George Shepherd, Bampton," and is also similar to other Bampton versions. This text and that of entry 033 are contained in an envelope on which is written "Given to W.R.A. [Sir William Anson] in 1912 or 13...Performed at his home Pusey House Faringdon Berks 1912 & 13." No indication of which of the two texts this information refers to is given. [See also Pusey, entry 102.]
- 035 Bee Collection: Interview with Bill Barnett, aged 87 in 1984. Bill Barnett played Molly Tinker in the Niven version in the 1920s, when the team was led by Neddy Tanner. Paper costumes were not worn by this time and players dressed in character. One soldier wore a blue shirt, the other red; Molly Tinker wore skirt, blouse and bonnet; the horse was represented by two people covered by a horse cloth, shaped to form a head. Rehearsals were held in the blacksmith's shoeing shop and performances were given for a fortnight or so over Christmas at private and public houses in Buckland and surrounding villages. Usually coppers were given, but possibly a shilling each at larger houses. Performances ceased during the inter-war years.

BURGHFIELD

SU 6668

- 036 Berkshire Book (1939) p.34: "...and the Mummings perform their play of St. George and the Dragon at the Three Firs Inn when the South Berks. Hunt meets there on Boxing Day."
- 037 Yarrow (1952): "...and Burghfield, who performed at the Three Firs Inn on the common on Boxing Day, drew considerable revenue from the crowds which were there to see the hounds meet."
- 038 Berkshire Village Book (n.d.) p.31: "Until recently, mummings performed their ritual play, 'St. George and the Dragon,' at the Three Firs Inn, but this custom ceased when the inn was demolished..."

[See also Shinfield, entry 108.]

CHADDLEWORTH

SU 4177

- 039 Mayson (1926): "...At Chaddlesworth they found a Mr William Pearce, a blind singer, and they got from him a Mummer's Play, which is still performed at Christmas time...[gives tune and one verse of mummings' song]

God bless the master of this house,  
All seated by the fire,  
And pity we poor travellers,  
All in the dirty mire.

To my hey dum dum  
To my hey dum dum  
To my hey dum dum to my derry  
For we are come this Christmas time  
On purpose to be merry.

...the tune was used again at the end of the play as a dance."

- 040 Brown (1980): Text collected from Fred Tarrant, aged 80, who played the part of Doctor in the 20s. "Briefly, characters were dressed in accordance with their role with the exception of Big Head who wore nondescript clothes. Happy Jack had a string of dolls over his shoulder. No-one was blacked, so all were recognised, and that, says Fred, was part of the fun. Big Head - as Fred knew him - played a mouth-organ and that was all the music Fred remembered. The Mummings did sing what is, in fact, the usual song in the area 'God Bless the Master of this House' at the beginning of the play.

The Mummers travelled the district, particularly to the larger houses and George Harrison, another Chaddleshworth man, remembers the boys coming into one hall in hobnails and skidding about on the polished surfaces...A revival was played at a Harvest supper in 1953...kids at my school [John O'Gaunt School, Hungerford] played the Batson version this year in front of Fred (et al) and were, with some reservations, approved..."

- 041 Brown (1982b): Photograph, c.1913. [Reproduced on page 37 of this publication.] One performer dressed as woman, another in military uniform. Remainder with paper [rag?] strips sparsely attached to ordinary clothes. Performers named as Stevie Cotterell, Edward Smith, Ern Pounds, Will Goatley, Jackie Pole, Albert Smith, Fred Chapman.
- 042 Ordish Collection: (Batson MSS.) Text "from B.C.W. Christmas 1900."
- 043 Wroughton Collection (Bodleian Library): MSS. Top. Berks. e.18. Handwritten text headed "Christmas mummers Chaddleshworth 1902," almost identical to that in Carpenter Collection, [entry 044].
- 044 Carpenter Collection: "The Dirty Mummers Peacock Cottage MUMMERS, Edward Smith, Albert Smith, Frederick Jennings Fred Jennings, 10 Long Row, Chaddleshworth Wantage Berks. With [????] - learned from Frank [????] 40-50 years ago. Paste paper on clothes & top hats; usually wore sham faces." Mummers' song [God Bless the Master] and text is given. [See entry 043.]
- 045 Hannan Collection: Text collected in 1972.  
[See also Newbury, entry 101.]

CHIEVELEY SU 4773

- 046 Yarrow (1952): "Chieveley [sic] had its mummers..."
- 047 Brown (1983): "Fred [Tarrant] is absolutely clear that there were Mummers at Chieveley at the same time as his Chaddleshworth group." [See Chaddleshworth, entry 040.]

CHILDREY SU 3687 (OX)

- 048 Piggott (1929/30): "Childrey, Berks. Fragment of opening chorus dictated to me by my grandfather :-  
With a hey down, down,  
With a hey down, down,  
With a hey down down derry: "

For we be come this Christmas time  
A-purpose to be merry.

We'll be merry here, my boys,  
And we'll be merry there:  
Who can tell if we shall live  
To be merry another year?"

CHOLSEY SU 5886 (OX)

049 Berkshire Book (1939) p.42: "The old customs have died out but the mummers can still be remembered by old people living in the village."

050 Hammond (1972) p.143: "...one of Cholsey's oldest residents recounted the days when the Christmas mummer's play was performed, and quoted the whole play to me. Here the characters were King George, Doctor, Tipton Slasher, Father Beezebub, and Tom the Tinker, who introduced himself as being 'no small beer drinker, I tell the landlord to his face, the chimney corner's my place'."

051 Roud Collection: Text [reproduced on pages 65-67 of this publication] and information supplied by a Cholsey resident (1980). "...I was 6 years old when I first arrived here, & while no mumming was performed then & since I did know that it had existed, possibly I would think, towards the turn of the century...The original [text] was loaned to me by a lady whose father was a mummer and lived to be 90 years in age - having lived in Cholsey all his life - a great character..."

From what I gather from conversations with some of the older residents whose fathers or grandfathers were Mummers, it was usual for those taking part in the Plays to make their own costumes, using crepe paper & other old materials accordingly - for instance the person acting King George would make his own crown from cardboard and silver paper, & where a beard was necessary a part of an old woollen shawl would be shaped for attachment to the face - likewise the character using a sword or dagger would make his own from wood or stiff cardboard & cover with silver paper or paint. Those in Cholsey who were once mummers have long since passed on.

The father of the lady who supplied the verses was 91 when he died 11 years ago. I gather he did try to revive this old custom in Cholsey, but the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 put paid to it..."

052 Bathe (1985): "...Harrold [Robbins], his brother, Henry (born in 1907), and his sister, Kathleen (born in 1908) were able to provide conclusive evidence of the existence of a Mummings play in Cold Ash...The Mummings used to congregate in the house of Harold's grandmother, Mrs. Piper...at the bottom of Cold Ash Hill...Henry Robbins remembered seeing the Mummings perform at his grandmother's house during the First World War, whilst Harold's and Kathleen's memories derive from the reminiscences of their mother. The Mummings used to perform in the kitchen of the house, where the group of six or seven men would stand in a line by the dresser and recite their parts, which began, 'Here comes I old 'so-and-so'...' [words omitted in source]. Henry recollected that 'then one finished his little bit and then they went on down the line.' Whether or not the play was always performed in this manner is difficult to say - the kitchen was small, with not much room to move about.'

The Mummings had a variety of musical instruments - flute, fiddle, jew's harp - Henry thought that, perhaps, each one had an instrument to play on. He didn't recollect that the Mummings wore any special dress for the performance and made no mention of 'a man dressed as a woman...'

According to Kathleen Robbins, the Mummings used to perform 'St. George and the Dragon'...The Mummings started their performance with the words,

God bless the Master of this House... [Rest of verse omitted in the source.]

King George was remembered as a character in the play and there was a 'sword fight,' accompanied by dialogue which included the phrase

...sword of old England.

That a death and resurrection scene occurred is indicated by the lines:

Iddy, iddy, octor, can't say Doctor,  
I'm here to cure all ills, aches and pains.

It was further remembered that 'then he produces this big bottle...'

Fragments of the lines of other characters were also remembered...

In comes I, little Johnny Jack  
With my knapsack on my back...

Here comes I as ain't been yet



Girt big head and little wit  
Me head's so big, me wits so small,  
I brought me fiddle to please you all.

...Kathleen Robbins thought that one participant 'used to have straw on his head' - this is the only hint of a special costume. After the performance the Mummers were 'entertained' by Mrs. Piper, undoubtedly with a glass of something alcoholic and some Christmas fare..."

COMPTON

SU 5279

- 053 Lowsley (1888): Following his 'Mid-Berkshire' text, [entry 162] Lowsley writes "...the Mummers of most parishes have slight variations. For instance, we find the Compton Mummers have amongst their dramatis personae a Turkish knight in place of a French officer. He thus announces himself:

Yer come I, a Turkish Knight,  
Come vrom Turkeyland to vight;  
I myzelf an' zeven moor  
Vaught a battle o' 'leven scoor-  
'Leven scoor o' well-armed men  
We never got conquered 'it by them.

To whom King George replies:

Whoa thou little veller talks zo bawld,  
'Bout thaay other Turkish chaps  
I've a bin tawld.  
Dray thee zoord mwoast parfic knight,  
Dray thee zoord an' on to vight,  
Vor I'll hev zatisfaction avoor I goes  
tonight.

My yead is maayde o' iron,  
My body maayde o' steel,  
An' if 'e wunt bele-uv muh  
Jus' dray thee zoord an' veel.

(They fight.)"

- 054 Ditchfield (1896): Gives the above lines cast into standard English.
- 055 Brown (1983): "Nobody seems to remember the Mummers here...On the other hand, Michael Claridge (Christmas 1982) offered the information that his mother remembers her father being in a group of mummers in the Compton/Aldworth/Goring area."

- 056 Berkshire Book (1951) p.224: "At Christmas one misses the mummers who, decked with many strips of paper of various colours, gave the old play of St. George with his death-dealing wooden sword. Also the Doctor from Spain who could 'cure the palsy and the gout, the pains within and the pains without'."
- 057 Chalmers (1933): "...and the Mummers came too, just as they came in 'The Golden Age,' [Grahame, (1895)] stamping and crossing and declaiming 'till all was whirl and riot and shout.' And altogether it was the merriest Christmas that ever was."

- 058 Helm Collection: Letter from Russell Wortley to Alex Helm, dated 2.10.1965: "Mr Evan James...remembers the Mummers at his village of Appleton, Nr. Abingdon, Berks. He has since spoken to Sir Basil Blackwell who says their appearance in 1929 was probably their last..." Subsequent letter from Wortley to Helm, dated 5.10.1965: "Just heard from Sir Basil B. that the mummers were a Cumnor troupe. He remembers them coming once to Appleton since he came to live there in 1929. Probably almost the last survivor is Mr. Ted Brown, Besselsleigh, Abingdon..."
- 059 Bee Collection: Text [reproduced on pages 68-72 of this publication] from Fred Saunders, taken from manuscript of Bert Buckingham, pre-1914 player.
- 060 Bee Collection: Information from interview with Henry Webb, 1983. Henry's father, James Webb, played Bull Slash c.1906-8. Others who performed at that time include Charlie Coster [Fred Coster's father] and father of Sid Cox. Henry remembers much of the text as his father used to recite it to entertain his children at Christmas.
- 061 Bee Collection: Information from interviews, 1984 and [tape recorded] 1986, with Fred Saunders who had taken part before 1914 and whose father, John Edward Saunders, had also been a mummer. Before First World War, the side was led by 'Butcher' Neal [spelling?], who played Foreman. Bertie Buckingham, a coal merchant, probably played the Doctor. Performances ceased at some point during the war, but Fred organised a revival c.1922. The revival lasted only a few years, since there was difficulty in raising a side and on some occasions, doubling up of parts was necessary. In the 1920s,

performances were given for about ten days either side of Christmas at Cumnor, Boar's Hill, Appleton and Wytham. Private and public houses were visited. Chance calls were made at smaller private houses, but at larger ones, prior arrangements were made. Fred Saunders remembers an occasion when a young maid opened the door of a Boar's Hill residence and fainted at the sight of the mummers. [The story is also told by others, though recollections of the actual house involved vary.]

