

Songs in Dorset Mummers' Plays

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Synopsis

From the somewhat fragmentary evidence available on Dorset mummers' plays it seems that it was customary to finish the performance with a song. In some cases the titles or first lines have been recalled, in others there are sound recordings of the plays which have enabled the songs to be identified. This paper surveys the songs used by Dorset mummers, attempts to establish a rationale for the choice of material, and considers why one song ("Husbandman and Servingman") was by far the most popular choice. In conclusion it considers the value of mummers' plays as indicators of local song repertoire.

The paper is illustrated by recordings of the songs in question, taken, where possible, directly from the plays or from other local sources.

Lecture Notes (with recordings used indicated by **)

Existence of Songs

- Thomas Hardy said that the "Egdon" play (in *The Return of the Native*) should finish with a song.
- Udal's unlocated W. Dorset play, in *Dorsetshire Folk-lore*, concludes "Here follows a song after which exeunt omnes"
- R.H.Clutterbuck, "Jottings on Local Antiquities", *Salisbury and Winchester Journal and General Advertiser*, 1 August 1896, p. 2, says that in the Cranborne play Father Christmas concludes:

"Come throw in your money and we'll give you a song."

Corfe Castle

- Hammond Bros Collection. D655, Jos. Vincent, Wareham, November, 1906. Mr. Vincent would probably have been a young man in the 1850s

Oh! Here's England and Turkey and France hand in hand,
Both able and willing by sea and by land,
Neither soldiers nor sailors there's never no fear,
With such men as Lord Raglan and Charlie Napier.

From Crimean War 1854-56

Symondsburry

- First recorded 1870,
- Published (in bowdlerised form) in *Dorsetshire Folk-lore*. “West Dorset type” play (Cawte’s term) i.e. c. 12 characters, extra burlesque scenes, hobby horse.

Husmandman and Servingman

And another ? See Udal’s text.

Litton Cheney

- Play “Crimea”. West Dorset type.
- Coll. G. Greening. Rec. BBC Evershot 1936
- Learned by Harry Webber, (b. 1858), from John Yard who died “at a great age” in 1917 and would therefore probably have performed in the 1850s.

Under the British Flag – (“Evershot Mummers”) from – Crimean War? **

Husbandman and Servingman

Sixpenny Handley

- Coll. Sydney J. White , *Dorset Year Book*, 1955/56
- Perf. In 1880s.

The Ship that Never Returned - (Frank Hilliar) **
Written Clarence Work, USA, (1865)

How contemporary in Sixpenny Handley in 1880s?

Puddletown

- Seen by Thomas Hardy in 1850s and partly reproduced in *The Return of the Native* and its dramatisation. Performed to at least c. 1880.

Husbandman and Servingman

Puncknowle

- John Eastwood *Life in a Dorset Village*
- “In King Teddy’s time”, i.e. 1901-11
“When I was a young maid, at the age of zeventeen,
I ‘listed in the Army, var to serve the Queen”

i.e. *The Female Drummer*, probably Napoleonic (Lord Nelson is mentioned in play)

The Female Drummer (Walter Pardon) **

Husbandman and Servingman

West Lulworth

- Performed until 1913, rec. BBC 1936. “The Battle of Waterloo”
- Songs also sung outside play.

So Now We’ve Gained the Victory (1936 BBC recording) **
song probably Napoleonic

The Quaker (1936 BBC recording) – Relates to Battle of Ronlay c. 1801 **

Wim Wam Waddles (1936 BBC recording) – Gammer Gurton's Garland, 1810 **

Brave Wolfe (Bob Scarce) **

Wolfe died 1759 but song common on broadsides from 1830s.

Songs probably introduced when play rewritten to encompass Napoleonic War characters.

Husbandman and Servingman

Rationale

- 2 Crimean War
- 1 pre-Napoleonic War
- 1 Napoleonic War (probably)
- 2 Napoleonic
- 1 nonsense
- 1 Victorian American
- 5 *Husbandman and Servingman*

Of non-*Husbandman and Servingman* songs, nearly all are about war and all but one seem to have been contemporary with play's date of performance.

Likely that songs chosen by mummers were currently popular and/or of a type likely to appeal to audiences (e.g. landowners and farmers).

Husbandman and Servingman

- Three in West Dorset type plays. Other plays, i.e. Puddletown, Puncknowle. were probably also of this type.
- Not contemporary (published in "The Loyal Garland", mid C17.), not popular (Hammonds – Mrs. Russell, Upwey; Jos. Taunton, Corscombe – neither knew words), would probably not have proved pleasing to landowners.

Husbandman and Servingman (Magpie Lane) **

- Why used?
- West Dorset play includes material "from the plays and interludes of the booth theatres which were a feature of every fair from the mediaeval period until the late nineteenth century" (Cass and Roud) Consistent with play being pre 1814. Thus mainly pre-enclosure, therefore H & S popular with husbandmen, i.e. small independent farmers.
- Popular in their houses (and in their landlords'?)
- Pickering article comes to similar conclusion?

Husbandman and Servingman (Symondsburly mummers) **

Husbandman and Servingman (1936 BBC recording) **

Value of Plays as Indicators of Repertoire

- Selective collection by Hammonds et al.
- Mummers selected songs on grounds of popularity and acceptability. Songs fossilised in plays? Better indicators of popular repertoire than standard collections?
- More plays, more songs needed to develop this thesis. How do other counties compare?