

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.]