- 062 Bee Collection: Text, almost identical to that of Fred Saunders [entry 059] and description, from Fred Coster [Fred Saunders's cousin], performer in 1920s. "It is performed by seven persons, all attired in multi-coloured paper strips with hats to match, except the Donkey who wears a donkey mask with long ears. To obtain the correct dress, wallpaper pattern books are got, the whole pages removed and cut into strips, leaving a two inch margin at the top, these pages are then sewn onto a coat until it is completely covered. The hat is made of newspapers, 'Admiral's' shape and then covered with the pattern paper. 'Props' needed are two wooden swords, a 'doctor's' bag, pair of large spectacles, pair of pliers, short poker, a horse's tooth, a pill box, an inflated pig's bladder tied onto a short stick.

On arriving at the house or place of performance, the Foreman knocks on the door and when it is answered, he says, 'Please to let the Mummers act?' If permission is given, he then goes into the room and the others stay outside the room, waiting their call." Performers in 1920s as remembered by Fred Coster include Sid Cox (King William), Fred Coster (Doctor), Charlie Betteridge (Foreman), Fred Saunders then Fred Didcock (Beelzebub).

DIDCOT SU 5290 (OX)

- 063 Warner (1950): Text from J. H. King, described as "an actor of long ago." [Though Mr. King was living at Didcot in 1950, no details of where he performed are given. The characteristics of the text do not suggest a Berkshire version.]

DRAYTON SU 4794 (OX)

- 064 Vincent (1904): "...interruption came in the shape of the question whether I would like to see and hear the mummers. Of course the answer was "Yes," and proceedings began at once. Into the house walked a ploughman's boy, white bearded, in a tall hat and an overcoat of immemorial age, who reeled off a long speech in broad and rapid Berkshire, of which the intelligible part was a fervent hope that "Father Christmas won't

never be forgot." Next entered "King George," and after him a "knight from furring parts," both gaudily attired, partly in portions of cast-off uniforms of the British army (for Berkshire, you shall note, is military - perhaps because Berkshire wages are poor). Followed a terrific combat with wooden swords, after the first bout of which King George fell, "wounded in the knee" and grinning. But a doctor, summoned from without, after a recital of the merits of his medicines, some of them "strong enough to kill any tu," cured King George and bade him "rise and foight thy foe agin." So King George rose and laid about him with a will, until the foreign knight fell. Him a stranger, fantastically attired, tended, and the combat ceased. Next came "Merrian," a carter's boy with a shirt over his muddy corduroys, and bright blue eyes brimming over with fun, who recited at breakneck pace a number of lines consisting, so far as they could be followed, of wild paradoxes. "I zaw a cow black as snow" was one of the few phrases that could be distinguished, and then, upon modest largesse, followed singing. But the taint of the Music Hall is over the country, and the "Honeysuckle and the Bee" failed to please, even in the broadest Berks." [See also Drayton, entry 068.]

- 065 Berkshire Village Book (n.d.) p.54: "Until fairly recent years the Drayton Mummings performed their play."
- 066 Drayton Chronicle (Dec. 1979): Text from papers of Mrs. M.G. Hobson. [See entries 067 and 069 below.]
- 067 Jones (1979): "Miss M G Hobson who lived at Lime Close in the 1930's, was keenly interested in local customs and traditions, and was at pains to preserve for us the words of the old Drayton Mummings Play. Her papers, which include the script of the play, are now in the possession of the Reverend Eric Wood. Writing in 1932, Miss Hobson states 'The play was written out for me by a carter, Mr J. Dunsden, who said that he had learnt it from his brother. It is known that the play has been performed for the last 50 years and certainly long before that. I was told that the next village had no such play, and that "Drayton chaps" go over to perform it. The play was followed by a series of music hall songs and an occasional hymn.'"

[Mr. Wood has moved from Drayton and he does not know the current location of Miss Hobson's papers. The present vicar (1987) has searched for them, but without success. M.B.]

- 068 Bee (1987): Gives text and details.. Quotes Vincent (1906) [entry 064] and the account of North Berkshire mummers given in The Times (1904) [entry 163] and, on grounds of close similarity, argues that The Times description is likely to be of Drayton mummers.
- 069 Helm Collection: Copy of text from Miss Hobson [see entries 066, 067] with description of "ancient" paper strip costume (except Old Woman who dresses in woman's clothes) and "modern" costume: Father Christmas - red cloak, pointed red hat, beard 18 inches long, bag of rubbish; King George - red tunic, blue trousers with red stripe, black hat with red band, sword and belt; Beau Slash - khaki uniform, sword and belt; Doctor - top hat, tail coat, stick, grey beard; Jack Vinney - white smock, black face, slouch hat, bag with props; Old Woman - large hat with veil, blouse, skirt, umbrella, speaks in falsetto voice.
- 070 Carpenter Collection: Text from "W. Belcher, Ray Lane, South End Cottage, Drayton. Learned from father, Chas. Belcher, 50 years ago; never saw in print. Father from Drayton." [This text is clearly related to Miss Hobson's (entries 066, 069) but there are significant differences.]
- 071 Peacock Collection: Information from Jack Hyde, aged 68 [1961]. Jack Hyde, Abingdon morris dancer, took the part of the Old Woman in the Drayton play c.1905. In Jack Hyde's memory, Jack Vinney was replaced by Jack a' Boney.
- 072 Bee Collection: Information from interview in 1983 with Bert Belcher, then aged 85, who played Mary-Ann [old woman] for about seven years in the 1920s. He has no knowledge of the paper strip costumes. In the 1920s, the play was performed for about a week before Christmas and occasionally on Boxing Day and at New Year. Around three performances per evening were given in Drayton and in surrounding locations such as Abingdon, Steventon, Sutton Courtenay. At larger houses possibly two shillings was earned, whilst smaller houses rewarded the mummers with refreshment. Performances ceased, probably in the early 1930s. Bert's memory of fellow performers was hazy, but he recalled that Jim Dunsden, the leader, played King George, Bill Minchin was, probably, Father Christmas, and Tommy Roe was, probably, Jack Vinny.

EAST HAGBOURNE

SU 5388

(OX)

- 073 Carpenter Collection: Text from "Caleb Hitchman, New Road, East Hagbourne, learned from older brother, John Hitchman, 56-58 years ago...Dressed in paper suits; hats decorated in paper hats [sic] with crimp paper streamers.

Paper on long coat, not trousers; went to different villages, Arston [Aston Upthorpe/Tirrold], Blewbury West Hagbourne, Upton. Went to houses of gentry; always glad to see; gave drinks and money."

EAST HENDRED SU 4588 (OX)

- 074 Carpenter Collection: Text from "Mrs. Rose Kimber, New Cottages East Hendred; learned from father, Isaac Shaller, 82 when he died; been dead 34 years; lived all his life in East Hendred."

EAST LOCKINGE SU 4287 (OX)

[See Lockinge, entry 092.]

FARNBOROUGH SU 4381

[See Uffington, entry 148.]

GORING AND STREATLEY SU 6080 (OX)

- 075 Abingdon Herald (1907): "The Goring and Streatley mummers have been very successful this year, owing to the kindness of Mrs. Stenney-Rawson in writing a short play for them. The play contained an amusing dialogue and topical songs which, with a little more attention paid to dress than formerly, was the reason of their being more appreciated than in other years."

[See also Compton, entry 055, and Long Wittenham, entry 097.]

GREAT SHEFFORD SU 3875

- 076 Berkshire Book (1951) p.76: "The older inhabitants also remember the mumming plays which took place on certain days. The mummers were always men. Adjoining the 'Harrow Inn' there was a skittle alley, and here men got together to practice their play, one with a mouth organ, another with a melodeon, a third with a tambourine. All wore gay ribbons hanging from their hats and danced jigs. The words of one begging play reflect the hard times of agricultural workers: a man dressed as a woman sang of her children

Out of nine I got but five.  
Half of they be starved alive  
We want some money or else some bread,  
Or all the t'others will soon be dead."

HAMPSTEAD NORREYS

SU 5276

077 Brown (1983): "Information from Harold Woodage (1982) and his mother and her sister, Kit Gourlay (1982 and April 1983). There was apparently a group of Mummers here before the First World War, made up from the local scout troop and including a brother of Kit Gourlay who was later killed in action. There is no information as to which play was performed, where it was acquired or whether or not it was just a one-off."

078 Brown (1985): Records that the informants named in Brown (1983) [entry 077] "had a vague idea that there might have been a group of Mummers in Hampstead Norreys before the First World War, that it might have been got up by the local schoolmaster..."

Brown reports that subsequent enquiry brought additional information from other one-time inhabitants, Mrs. E. Stacey and Mrs. W. Quested:

"Apparently there was indeed a group of Mummers in Hampstead Norreys before the First World War with Steven or possibly Jack Jeffrey in it, which certainly visited Mrs. Stacey's father's bakery and grocery store. He, Walter Herman, had been instrumental in helping one, Freddy Warnham, by giving him bits of employment; and Freddy, who also did the job of sexton in the village, was another Mummer. The group included a King George and a French officer who 'died' and was 'cured' by a Doctor who extracted a tooth amidst great carryings-on. The tooth, thought Mrs. Stacey, was an animal's, judging by its size. King George wore a military coat and the others were dressed in motley: smocks, top-hats and frock-tail coats.

Further, Mrs. Stacey enclosed a copy of the 'play' which turns out to be Major Lowsley's 'mid-Berks.' 'text,' printed in his Glossary... [see entry 162] (and reproduced in the Newbury Weekly News in 1911, at the time that the Mummers were in action). This, Mrs. Stacey suggests was the 'play' performed at Hampstead Norreys."

Brown speculates on whether Lowsley might have got the text from the Hampstead Norreys mummers, or whether they got the text from his work, or from the Newbury Weekly News.

HATFORD

SU 3394

(OX)

079 Williams Collection: Text "as acted at Hatford Berks Nr. Faringdon 1840...Shadrach Haydon's version 1916."



- 080 Newbury Weekly News (1913): The Hermits this Christmastide are reviving the old custom of mumming. The training of a troupe is in course of preparation, who, garbed in fantastic costume, and with quaint dialogue, propose visiting the neighbouring residents during the festive season. It will therefore, soon be the cry, 'Look out for the Mummers'."
- 081 Newbury Weekly News (1914): "'Mumming'. The festive season of Christmas was this year distinguished by the renewal of the old-time custom of 'mumming'. The troupe [sic], if not readily recognised behind their fantastic garb, were, we are well assured, all local young men. The actors had taken considerable pains to effectively portray [sic] the various parts which they represented, and we learn that they were received enthusiastically at all principal residences in the district, and the performances conveyed delight to those by whom they were witnessed."
- 082 Brown (1983): Gives names of informants who remember "a group that performed just at the outbreak of the First World War. There seems to have been a previous history of mumming here, but not a subsequent one. I now have a good number of details of dress, personnel, stopping places, and so on, and I hope to offer a much fuller description at a later date."
- 083 Brown (1985): "...there was definitely a group of Mummers in action just prior to the First World War and all the informants have said that these Mummers had been 'doing it for years.' According to Louie Maskell and Ted Rouse, the Mummers had their headquarters at The Plough...and practice was held in the tap room there during the weeks leading up to Christmas...The eventual perambulation round the village took several nights and the following visits can be pinpointed: The Fox; Britton Lodge (Colonel West); the Post Office (Walter Boshier); Hermitage House (Rev. and Mrs. Arnold); The White Horse; Mrs. Longmore's, Pond Lane; and The Lamb at Long Lane - a mile south of the village - and The Fox and Hounds at Wellhouse - a mile to the east.
- Both Louie Maskell and Ted Rouse reckoned that the visiting took place at Christmas and up to the New Year. Joyce Rouse, Ted's sister-in-law (nee Boshier), remembers a visit on Christmas Eve at the Post Office. This stop is an interesting one in that whilst Walter Boshier obviously held a responsible position as Postmaster he was hardly 'gentry' and all the other favoured recipients of the Mummers - apart from pub

landlords - were. Ted Rouse, however, claimed that Walter was a character and Louie Maskell agrees that 'he would like that.'

Personnel included Dick Buckle, who played King George, and began, 'In comes I, King George'; Bill Flitter (senior) and his brother, Fred - it seems that Bill played Happy Jack, carried dolls and delivered the line 'with my family up my back'; Dick 'Spiff' Scrivener; Dick Smith; Bill Bryant and Jimmy Wernham. The latter two were bakers. All the others worked at various times at the brickworks at Pinewood, about a hundred yards north and opposite The Plough.

Louie remembers a mouth organ but is less certain about other instruments whilst Ted Rouse was of the firm opinion that there was a melodeon. Ted recognised God Bless the Master when a few bars were sung to him and Louie agrees that this song was sung. They neither remembered any other songs connected with the Mummings. Bill Flitter (junior) and Louie both recall the line 'I've brought my fiddle to please you all' (but no fiddle!), which, by analogy might suggest a Big Head character; and both Louie and Ted remember a Doctor. Dress was smocks and rags. It is possible that one of the characters was blacked up. Ted Rouse confirmed that the get-up was much the same as that at Chaddleworth as evidenced by what appears to be an exactly contemporary photograph [reproduced in Brown (1982b) [entry 041, and on page 37 of this publication]. All participants wore their everyday boots. There was a money box, apparently for beer money.

As is the case elsewhere in the area, informants now in their old age were then young enough to be both excited and scared. Joyce Rouse, for instance, remembers her sister and herself hiding under the stairs. Her husband, John (Ted Rouse's brother), remembers being allowed to stay up as a special privilege. All informants stressed the fun involved. It seems apparent, also, that the 'gentry' accepted the Mummings as a notable feature of the Christmas season...[Brown here quotes Newbury Weekly News reports given above in entries 080 and 081.]...the First World War put an end to it all. Louie Maskell says that her father went into the army and that, out of friendship, 'Spif' Scrivener followed. Remarkably, no-one was actually killed but neither did anyone feel impelled to re-start the custom after the war..."

HOE BENHAM SU 4069 (approx.)

084 Reading Public Library: MS text (MS No. HR 9520 Local Collection: History of Welford Vol. 7 Misc.). c.1900, compiled by Mrs. H.M. Batson. [See Boxford, entry 018.]

085 Ordish Collection: (Batson MSS.) Typed copy of above text.

086 Piggott (1928): Publishes Reading Public Library MS.

[See also Boxford, entries 017 and 019, and Weston, entry 155.]

HUNGERFORD SU 3368

087 Roud Collection: Confused reference from ex-resident - possibly referring to visiting morris dancers.

KINTBURY SU 3866

088 Ordish Collection: (Batson MSS.) "At Kintbury, where the play has been discontinued for many years, there was a preliminary stanza to the Chorus, which ran as follows:-

Good people all of high degree,  
Both rich and poor draw near,  
I beg you pay attention  
To these few lines you hear.

(chorus) Hi dum-dum to me  
Hi dum-dum to me  
Hi dum-dum to me derry,  
We won't come here but once a year  
On purpose to be merry.

The Mummings' dresses are generally of grey cretonnes, made into jacket and trousers. High-crowned head-gear, with fringes of coloured paper or print hanging before and behind the head. The doctor wears a morning suit with a top hat; King George a military uniform, or as near as he dares approach to it. Happy Jack has a flag-basket slung behind him to hold his wife and family (six dolls, one larger than the rest)."

LAMBOURN SU 3278

089 Berkshire Book (1939) p.102: "...and the Mummings at Christmas time. All has vanished."

090 Brown Collection: Tape recording of recited text. [Copy also in Roud Collection.]

- 091 Brown Collection: Text from Jabez Williams, ex-participant, via Mrs. Portman, his daughter. "Performed at Lambourn Woodlands in 1900 when he was 17 and played the part of Happy Jack, although he says there were Mummings some years before this and of course a few years later...These Mummings usually performed at Christmas Time - they were 'invited' to the big houses in the district, i.e. Inholmes (Major Aldridge was then in residence...) Pondsley House (belonging to Mr. Waldron, a big sheep farmer) and others. The play was acted in the servant's hall if they had one otherwise a barn. Refreshments were plentiful (Xmas fare). Rehearsals took place in Dickie [???] (Mildenhall's) Cottage in the Square opposite 'The Chalkers' - nearly all the Mummings were farm labourers. The parts of Father Christmas and Big Head were played by a Bill Townsend who used to live at Cleeve Cottage and worked for Mr. Bunce at Rooksnest Farm. He also played the melodeon...King George played by George Westall who was a shepherd at Baydon Hall Farm - and was 'famous' for playing football on moonlit nights! Jack Slasher played by George Little of dances Cottage." A description of the costumes is given with the text: Doctor wore morning coat and top hat; Jack Finney and Happy Jack were "villagers dressed in two large suits with bowler and slouch hats;" Big Head wore "a large false head." "All the costumes were made of paper."

[Some of this material is recorded in Brown (1978).]

LOCKINGE

SU 4287

(OX)

- 092 Hallam (1900): Text [reproduced in Havinden (1966)] and comment. "The Christmas Mummings have disappeared too, although this was the last of the old customs to die out. The dialogue here given was taken down at their last performance, about 1880...To atone for the abrupt termination of the dramatic performance the entertainment was lengthened out by introducing the popular songs of the day." [Hallam is writing of East Lockinge.]
- 093 Piggott (1928) p. 271-73: Text and comment. "In the winter of 1926 I had the good fortune to obtain the following version of a Christmas Mummings' Play from an old man, William Crane, formerly of Lockinge, near Wantage, Berks, now living at West Challow. He had acted in the play when a young man, and had played all the parts in his time, and consequently could remember almost the whole of the performance. The last time it was played was before Lady Wantage [at Lockinge House] in 1881.

Although short, the version presents many interesting points. In its present form it is late, i.e. a 'compressed' version of the archetypical play. This is well shown by the fusion of characters; Jack Finny and the Doctor are one, while Mary tinker is compounded of Mary (or Molly), Tom the Tinker, and Beelzebub. Also, there is no prologue, and the usual crowd of quite superfluous characters at the end is omitted...[After the play] "follows a dance, Mary jingling her bell, and then she calls for songs from each of the performers."

[Both Hallam's and Piggott's texts appear to be incomplete and each contains elements absent from the other. Hallam's book relates to East Lockinge so it is possible that he describes a different play from Piggott's. However, against this possibility are the facts that East Lockinge and Lockinge are effectively the same community, that the two texts have close similarities and that the reported dates of last performance are very close.]

094 Berkshire Book (1951) pp.140-1: "Christmas Mummers performed in Lockinge as recently as 1880, but there was nothing very original about the jingle that was recited, it being similar to that of many other mumming plays." [Information appears to have been taken from Hallam and/or Piggott, entries 092, 093.]

095 Hammond (1972) p.166: "At the school house I tried to discover the story of the village mummers, who at Christmas each year acted their traditional play to the assembled villagers. The custom died about 80 years ago, but at the last performance the words were written down and preserved for all time.

The play of the triumph of good over evil varies little in its detail from the traditional version acted throughout the West of England. Hearty King George as a Knight, Old Beelzebub dressed as Father Christmas, and Molly - the man disguised as a woman - are all there. So too is Happy Jack, but at Lockinge with the surname of Winney - maybe an allusion to some bygone villager. [Information appears to have been taken from Hallam and/or Piggott, entries 092, 093.]

A post-war attempt to revive the mummers has taken place. But they do not now give their age-old play, but collect for charity..."

[See also Ardington, entry 005.]

LONGCOT

SU 2790

(OX)

- 096 Ordish Collection: Manuscript text, original now lost, but copy made by Alex Helm placed in the Ordish Papers. Text dated 1893 and headed "from Ms. sent to Mrs. Gomme [signature indecipherable]."

[See also Uffington, entry 148.]

LONG WITTENHAM

SU 5493

(OX)

- 097 Manning Collection (Bodleian Library): MS. Top. Oxon. d.199, fol. 328. "Capper Clutterbuck....says at Wittenham it used to be King William, not King George, and the doctor was called Jack Binny or Pinny, and used to object to the name (as in the Goring version) and say he wasn't Jack Pinny but Doctor Pinny and a person of great importance." [Note appended to Culham, Oxon, text.]

LOWER WHITLEY

SU 7269

- 098 Seaby (1931): "There still survives in this district, two miles away at Lower Whitley, a seasonal custom, which is one of the last of its kind to be found in the country. The Mummer's Play reveals the art of the country people, and is almost the only surviving form of folk drama today:

In this play, still acted by Mr. Poulter and his troupe, there are the following characters: Father Christmas, King George, Turkish Knight, Bold Roamer, doctor and Twing-Twang, who is Johnny Jack as well. There are several reasons why this local piece is to the folk-lorist one of the most interesting extant; but all who have seen it will admit that it is a very lively and quaint little show. Years ago the actors smeared their faces with burnt cork, wore high-pointed hats like those of dunces, and decked themselves with the customary strips of coloured paper; but now King George wears an old red military uniform and blue cap, the doctor a top hat, stiff collar and back coat, while Father Christmas dons an appropriate red cloak and paper mask with beard. The other three still wear the conical hats, but even these are decorated with bits of modern tinsel and small novelties, their coats being made from bright cretonnes. All the characters wear cretonne leggings pulled on over their trousers. Father Christmas carries a stick, the doctor his bag, the other four their wooden swords.

The name "King George" is a corruption of "St. George," and he is the most important, and probably the oldest, character of the play. Turkish Knight is also an early character, and it is supposed that he was introduced at the time of the Crusades, when the Turks

were our bitterest enemies. Bold Roamer, who never seems to have quite the same title in any two plays, appears to be just an arrogant soldier who follows Turkish Knight to try his hand against the king. The "noble" doctor is a traveller, from Spain. Twing-Twang, with his "left-handed press-gang," is a Sussex character and unique in this inland district. He burlesques a leader of the naval parties, whose methods to "impress" men for service in the Navy proved so unpopular during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Father Christmas comes in first, and, after making the usual introductory remarks, calls in King George. The warrior enters and boasts his prowess. He speaks of his "graded" hand, a curious corruption of "courageous." Father Christmas next summons Turkish Knight, who does battle with the king and is vanquished. Bold Roamer then makes his appearance, but the champion soon puts an end to him also. Father Christmas, bemoaning his "two sons," calls for a noble doctor. The "noble" doctor arrives and for the sum of ten guineas guarantees that he will "cure" the dead men. He explains how he healed a magpie of the toothache by cutting off its head. On hearing this, Father Christmas remarks, "Most safely cured and a barber's trick," which statement one will readily accept without comment, for the idea of decapitation might humorously be connected with the practice of chirurgeon or barber, but, on comparing this with other versions, it is seen that "barber's" is simply a corruption of "barbarous." The doctor shakes the legs of the deceased and remarks, "No broken arms here!"; he then feels their arms and adds, "No broken legs here!" After this, with the aid of his magic drug, elecampane, that "can cure the itch, the stitch, the palsy and the gout, pains within and pains without," he restores the victims to life. Finally Twing-Twang enters and asserts that he is going to "press" everyone to see. He has a mock fight with father Christmas, and it finishes by the old gentleman falling with one knee up, upon which Twing-Twang sits and exclaims, "Hold, behold, look what I've been and done; I've killed my father Abraham, and here sets his son (sun)" - a pun which is truly delightful. The performance is rounded off with music, produced by accordian, mouth-organ and drum. [The article goes on to speculate on the the origin of mummings' plays generally.]

- 099 Fletcher (1936): Reports that mummings were active in Lower Whitley at Christmas 1931.

[See also Shinfield, entry 108 and Whitley, entries 157 and 158.]

MARSH BENHAM SU 4069 (approx.)

[See Weston, entry 153.]

MOULSFORD SU 5983 (OX)

100 Oxford Times (1902): Bare mention only in report of lecture given by E.H. Binney on Oxfordshire mummers.

NEWBURY SU 4767

101 Brown (1983): "Bill Wheeler (in his nineties), ex-Newbury resident, spoke of mummers from Northcroft Lane in Newbury. Subsequently, Bill thought that they might have come from Chaddleworth but Fred Tarrant (Aug. 1983) [Chaddleworth mummer, see entry 040] was quite adamant that 'his' mummers never visited Newbury."

NORTH MORETON SU 5689 (OX)

[See Appleford, entry 004.]

PUSEY SU 3596 (OX)

102 Carpenter Collection: Text from "Jack Herring, Pusey Home Farm, Pusey... 'Spring' Giddings, Lambourne, 40 years ago; never saw in print... Jack Herring: King George Charlie Castle Beelzebub Joe Castle Jack Herring coached the Pusey players 38 years ago Dressed with red [????] and around hat and jackets: coloured paper: Blacked faces Sir Wm. Hanson [Anson], Pusey House, used to give half sovereign."

[See also Buckland, entry 034.]

RADLEY PARK SU 5199 (OX)

103 Smith (1871): "[Mummers] came every January to Sir George Bowyer's shooting cottage in Radley Park. I saw them there this year; they were very well got up with shreds and patches of coloured calico and paper hangings, and the parts of the doctor, the wounded man, and St. George were enacted in capital style...mummers go the rounds of all the farm houses of all the farm-houses on the property."



READING

SU 7173

- 104 Johnson (1961): "60 years ago I was a Mummer, and we always started two weeks before Christmas and, weather permitting, would go out round the public houses every night until Christmas Eve.

A party of Mummers consisted of six, namely Father Christmas, King George, Bold Slasher, Doctor (my part), Joe the Sweep, Old Mother Sack. We went into the public house in that order. When Bold Slasher was supposed to be killed in the fight with King George, Father Christmas would shout 'Doctor, doctor £500 for our doctor.' I would rush in and shout, 'In steps I, old Doctor Brown, cleverest doctor in the town.' Father Christmas would say, 'What can you cure?' and I would say 'ipsy, pipsy, palsy and gout, pains within and pains without.' Father Christmas would say, 'Then cure Bold Slasher.'

I would then go on. I would have a small bottle in my pocket. From this I placed one drop on this man's tongue and he would stand up again.

The small bottle which I carried in my bob-tail coat pocket was a beer bottle, empty of course.

[N.B. whilst Johnson writes from a Reading address, the report does not identify the location of the performance described.]

- 105 Cawte Collection: Information from David Riley, 1956. Riley remembered seeing Johnny Jacks in Silver Street, Reading. He recalled:

"I'm old Joe the Sweep  
And all the money I mean to keep  
And if I don't get money I'll sweep you all  
out into the street."

- 106 Roud Collection: Informant remembered mummers visiting local pubs, dressed in costume made of different coloured cloth. One character introduced himself - "In walks I, old Joe the Sweep."
- 107 Vaughan Williams Memorial Library: Text, headed "Reading Play." but with no details concerning the source.

SHINFIELD

SU 7368

- 108 Roud Collection: Information given by Mr. Arthur Poulter in 1980. William Poulter, Piggott's informant for Whitley text [see entry 157], lived at Shinfield. He was the son of Harry Poulter who led the mummers. There were about six of them, dressed like clowns, with

tambourines, accordians [melodeons], drum and violin. They visited local pubs over Christmas, sang and played and collected money. On Boxing Day they went to The Three Firs, Burghfield Common. This information, together with the recurrence of the name Poulter in records of mummers at Lower Whitley and Whitley and, perhaps, Shinfield, suggests that the same gang may have been active at Burghfield, Shinfield, Lower Whitley and Whitley. [See entries 036, 037, 098.]

SHRIVENHAM SU 2489 (OX)

[See Stanford-in-the-Vale, entry 113.]

SOUTH HINKSEY SP 5004 (OX)

- 109 Hitchener Collection: Note from informant: "My grandmother (aged 95 in 1985) lived in South Hinksey ...and as a child, she remembers her father blacking his face and participating in a mummers' play. She said he used to say the words (quote)

In comes I... (Belzebub)  
Over me shoulder I carries a club  
In me hand a dripping pan  
Don't you think I'm a funny old man."

SPENCER'S WOOD SU 7166

- 110 Reading Standard (1960): "Remember the Mummers? I wonder if any of my readers can recall the Mummers, who used to present their peculiar drama at Christmas time - generally on Boxing Day.

I remember, about 40 years ago, seeing some mummers from, I believe, Spencer's Wood acting in the open in Whitley Wood. Wearing extraordinary costumes, they used to present a drama in which 'St. George' killed a 'Turkish Knight,' who was raised to life by 'Medicine Man.' The latter used to pass the box round for the collection." [For a reply to this appeal, see Reading, entry 104.]

STANFORD-IN-THE-VALE SU 3493 (OX)

- 111 Piggott (1929/30): Text and comment "Dictated to my father by William Kitchener, 1930. Performed up to about 1900. The mummers wore the usual 'dress' of strips of coloured paper etc. over their ordinary clothes, but

did not black their faces. The fiddle brought in at the end was a cigar box with a piece of wood stuck on and a string of whipcord."

- 112 Howse (1962): Text from Horace Titchener and comment: "...the ancient village mummers...continued their performances until the turn of the century. All the men taking part blackened their faces and hands, and wore strips of coloured paper over their own clothes, or any other garments they thought suitable. One character named Molly Tinker was impersonated by a man wearing woman's clothing, with blackened face peering from perhaps a sunbonnet. Performances were given on request in any private house, or at any village merrymaking. Sometimes Challow Station was visited to await the arrival of the trains, which was often a profitable journey. One well remembered outing was to Charney. The company having finished their performance, later celebrated a little too well. Finally they wended their way homeward along the bridle track, and having somehow reached Belcher's Barn, a difference of opinion arose, resulting in strange and strenuous doings hereabouts. Next morning early Frogmore Bridge was visited once again and was the scene of much diligent fishing. Eventually their labours were rewarded with the rescue of the mummers' clothes, fiddle etc., which were quickly but quietly smuggled home to be dried out for future use."
- 113 Carpenter Collection: Text [very similar, though not identical to that in Howse (1962), entry 112], from "Mr. William Titchner 69 years old Station Road, Stanford in the Vale Learned about 1887 from a book...Played last close on to ten years ago; taught a party down at Shrivenham; Always well received by nobility and gentry big houses where children were come home for Christmas."
- 114 Helm Collection: Text "Ms. Horace Titchener...per Miss Christina Hole." [Appears to be an abridged version of text in Howse (1962), entry 112.]
- 115 Roud Collection: Letter from Mrs. Howse [see entry 112]. "The old man who gave me these words [Horace Titchener] blacked his face and dressed up as Molly Tinker for a photograph. He made the fiddle especially for this pictorial record. Two coloured slides of this event are now in the Bodleian Library - Nos. 407 and 408 in one of the following boxes: MS Film 644, 645, 646 or 647..."
- [See also Uffington, entry 148.]

- 116 Lowsley (1888): "In the performance by the Steventon Mummings we find King George announces himself as the 'Africky King.' His antagonist, however, is Beau Slasher, the French officer." [This information is paraphrased in Ditchfield (1896) and Yarrow (1950).]
- 117 Steventon News (1983): "Mrs. Amy Howard who was born in Steventon 90 years ago had memories of their coming to the village around Christmas time, and also remembered her not surprising fears of the maybe somewhat bawdy players. She also recalled that the custom would probably have ceased early in this century."
- 118 Steventon News (1984): "Mrs Willis...has clear memories of her father [Jack Dunsdon] as Jack the Slasher who had the perhaps unenviable part of wounding King George, later treated by the Doctor. The Doctor's ditty is still firmly imprinted on Mrs Willis's memory:

I've got my pills  
To cure all ills -  
The stitch, the itch  
The palsy and the gout  
For pains within and pains without.

At Christmas time the family became involved in making the costumes worn by the players and others, and performances were given following the traditional Christmas church service on Boxing Day. [Jack Dunsdon was a bell ringer.] The players proceeded to the Fox and maybe other pubs in the village and beyond. The characters had some variations but Mrs Willis has memories of Beelzebub being a man dressed up as a woman."

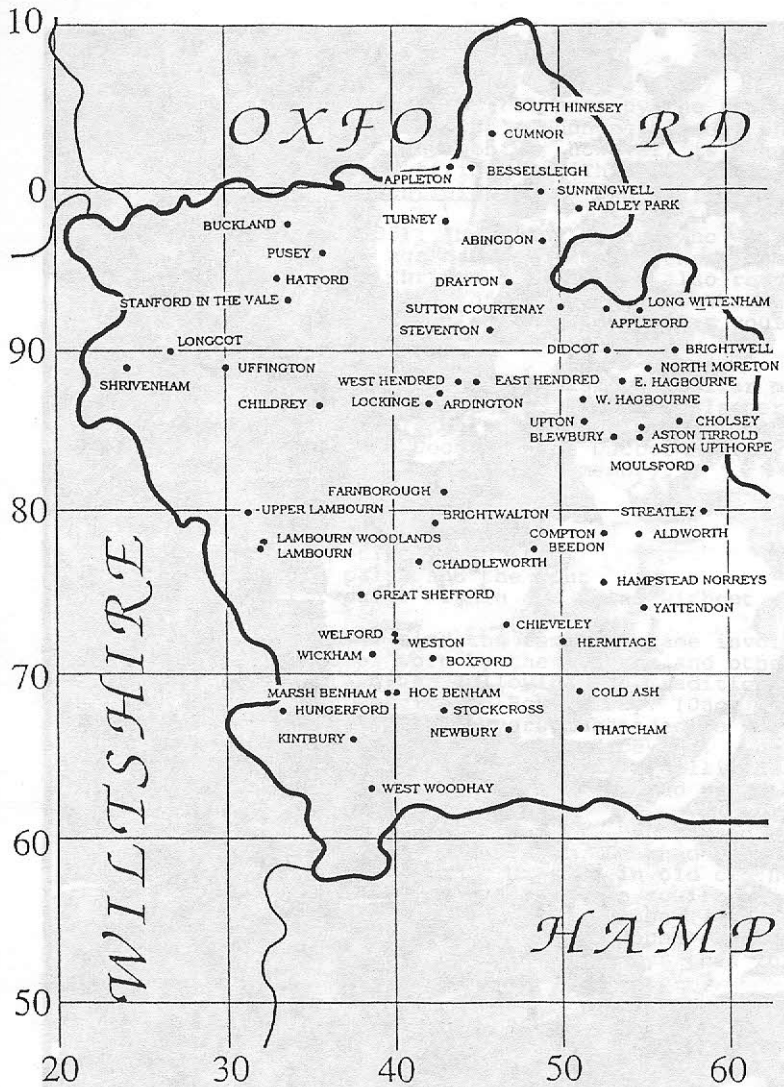
- 119 Carpenter Collection: Text from "T. Bunce, and Hutchins The Green, Steventon, Pond Place. Learned from the old mummings - fifty years ago...Dressed in old clothes, papers on clothes and high hats.. the squire always glad to see. give food and beer and money.. sometimes a little 'top-heavy' Sometimes make a pound or two.. Go up to squires: play for Squire; "gentry" then for butler and servants"
- 120 Bee Collection: Mrs Willis, aged 92 in 1984, [see entry 118] recalls that costumes were paper strips pasted onto thicker paper and worn over ordinary clothes. The mummings were mainly farm workers.

[See also Drayton, entry 072.]



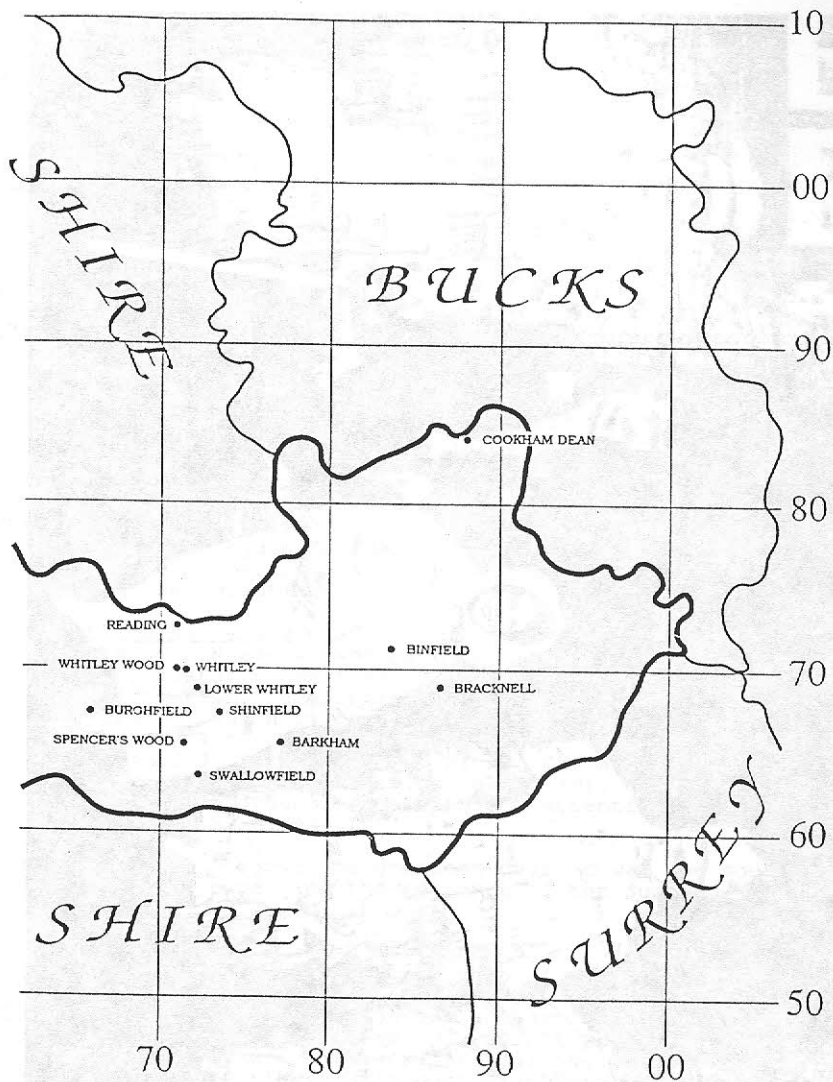


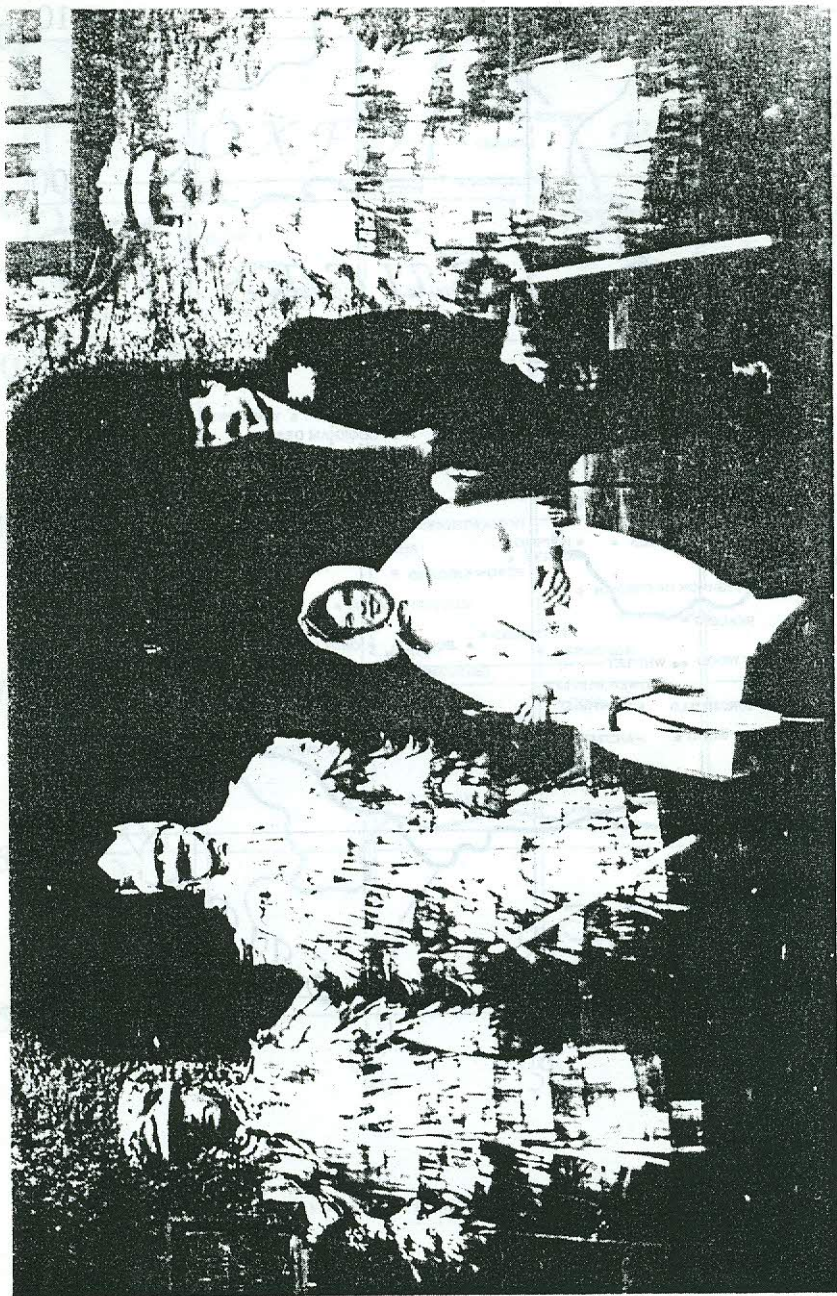
Chaddleworth Mimmers, c.1913. [See entry 041.]



Map showing Locations of Mummings in Berkshire.







Sunningwell Mummers, 1924. [See entry 121.]



STOCKCROSS SU 4368

[See Weston, entry 153.]

STREATLEY SU 5980 (OX)

[See Goring and Streatley, entry 075.]

SUNNINGWELL SP 4900 (OX)

- 121 Oxford Journal Illustrated (1924): Photograph [reproduced on page 40 of this publication] and caption "A group of mummers at Sunningwell, which is one of the few places where the old-time custom is still observed." Performers on photograph identified by Ernie Cudd as Ernie Cudd (First Man); Arthur Answorth (King George); Bill Cudd (Mrs. Finney); Bill Beckenham (Doctor); Bob Himpson (Slasher).
- 122 Abingdon Herald (1927): Photograph and caption. "Mummers Entertain Abingdon Residents. The Sunningwell mummers visited a number of places in the Abingdon district during the Christmas season."
- 123 North Berks Herald (1933): Photograph and caption. "The Sunningwell Mummers, who each Christmas carry on an ancient custom by performing in villages in the district. The scene depicted above is "King George on the ground" which is the climax of the traditional play which they act. The performers (left to right) are Bold Slash (Mr. J. Strange), Mrs. Finny (Mr. W. Cudd), First Man (Mr. F. Wells), with King George (Mr. F. Harris), who is on the ground, receiving the attention of the Doctor (Mr. R. Himpson)."
- 124 Rix (1943): "...but the greatest delight was the sound of rustling paper and the entrance of the Sunningwell mummers:  
Ere I comes Beelzebub  
In me 'and I carries a club."
- 125 Oxford Mail (1949): Photograph and article giving general account of mummers' plays. "Mummers Play at Sunningwell. Revival of Ancient Village Tradition by Youth Club." Performers in photograph are named as First Man (Ed. Cross), King George (Robert Everil), Mrs. Finney (Brian Dusy), Bold Slash (Leslie Dunn) Doctor (Fred Harris)... [A record of correspondence relating to this article is preserved in Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.]

- 126 Yarrow (1952): Bare mention only.
- 127 Philip (1961): "A parishioner of Sunningwell...drew on his memory of performances in his youth for the benefit of the local boys' club which wished to revive the old play. The one condition he stipulated was that the play should never be published, as he was certain the essential 'magic' would go out of it if it became public property.  
So the club leader took it all down and the boys learned the old rhymes. They copied their ancestors' costumes by sewing fringes of wallpaper onto mackintoshes. King George (the son of the man who remembered the play) and Slasher armed themselves with fencing foils, they found a billiard ball to cure the noble knight, and with much gusto set out to act their play, as of old, in the inns and in the houses of friends."
- 128 Ordish Collection: Manuscript text "Communicated by R J E Tiddy 1913".
- 129 Helm Collection: Information from Neroli Whittle, N. S. W., Australia. "Nine clear days before Christmas, in the darkness of Sunningwell village, men's voices may be heard, laughing quietly, in a de-crescendo as the lights of their six bicycles travel up the lane from Sunningwell village to the highroad of Boar's Hill, Oxford.  
When John Masefield lived on Boar's Hill, the six mummers wheeled their bicycles into his garden, then donned the gaudy coats they carried on their shoulders, and having adjusted their crowns and silver-painted wooden swords, knocked at the door, certain of the poet's welcome. For these Berkshire Mummers acted their play each year in Masefield's house which they used to make their first port of call of their play season. The poet loved their performance, and rewarded the actors with applause and a treasured half-crown apiece.  
The old traditional wording of the play is faithfully repeated, even though some of it has lost its sense over the uncounted centuries, and the traditional costumes worn by the three characters, King George, Bold Slash, and Announcer wear coats oversewn with wallpaper cut into fringes. Old woman Ann is always played by a man dressed as a woman, and the 'Doctor' is a comic figure.  
Until this version was given to me, it had never before been written down, so I was told, the words being learned and taught by repetition. I was extraordinarily favoured in being given them.  
Here, then, is the Sunningwell version which is acted with humour and gusto [text follows]."

- 130 Helm Collection: Letter from Christina Hole, dated July 1955. "...Another play is acted at Sunningwell, Berkshire. It was revived after a lapse by the Bayworth and Sunningwell Youth Club, and has been given regularly for some years now. It might be difficult to get the script of this, as the founder of the club told me that the old men, who used to act in it, only allowed the youths to learn it on condition that it was never printed."
- 131 Bee Collection: Manuscript text, dated 1948, only slight variations from Ordish text [entry 128]. In the 1920s, performances were given for Masefield and Asquith, both of whom gave £1. Several of the performers were employed at the big houses on Boar's Hill and another link arose via the church. The men performed for a week or so up to Christmas Eve. Generally, they did not visit public houses since refreshment was given at the private houses. Occasionally, they were asked whether they were collecting for charity, but the men were poor and the money collected (possibly £1 each per night) was useful for Christmas. [This information from tape-recorded interview with Ernie Cudd, aged 81 in 1984, who played First Man in the 1920s. Ernie Cudd was a farm labourer and afterwards a building worker. His uncle, George Trinder, performed in the play before the First World War.]

[The survival of the Sunningwell Mummers until as late as 1939 might be explained by the village's proximity to the substantial houses on Oxford's Boar's Hill. Several of the men were gardeners there (Himpson, Answorth, Beckenham), so the side was known to the residents. In 1947 a boys' club was established in the village, and to raise funds, the boys revived the mummers' play. The text was obtained from the father of one of the boys, Ned Cross, who had been a mummer in the 1930s. The revival lasted about seven years.]

[See also Abingdon, entry 001.]

SUTTON COURTENAY SU 5093 (OX)

- 132 Bradbrooke (1936): Gives text, quite similar to Carpenter Collection text [entry 135]. Provides comment: "The version acted at Christmas time in Sutton Courtenay is here printed as dictated by Mr. George E. Harris. Mr. Harris is a member of a family of more than one hundred years standing in Sutton and neighbourhood; in his youth he learned the play from his father and other old folk, and has passed it on to his son, Roy Harris, who now plays in it. The play is not written, but transmitted by memory, and has never been printed. Formerly it was

played by young men, but now by boys under sixteen. During the last three years the players have been Raymond Mooren, Roy Slatter, Roy Harris, Cecil Davis, and Fred Herridge."

Bradbrooke (1936) also gives a second text, from Thomas E. Yates, with comment: "Mr. Thomas E. Yeates of Benson, Co. Oxon. aged 86 in 1935, was for 50 years school-master in Sutton Courtenay; he taught the boys the Mummings' Play which was acted in the school house at Christmas. Mr. H.G. Lock, age 59 in 1935, of the Plough Inn, procured the written version from Mr. Yeates. Mr. Lock at different times played St. George, the Turkish Knight, the Doctor, and Little Johnny Jack."

- 133 Bradbrooke (1939): "The Sutton Courtenay version... was supplied by Mr. Thomas Yeates, aged eighty-six, in 1935, of Benson, Co. Oxford, who was fifty years school master in Sutton Courtenay, and taught the play and business to the lads. The play was un-written, and passed on orally, preserved as a tradition in the memories of the old men who had performed it in their youth. The Sutton version is uncontaminated by 'popular songs of the music hall sort.' One old native whose family has supplied actors in the play for more than a century, still instructs; he himself has played the Turkish Knight; the Doctor; and Johnny Jack. The players visit houses in the village, are invited in, perform, and end by singing:

Here we come awassailing among the leaves so green  
Here we come a-wandering so fair as to be seen,  
Love and joy come to you  
And to you a wassail too  
And God bless you and send you a Happy New Year.

Largess is then requested, and the mummings depart."

- 134 Manning Collection: (Bodleian Library) Four photographs taken, according to notes on reverse, at Culham, Oxon, in December 1901. The characters named on the reverse of each photograph correspond approximately with those of the Harris text in Bradbrooke (1936) [entry 132] and Carpenter Collection text [entry 135]. A note on the back of fol. 354 indicates that the team was from Sutton. This is supported by note on fol. 328: "T. P. says that there is no mumming "team" at Culham now, but one from Sutton came round last winter to his house, but he did not take them in, as he knew it all so well himself."

The photographs are extremely faint:

M.S.Top. Oxon. d.199, fol. 353. King George and Bold French Officer. No blacking. Ordinary clothes. King George has straw hat, Bold French Officer has hat with feathers.

fol. 354. Father Christmas, hat with ribbons or paper strips. Doctor, sparse covering of strips on clothing. Bold French Officer, Jack Finny, Beelzebub (as a woman).

fol. 355. Doctor reviving King George by drawing tooth.

fol. 356. Father Christmas and Doctor.

- 135 Carpenter Collection: Text from Harry Treadwell, High Street, Sutton Courtenay, "learned from old mummers (Joe Harris; Joe Quarterman) 35 years ago. Never saw in print."
- 136 Bee Collection: Information from interview with Roy Harris, 1983: George Harris [see entry 132] led the mummers as a young man. He was a carrier between Sutton Courtenay and Abingdon, and died c.1978, aged 86. Performances ceased but the play was revived in 1933 by George's son, Roy. The revival side consisted of boys who, on George's suggestion, took up mumming initially as an alternative to carol singing. The revival lasted about eight years. Costumes worn included Royal Persian King, blue robe with gold; Doctor, blue suit and top hat; Bull Slasher, rough army clothes. Beelzebub was dressed as a tramp, with old tin cans. The Broken Kneed Pony comprised a flat horse's head, shaped from a piece of wood and fastened onto a pole with two old pram wheels at the back, like a hobby horse. The tooth was wooden, painted red and cream, and was hidden in shirt. The mummers, organised by Roy, toured the pubs and larger houses of the village for several weeks either side of Christmas, and occasional performances were given at other times of the year.

[See also Drayton, entry 072.]

SWALLOWFIELD

SU 7264

- 137 Russell (1901): "We have not many old customs remaining in this parish, but amongst the few survivals we have still the Christmas Mummers...The following is what the actors in Swallowfield try to portray..." Russell gives a short text which, as far as it goes, is word-for-word the same as that printed in Sandys (1833). Possibly, the Swallowfield mummers took their text from Sandys or an intermediate source. Alternatively, Russell might

have used this text in the belief that it was more correct than the version actually performed in the village. [For evidence of Sandys being used by other writers in a similar way, see Roud and Fees (1984)]

- 138 Russell (1906): "Here in Berkshire we still keep up the mummers, and every Christmas they give us their rendering of the play 'St. George.' We have the Doctor, the King of Egypt, St. George, and some other characters."

THATCHAM SU 5167

- 139 Ordish Collection: Manuscript text [reproduced on pages 72-75 of this publication] presumably the one which, according to Ordish's 'Report on Mummings Plays and other Vestiges of folk Drama,' [Ordish Papers Box IV] was collected in Thatcham and sent to him by Mrs. Eden of Rugby.

- 140 Bathe Collection: Confirmation of existence of mummers, remembered by resident.

TUBNEY SU 4398 (OX)

- 141 Carey Collection: Text "Noted by Dorothy Marshall, 1912."

UFFINGTON SU 3089 (OX)

- 142 Hughes (1856): "...the bands of mummers came round dressed in ribbons and coloured paper caps, and stamped round the Squire's kitchen, repeating in the true sing-song vernacular the legend of St. George and his fight, and the ten-pound Doctor, who plays his part at healing the Saint..." [Hughes was born and brought up at Uffington and it is likely that he is here describing the Uffington performance.]
- 143 Cawte et al. (1967) p.99: Give John Betjeman's 'A.B.C. of English Churches,' broadcast on B.B.C. Television, 29 August 1965, as source of material on Uffington. We have been unable to obtain further details of this.
- 144 Carpenter Collection: Text, headed "THE MUMMERS - DICK ELDRIDGE, Uffington, Farington, Berkshire, from Edward Bailey, Uffington, years ago; he about 40 yrs old then; Never saw in print. (Wrote for Miss Butler, Woolston Lodge, (next village, last year; & Miss Jenkins, Stockham farm, 3 to 4 years ago -- just above village." [From evidence elsewhere in the collection, E.C. Cawte assigns the year 1933 to this manuscript.]

- 145 Roud Collection: Tape-recorded interview with Teddy Bailey, aged 84, and Bob Iles, both living in Uffington, November 1980. Bob's father (also Bob) had been in the 1930s team with Mr. Bailey. The players included Teddy Bailey (King George), his father (Father Christmas), Bob Iles Snr. (Doctor), Teddy's uncle Tom (Beelzebub - and tin whistle), Dickie Eldridge (Carpenter's informant, Mother Vinney), Dick Smith (?) (Starcher), and Artie Samson (?) (Doctor's Boy).
- Mr. and Mrs. Bailey were sure that this team had been a 'revival' instigated by Miss Butler about 1930, but it is clear from Carpenter's note that the mummers had existed in the village long before that, and, therefore, that the revival was of the local tradition.
- Bob Iles had been instrumental in a further revival in the 1970s and the play was still being performed, somewhat spasmodically, at the time of the interview. He based the revival on his, and others', memories of previous performances, relying mainly on Teddy Bailey for the text. Bob was aware that the reconstructed text was 'incomplete', as compared with his memory of his father's version. He was pleased to receive a copy of the Carpenter Collection text [entry 144] and planned to introduce this to the current team.
- 146 Bee Collection: Text, as performed in 1972.
- 147 Bee Collection: Interview with John Little, 1984. The mummers play was revived for Tom Brown's Festival, August 1972. Mr. Little was Chairman of Festival Committee and one of the instigators of the revival. He has a manuscript text in an exercise book which was discovered in the papers of Miss Butler of Woolstone. On the cover is written 'not quite as I remember it.' Reference is made to Eldridge 'who acted lately.' Mr. Little also has a letter from John Betjeman, who for a time lived in the village, dated December 1974, in which he wrote that the music was supplied by gramophone "put on by one of the players for lack of something to say." Also, "the Eldridge family carried it on traditionally...the last of the village band." Betjeman's account relates to performances in the early 1950s, following the play's revival for the Festival of Britain in 1951. The 1972 revival, for Tom Brown's Festival, led to occasional performances thereafter, for example in 1974-5 and 1977-8 but the play is not currently [1990] performed.
- 148 Bee Collection: Interview with Charlie Bailey, c.80 years old, 1984. For the 1951 revival, practices were held in the village reading room. Charlie was a lorry driver and drove along with Tom Weaver going through the words and songs. Charlie and Tom used to dress as tramps and sing songs before the play's performance. The players dressed in character. Bandsman's hats were worn.

The revival lasted about eight years, with visits to pubs and private houses. Performances were given at Stanford-in-the-Vale, Betjeman's house at Farnborough [after his removal from Uffington], and Longcot. "Trouble was, we were always drunk." Charlie could not remember when performances ceased prior to the 1951 revival, but could recall the names of men who had taken part: Charlie's uncle, 'Young' Ted Bailey, was King George, Uncle Tom was Beelzebub, 'Old' Bob Iles was Doctor and Charlie was Doctor's Boy. In the 1950s, Charlie was Doctor, his brother Bill was Starcher, and other players included Packford, Mitchell and Coxhead.

- 149 Bee Collection: Interview with Tom Weaver, 1984. Tom Weaver became associated with the mummies at the 1951 revival through providing makeup. His involvement as a player was limited, though he did take part for two or three years. [When, in 1984, the opening lines of the text were read to him, he laughed loudly at the poor rendition and proceeded to recite them "how they should be done," with broad Berkshire accent.] The revival got under way after the then landlord of the White Horse pub asked about the play one night at a band practice there. "Dickie Eldridge, the Kingston Lisle bandmaster got it going." The band used instruments provided by Kingston Lisle House. Tom's earliest memory of mumming in the village was 'Old' Ted Bailey as Father Christmas c.1914. Performers in the 1950s revival included 'Young' Ted Bailey, King George; 'Shiner' Terry Packford, Doctor's Boy; Bill Mitchell, Father Christmas. At one time, Jack Jeeves played King George and Charlie Bailey played Father Christmas.

[The chronology of the Uffington mumming tradition in the 20th century is a little confused, but we can offer the following tentative scheme:

- Phase 1: Existing team: ceases performing before 1930.
- Phase 2: c.1930: Revival instigated by Miss Butler, probably with substantial involvement of previous team (possibly same team).
- Phase 3: Revived for Festival of Britain in 1951, continuing for about 8 years. Some personnel from Phase 2 involved.
- Phase 4: Performance for John Betjeman's television programme in 1965, possibly a one-off performance.
- Phase 5: Revival in mid 1970s, continuing spasmodically into early 1980s.]



UPTON SU 5186 (OX)

[See East Hagbourne, entry 073.]

UPPER LAMBOURN SU 3180

150 Carpenter Collection: Text from William J. Alexander, Bridgehouse, Feltham Middlesex, "learned from old mummings; 33 or 34 years ago; never saw in print."

WELFORD SU 4073

[See Weston, entry 153.]

WEST HAGBOURNE SU 5187 (OX)

[See East Hagbourne, entry 073.]

WEST HENDRED SU 4488 (OX)

151 Hayden (1901): "...The second interruption was the arrival of the Mummings - King George, the Doctor, white horse, and all - of whom a poor remnant still survives in the village. They regularly received a previous hint from the farmer that they would be welcomed on these occasions, and as regularly expressed their regret at intruding when 'Maister had got comp'ny' which little piece of politeness was considered an essential part of the programme..."

WEST WOODHAY SU 3963

152 Ordish Collection: (Batson MSS.) Text. "The Mummings' Christmas Play, as performed at West Woodhay, Christmas 1901. From W. Vowkins." [Text reproduced in Helm (1971), and extracts in Brown (1978).]

WESTON SU 4073

153 Brown (1982a): Information from Mr. Charlie Looker, 1979. "Mr. Looker commented that it was Daniel Fisher who re-started the mummings after the first World War and 'I take it that he played with older people before the War.' Other members at the time were Ben Birch, now dead, who played Slasher...Orry or Harry Herbert, also dead, who played Happy Jack...Alf Prince and Fred Perris - Mr. Looker is not sure which of them played King George (Queen Mary in the Carpenter text [entry 156]) - and Ern

Barrett, who played the Doctor, as did Mr. Looker himself. Albert Hunt, also now dead, played the 'squeezebox.'...Mr. Looker...further commented that 'The older men liked the beer, I think that is why they started the mummers again.' and in a P.S. to one of his letters says that 'we younger ones did not drink' and went for the fun and a bit of pocket money, adding that agricultural wages were 'very small.'

God Bless the Master - with Albert Hunt on melodeon - was evidently sung first, after which Daniel Fisher (it isn't clear which part he played - he was definitely 'our leader' though) would knock and ask the residents if they would like to see the mummers perform. When Mr. Looker's turn as Doctor came he was carried in piggy-back; he was aged around 20 at the time!...Jack Smith who played the Doctor at Chaddleworth, around the same time as Fred Tarrant, says that he too was carried in piggy-back.

There were apparently more carols but Mr. Looker cannot remember them. The mummers wore rag, not costume, and travelled on foot via footpaths across fields in an area roughly bounded by Weston, Wickham, and Welford, taking in Westbrook, Boxford, the Stockcross public house and Marsh Benham...This perambulation took several nights to complete, with the following specific stops being made: Welford House...Elm Farm House...Hoe Benham (Mrs. Baker); and the Old Farm, Wickham Heath..."

- 154 Brown (1983): "Mr. Mundy...remembers the Weston mummers visiting Elcot Farm (where he lived at the time) a mile or so south of Wickham...Information from Charlie Looker ...practice took place in the village hall, then a Church Mission hut; the group existed in the early 1920s, and Daniel Fisher...would not...allow any frivolity during the proceedings."
- 155 Brown (1985): "The Weston Mummers actually visited Hoe Benham as well but it seems clear that their group of participants and their 'play' were separate."
- 156 Carpenter Collection: Text from Daniel Fisher. "Dropped it just before the War."

WHITLEY SU 7170

- 157 Piggott (1929/30): Text "Dictated to me by a performer, W. Poulter, 1930. Still acted. This version has been performed by at least three generations of the Poulter family and their relatives, the words being transmitted orally. Formerly the actors blacked their faces, but this has not been done for some years. The costumes

mainly consist of conical 'foolscaps' decorated with scraps of tinsel etc., but King George wears an old red military tunic."

- 158 Chandler Collection: Tape-recording of ex-participants, Mr. Clarke and Mr. Slade, including recitation of text. entry 157.] [Copy in Roud Collection.]

[See also Lower Whitley, entry 098, and Shinfield, entry 108. The Piggott and Chandler Collection Whitley texts are very similar, and Seaby's account of mumming at Lower Whitley fits these closely.]

WHITLEY WOOD

SU 7170

- 159 Ditchfield (1926): "...we have just welcomed a happy band of mummings, who usually come to us at this time and perform their curious old play, a relic of ancient folk drama. This company comes to us from Whitley Wood and is a very well equipped band who perform very ably their traditional tunes. The leader, aged 69, learned the words from his mother, who acquired them from her parents, and thus the play has been passed down from remote times until the present day. It is not surprising that there should be many variants, and the play that we have heard tonight differs somewhat from other versions which I have noted and transcribed, but the same elements are observable, and here and there the same words. 'King George' is the hero, a noble knight, with helmet covered with strips of coloured paper and carrying a wooden sword, with which he fights 'Beau Slasher,' a French officer,

Whose body's lined with lead,  
His head is made of steel,  
And who comes from Turkish land  
To fight thee in the field.

...In the Whitley Wood version King George is successful in the fight, and slays another victim, the Turkish Knight, who is healed by the pills...The most important character is 'Father Christmas,' the leader of the company, who walks about with the aid of a stout stick, introduces the characters and begins:-

A room, a room, I do presume  
For me and my brave men;  
For we be come this Christmas time  
To make a little rhyme.

...My Whitley friends have no intention of allowing the memory of the Mummers' Play to lapse, as they have formed a junior troop, who are ready to carry on when their elders cannot walk long distances."

[See also Spencer's Wood, entry 110.]

WICKHAM SU 3971

[See Weston, entries 153, 154.]

YATTENDON SU 5574

- 160 Beeching (1897): "Tonight the mummers came round. For old sake's sake one does not refuse to see them, but the glory has long ago departed. At least, I seem to remember that in my youth the performance was better; certainly it was the best of the village boys who used to act, now it is the tag, rag, and bobtail, and they do not take the trouble to learn all the verses. The principal characters are King George and a French officer, who fight, both get wounded, and are cured by a doctor; Molly who acts as showman and chorus, and Beelzebub, who comes in at the end, dressed like Father Christmas, to collect the pennies. All the characters announce themselves in the manner of the old miracle plays, thus:

I be King George, a nawble Knight,  
I lost some blood in an English fight,  
I care not for Spaniard, French, or Turk,  
Where's the man as can do I hurt?  
And if before me he durs stan'  
I'll cut him down with this deadly han',  
I'll cut un and slash un as small as flies  
And send him to the cckoshop to make mince  
pies, &c. &c."

[Details of author and location for this reference are recorded in Beeching's obituary in Cornhill Magazine, (1919).]

- 161 Brown (1983): Records that an informant from the village, whose memory goes back to the beginning of this century, does not recall mumming at Yattendon.

UNLOCATED BERKSHIRE PLAYS

- 162 Lowsley (1888): gives text "As acted in MID-BERKSHIRE at Christmas-tide." [The text is reproduced in Newbury Weekly News, (28 Dec. 1911).]

163 The Times (1904): "Here is a true story of the evening of Monday, the 19th of December, 1904, a story liable to give pause to those who are prone to declare the old usages to be dead and gone, merely because the old usages do not come in their way. I was sitting in my smoking-room, part of an ancient tenement in a sequestered village of Northern Berks, when there came a sound of crunched gravel and of muttered conversation from without, followed by a modest rapping at the hall door. A rosy-cheeked Berkshire maid was heard in colloquy with the visitors, and, in another moment, entered with the announcement that the mummers wished to know if we would hear and see them play...I caused the mummers to be invited into the smoking room, one-half of which served for stage, while in the remainder the household was grouped for audience.

The players were six in number, and fantastically attired, not in paper caps and ribbons, as in the days when Tom Brown was written, but in habiliments which it would be unfair to call tawdry. Enter first Father Christmas, white bearded and quite free from self-consciousness, to recite the time honoured prologue in the 'true sing-song vernacular' beloved of the late Judge Hughes. He was, like the others, a carter's lad or a ploughboy of 15 years or thereabouts, and, hard as his words were to follow, enough of them could be caught corresponding to the version that has been printed to show that the tradition has been faithfully kept; and it ended

So it's walk in Room, again I say,  
And pray good people clear the way,  
Walk in Room.

Enter Room, having no part in the play, but delivering an oration in the nature of a second prologue. His costume was a kind of tunic of ancient print or muslin, from beneath which his corduroys and iron bound boots protruded. He it was, too, who introduced St. George, or Sir George, in a cast off uniform of a full private in the Royal Berkshire Regiment, who challenged all and sundry in valorous language, his gage being taken up by an equally bombastic "knight from furrin parts"...Very gingerly the two champions laid about one another with two walking-sticks for swords, and, sad to relate, St. George was the first to fall, grievously 'wounded on the knee,' regardless of the fact that he was in truth impaled on the knight's sword at about the point where, as Homer puts it, the midriff joins the liver. So the Doctor was summoned, with venerable silk hat and mud-drabbled overcoat to denote his professional status, full of 'comic business,' but rather oblivious of his part, and accompanied by an attendant in a smock frock, who produced various medicaments the lethal power of which were extolled at large. However, such are the

unforseen actions of drugs and the mysteries of healing, a drop of a cordial 'strong enough to kill any two' enabled St. George to obey the doctor's behest to 'rise and fight thy foe again.' A little more careful fencing and this time the knight bit the dust. Him, since the English doctor refused to soil his fingers with him, a foreign quack restored to 'rise and fight no more.' So ended the action of the drama, but at this point Room summoned 'Maid Merrian,' a shy youth, but pretty, wearing a sailor hat and a striped black and white skirt, a world too short to hide her russet corduroys, and 'Merrian' recited a long string of verses composed of such harmless rural paradoxes as 'I saw a crow so black as snow,' and so on. A curious old-world catch, not in the least like any music-hall song that ever was heard, wound up the entertainment that was pleasant for its simple savour of the old world...last of all, on invitation, Maid Merrian produced 'the box' and that a very modest donation, half-a-crown to be precise, delighted the honest lads so much that they insisted in rendering a few modern songs, but they were, with one exception, rather of the interminable and didactic type beloved by sailors at sea than of the vulgar and modern class. There was a sailor, for example, who bade his hearers beware of the ladies, 'who have been the ruings of me,' and that the song was sung by 'Maid Merrian' rendered the effect all the funnier. A basket of apples sent the lads away happy, and they left us distinctly entertained.

Before they departed I cross-examined them a little as to the manner in which they learned the words. 'No, 'taint never been wrote down, but it might be if so be as any genlman wanted. Us knows un.' 'But you were not born knowing the words?' 'Nay, but if there be a newcomer we learns ee; there baint no newcomers this year.' The boy was a witness of truth. This old-world drama is handed down, not from father to son, but from one generation of lads to another, new recruits to the company being carefully taught by those who have passed through the stage of apprenticeship; and the plot, the jests, and the paradoxes are the same every year."

[See Drayton, entries 064, 068.]

- 164 Coleman (n.d.) [Typed extract in Helm Collection.] "Twenty five years ago I recall witnessing the Christmas custom of mumming..." Proceeds to give description of performance, with fragments of text, but it is clear that his account is based entirely on Lowsley [entry 162].
- 165 Taylor (n.d.): "But to us children the high spot of Christmas entertainment was the visit of the mummers. About eight or nine men would arrive outside the house and start up:

God bless the master of this house,  
We hope he is within,  
And if he is, pray tell us so,  
And we'll soon step in.  
We hopes the mistress is within,  
A-settin' by the fire,  
An' piitying we poor mummers, yer  
Out in the mud and mire.  
We don't come here but once a year,  
And hope 'tis no offence,  
But if it is, pray tell us so,  
And we will soon get hence.  
For we be come this Christmas time,  
A purpose to be merry.

My father would then open the door and invite them into our large paved kitchen and the show would begin, watched with baited breath by all of us ten children, our parents, the maids, and any other visitors there might be.

The mummers were led by Father Christmas in the correct attire, and long white beard. He stumped around, leaning on his stick, and reciting:

Christmas comes but once a year,  
And when it does, it brings good cheer,  
Roast beef, plum pudden, mince pies.

The geese are getting fat.  
Please to put a penny in the old man's hat.

Then he would introduce 'King George' - a fine, upstanding young man (incidentally the village gamekeeper) resplendent in navy-blue uniform and much yellow braid. He was ordered to fight the 'Turk,' who proved to be a man with a very black face and a very odd costume.

They immediately set to, and after much sword play and dodging round and round the ring, the 'Turk' falls to the ground, lying silent and still. Father Christmas then calls, 'Is there a doctor to be found?' and out steps a man in a long black coat and large hat. From his black bag he takes a bottle, and says, 'In this bottle I have medicine to cure the itch, the stitch, the palsy and the gout; pains within, and pains without. I drop a drop into the palm of the dead man's hand, and a drop on his tongue and say to him, 'Turk, arise, and get thee back to thine own country.'

The cure is instantaneous; the Turk arises and joins the rest of the company, who all add something to the play. I remember one little fat man who always had a row of dolls of various kinds on his back. He says:

In comes I, little Happy Jack

With my wife and family on my back.  
My head he's big, but my wit so small  
So I brought my fiddle to please 'ee all.

Then they all dance round until jugs of beer appear, and a huge dish of mince pies - specially made for the mummers. The theme of the play, no doubt, dates back to the middle ages, but it varied in every county. In our village it carried on very successfully until the First World War. Now, I fear, all mummers are extinct."



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## SAMPLE TEXTS FROM BERKSHIRE

The character of the mummers' play differs slightly according to region, and Berkshire mumming straddles the boundary between the south-midlands form and that of central-southern England. Broadly, north Berkshire follows the pattern of the south-midlands whilst, from the Downs southwards, texts tend to bear similarities to those of Hampshire. Thus, there is no 'typical' Berkshire text. The three which are reproduced below comprise one from north Berkshire (Cumnor), one from the centre (Cholsey) and one from near the Hampshire border (Thatcham). None of these has been published previously. The interested reader is also particularly recommended to look at the text given by Lowsley (1888). [Entry 162. An identical text is published in Folklore, Vol.72, 1961, pp.338-42, as 'The Glympton (Oxfordshire) Mummers' Play' (without reference to Lowsley, or to Berkshire).]. The following texts are reproduced as collected, with the exception of Cumnor, in which the only alteration has been to present the names of speakers in a standardised format.

### I. CHOLSEY

[Text from Frank Farrow, Roud Collection, entry 051.]

### MUMMERS

#### Act I

A room, a room I do pursue,  
And give no room to Rhyme.  
For I am come to show activity  
This merry Christmas time.  
Activity of Youth, activity of Age,  
This life has never been seen before, or acted on  
the stage.  
So if you do not believe all this, I say,  
Walk in King George and clear the way.

#### Act II King George

In comes King George this Noble Knight,  
Who lost some blood by an English Fight.  
An English fight is the reason I carry this awful  
weapon,  
I fear no Anish, Danish, French nor Turk,  
No mortal man can do me hurt,  
So now let all our voices ring,  
I am the Royal Persian King.

Then the leading man says,

'Walk in Tipton Slasher!

Act III

In comes Tipton Slasher.  
Tipton Slasher is my name,  
Where is this man who bids me stand?  
I'll knock him down with my greatest hand,  
I'll cut him and slash him in greatest supplies,  
And send him to his Cook Shop to make mince pies.

And Tipton Slasher turns round to King George and says,

Guard they eyes and guard they blows  
For fear I might take off thy nose,

Then they both fight with little toy swords, and King George is wounded. Then the leading man says,

Doctor, Doctor do they part,  
King George is wounded through the heart.

Act IV

The doctor comes in and bends down over King George and takes from his bag a pair of Pliers and a large tooth, which is supposed to be drawn from King George's mouth, and the Doctor holds it up and he says,

'Caesar, Caesar, see what great fangs this man has got,  
Isn't that enough to kill any man?

And the leading man says,

Any Man indeed, Sir,

Then the Doctor takes from his bag a box of Pills and says,

I have a box of Pills that cures all ills,  
The Hitch, the Stitch and the Palsey and the Gout,  
Pains within and Pains without.  
Molly Grubs, Sally Grubs or any other old Grubs.

And the Doctor says:-

'Here old Man, take one of these,  
He'll work thee through and through,  
Through they body and stomach too,  
He'll go dripdrap into thy nipnap,  
He'll work thee through and through,

And if thee comes to England and I come from France,  
Give me thy right hand and we'll have a merry Dance.

Act V Behellsibub

Then the leading man says,

Walk in old Father Behellsibub.

In comes old Father Behellsibub.  
Upon my shoulder I carry a club,  
And in my hand a dripping pan,  
And don't you think I'm a Grand Old Man.

Act VI

Then the leading man says,

Walk in old Tom the Tinker.

In comes old Tom the Tinker,  
I am no small beer drinker,  
I tell the landlord to his Face,  
The chimney corner is my Place.

Act VII

Then the leading man says,

Walk in Bighead.

In comes I as ain't been hit.  
With my big head and little wit,  
My Head's so big and my wit so small,  
So I have brought my fiddle to please you all.

## II. CUMNOR

[Text from Fred Saunders, Bee Collection, Entry 059, with additions in square brackets from Fred Coster, Bee Collection, entry 062.]

THE CHRISTMAS MUMMERS. As played since 1895 annually.

Foreman knocks at door and when it is opened he exclaims in a heavy sonorous voice (Please to let the Mummings act)

FOREMAN: A room, A room I do presume for me and my brave gallants all; please to give us room and rhyme to act this merry Christmas time. We'll show you the acts of youth, and the acts of age; likewise not acted on any common stage. For we are not any of the rant-tant-terrier sort we are some of the Royal of Spain. We have travelled Ireland, Scotland, Spain and now we're back in old England again, And if you don't believe in all this I say Step in King William and clear the way.

KING WILLIAM: In comes King William the Noble Knight who lost his blood by English fight and with English nation that's what makes me carry this awful weapon. Where is the man who dares to bid me stand I'll knock him down with my corageous hand I'll cut him and hew him as small as flies and send him to the cook-shop to make mince pies, for I value neither Greek, Duke or Turk, or any other man that dares to bid me hurt; I'll let all nations ring for I am the Gallant Prussian King born to defend all Christians [rights] I have fought my battles at home and abroad and if this aint true upon my word step in Bull Slash.

BULL SLASH: I am a valiant soldier brave and Bull Slasher is my name with sword and buckle by my side I hope to win the game.

FOREMAN: Bull Slash, Bull Slash, dont be too hot for in this room not a friend thou'st got

BULL SLASH: Where is the man that dared to bid me stand, he said he'd knock me down with his courageous hand cut me and hew me as small as flies and send me to the cook-shop to make mince pies; But I'll cut him and hew him as small as flies and send him to the cook-shop to make mince pies. Bold French Officer, Bold French Officer [many a time] hast thou driven me across

yon fields to fly but now I've come with my heart and mind to try; So mind thy head likewise thy body and face all foes, for a battle, a battle betwixt thee and I to see which on the ground shall lie.

(They fight and King William gets wounded badly.)

FOREMAN: Doctor, Doctor come and see King William's wounded Bitterly Doctor, Doctor play thy part King William's wounded to his heart.

DOCTOR: FEE, SIR, FEE

FOREMAN: Doctor, Doctor what is thy fee to cure King William and set him free

DOCTOR: TEN Pounds is my fee, but only five I'll take of thee for I am a doctor and a doctor good with my pills I can do this man good my pills I can do this man good my pills shall work him through and through cure his body and stomach too, for I aint one of these quack Doctors that travel about I travel about for the good of the country either to kill or to cure

FOREMAN: What diseases can'st thee cure

DOCTOR: ALL sorts of diseases, just which my physic pleases; the Hitch, the stitch, the palsy, and the gout, pains within and pains without (Bony scrubs, Bony scrubs such as any old woman could mention in a fortnight;) Bring to me any old woman eight years dead, ten years buried and ninety years laid in her grave as long as she has got one hollow stump or old jack tooth in her head and can crack one of my pills I'm bound to bet ten thousand pounds she comes to life again

FOREMAN: Doctor, Doctor Haste away King William can no longer stay.

DOCTOR: Well Prussian King how long has this pain took thee?

KING WILLIAM: A fortnight afore I found on't, and three weeks arter it got well.

DOCTOR: Bring my spectacles Jack some as I can see twelve months forader in.

FOREMAN: Yes Sir, yer's a pair thee canst see two years forrard in

DOCTOR: Bring my smelling bottle Jack.

FOREMAN: Yes sir.

DOCTOR: Shake him Jack

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

DOCTOR: SNiff hard King (King smells bottle raising a little to do so) Bring my Pill Box Jack.

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

DOCTOR: Take one of [my] Pills Prussian King. they'll melt in thy mouth like a horseshoe, grind in thee maw like a millstone run down thee throat like a wheelbarrow then come back to me like a twopenny rubber, Hadn't that ought to do him some good then, Jack.

FOREMAN: Ha! well I should think so

DOCTOR: Bring my poker Jack.

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

DOCTOR: Hot him Jack.

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

DOCTOR: Frizzles well Jack

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

DOCTOR: Bring me my pliers Jack

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

DOCTOR: Help me Jack

FOREMAN: Yes Sir

(They extract a tooth & hold it up for the audience to see from the King

DOCTOR: Look at this terrible, terrible tooth I have just drawn from this man; three sprangs to it like a dung fork more like an Elephant tooth than a Christians'. Hadnt that ought to pain any man then Jack

FOREMAN: Ha! well I should think so!



DOCTOR: Rise up King William and fight thy battle once again and I'll bet ten thousand pounds thee bist a better man than thee wast afore.

(He helps the King to his feet) (They fight again and Bull Slash gets wounded).

DOCTOR: Look at this terrible, terrible thing I have just cured one man and set him free and hes been and killed another, if anybody can say or do any more than this Step in Jack Finney

JACK FINNEY: My name is not Jack Finney my name is Mr. Finney A man of great fame can do more than thee or any other man of name

DOCTOR: Ho! what can'st thee doo so much then Jack.

JACK FINNEY: HO! cure a magpie with the toothache and how dost think I does that?

DOCTOR: How dost think I knows?

JACK FINNEY: Why I cuts his head off and chucks his body in the ditch.

DOCTOR: O thou barbarous rascal: a quick way of doing it Jack.

JACK FINNEY: Any more barbarous than thou, thee has just burnt a poor mans tooth out with a red hot poker and besides all this I can cure this man if he aint quite dead. Young man I say unto thee Arise.

FOREMAN: Ride in O Belzebub

((He rides in on anothers back)

BELLZEBUB: In comes I who aint bin hit with my big head and little wit my heads so big my wits so small Stop my nag, Jack, Whoa

(Finney stops the one acting as horse

JACK FINNEY: Whoa, Wee, Whoa!

BELLZEBUB: Over my shoulder I carry my club in my hand my dripping pan and dont you think Im a jolly old man.

FOREMAN: Hey Father, you silly ass you lives upon grass  
thou hast gone too far to view a stranger I  
lives in hopes to buy some ropes to tie thy old  
nose to the manger.

BELLZEBUB: Belt my nag out Jack.  
My Father he killed a fat hog and that youll  
plainly see my mother gave me the Bladder to  
make a hurdy gurdy With a hey ding dong and a  
ho ding dong and a hey ding dong a derry weve  
all come here this Christmas-time to make you  
all so merry.

(All join in and sing Auld Lang Syne and any other songs if  
requested.)

### III. THATCHAM

[Text from Ordish Collection, entry 139.]

#### Mummers' Play

##### Father Christmas

In comes I, poor old father Christmas,  
Welcome or welcome not,  
I hope poor old father Christmas  
Will never be forgot.  
For in this house there shall be shown  
The greatest battle that ever was known,  
Between King George and the Turkish Knight.

##### King George's Man.

In comes I, King George's Man,  
I am come here to let you understand  
The meaning of our play,  
For I'll quickly lead the fighting men this way.  
Walk in King George.

##### King George.

In comes I, King George,  
That man of courage bold,  
With my broad buckle and sword  
I won ten thousand pounds in gold.  
I fought the fiery dragon  
I brought him to a slaughter  
And by these means I won  
The King of Egypt's daughter.  
If any man dare step in this room tonight,

I'll hag him, I'll gag him, I'll let him for to know  
That I'm King George of England before I let him go.

The Turkish Knight

In comes I that bold Turkish Knight,  
I've come to England for to fight.  
And fight I will before I go  
To make King George's blood run cold,  
For if his blood run hot  
I'll quickly make it cold.  
For my head is made of iron,  
And my body's made of steel,  
I'll tie him to my huckle bones  
Before I leave this night.

King George.

Ha, ha, my little fellow, thou talkest very bold,  
Like some of these Turkish Knights I've oft been told.  
Pull out thy purse & pay, for I'll make thee pay thy  
bill.

Turkish Knight.

No puse will I pull out, nor no money will I pay  
But I'll fight thee on the battle field,  
Battle to battle betwixt you and me,  
To see which on the ground shall lie.

[? They fight]

Pardon me, Pardon me, King George, & I'll be thy slave.

King George.

Pardon thee? Why I never pardon a Turkish Knight;  
Stand on thy feet and show thy might.

[? Turkish Knight is slain]

Father Christmas.

Thou villain, thou villain, what hast thou done?  
Thou hast ruined me of my only son,  
Now lies bleeding on the ground.

King George.

He challenged me first, father. What was I to do?

Father Christmas.

Is there a doctor to be found?

King George.

Yes, father.

Father Christmas.

What's his name?

King George.

Peter Lamb.

Peter Lamb.

In comes I, Hiddy hiddy ockter.  
I can't say doctor, therefore I must say Hiddy hiddy  
ockter. I am here, Sir, there, Sir, all over the  
world, Sir. I don't go about like one of those quick  
quake doctors. I go about for the good of my  
Country, rather kill than cure.

Father Christmas.

What canst thou cure, Doctor?

Peter Lamb.

The hich, the tich, the palsy & the gout,  
Pains within and pains without.  
Any old woman that's got the mumps,  
Bring her to me, and I'll fetch out her stumps.  
Been dead ten years, in her coffin eleven, buried  
twelve, give some flit flot [?flip flop], shake up in  
her tip top, she will maintain life for ever. I  
carry a bottle by my side called the cold and frosted  
drops. One drop on the man's tongue, and another the  
roof of his mouth, and he shall maintain life for  
ever. Here, old man, have a drop of my flip flop, and  
I shall shake it up in your tip top, and you shall  
maintain life for ever.

Father Christmas.

What is thy bill, Doctor?

Peter Lamb.

Ten guineas is my fee. Five I'll take of thee.

Father Christmas.

Rise, my son, and fight no more.

Johnny Jack.

In comes I, little Johnny Jack,  
With my wife and family up my back,  
Out of eight there is but five,  
All the rest is starved alive.  
Roast beef, plum pudding, who likes that better  
than I, and old father Christmas?

Billy Wit.

I do, I do. In comes I, little Billy Wit,  
With my big head & little wit.  
White stockings, yellow lace,  
Now come, my boys, and dance apace.

# THE FOLKLORE SOCIETY

The Folklore Society was founded in 1878, and exists to promote the study and collection of Folklore and Folklife of Britain and elsewhere.

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The specialist Children's Folklore Group also publishes a newsletter and organises the Annual Children's Folklore Conference.

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