

ROOMER

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JOHN FLETCHER AND THE OBSERVER

Derek Schofield

In Roomer Vol.I:3/4 I enquired if any traditional drama researchers had located precisely the correspondence from and to Mr. John Fletcher, which was apparently published in The Observer in 1936. This correspondence was referred to in Phyllis Crawford's In England Still (Bristol, Arrowsmith, 1938) p.215, which I quoted in my enquiry. The full correspondence has now been located and, as it refers to plays in several areas of England, is summarised below.

1. Fletcher, John P. (Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial St., E.1) 'Christmas Mummers' (Letters to the Editor), The Observer (London) 28 December 1930, p.3d.
Fletcher asked "where there are existing Mumming players".
2. 'Christmas Mummers' (Letters to the Editor), The Observer 4 January 1931 p.7bc.
 - i) Letter from R.J.Sharp (Westfield, Chichester). He stated that the play "is done in this locality by the 'Boxgrove Tipteers'" and related how he compiled their text from the East Preston and Iping versions. He suggests an origin for the word 'Tipteers'.
 - ii) Letter from Liet.-Col. Wm. Merrick (The Lygon Arms, Broadway, Worcs.). Mr. Merrick "saw them here on Christmas Eve, 1928... I understand they gave their usual show here this last Christmas Eve".
 - iii) Letter from H.J.Massingham. "On Christmas night, at Chipping Campden, on the edge of the Northern Cotswolds, I witnessed a mummers's play at the 'Nall Arms'".
3. 'Christmas Mummers' (Letters to the Editor), The Observer 11 January 1931 p.21cd.
 - i) Letter from Arthur Beckett (Editor, Sussex County Magazine, 4 Pevensey Rd., Eastbourne). He suggested an alternative origin for 'Tipteers', adding "...a few years ago I arranged for revivals at both Brighton and Eastbourne. Twenty-five years ago I witnessed annual performances in the latter town by a band of peregrinating performers, and I have also seen performances at Compton (West Sussex) and Ditchling (East Sussex). Some years ago Mr.T.Fisher Unwin informed me that the Mummers' Play was given annually at Heyshott (West Sussex)...".

- ii) Letter from G.Long (Clifton House, Whitchurch, Hants.)
 "...the Longparish troupe, which appeared regularly until recently, did not go out during Christmas 1930, though I think they will probably continue. The Overton troupe.. was out last Christmas....".

The Editor of The Observer then closed the correspondence.

4. Fletcher, John P. (4 Maurice Walk, NW11). 'Mumming Plays' (Letters to the Editor), The Observer 29 March 1936 p.11c. Fletcher referred to the 1930/1931 correspondence and added that he had heard of ten groups of players that were still active. These were:
 "Berkshire, Lower Whitley; Cheshire, Alderley; Hampshire, Overton and Applesham or Andover; Oxfordshire, at Eynsham, Chipping Campden and Sunningwell; Stafford, Rocester; Sussex, Boxgrove; Worcestershire, Broadway". He gave further details of the Alderley play, adding that the list did not contain "the Marshfield Paper Boys, whose performance at the English Folk Dance Society's festival at the Albert Hall last January enabled London people to see a good performance of the play". Fletcher again asked for details of where the play had been performed the previous Christmas.
 (NOTE: Chipping Campden is in Gloucestershire, Sunningwell was at that time in Berkshire, and by 'Applesham' he presumably means Appleshaw (SU 3048), which is 4 miles NW of Andover, Hants.)
5. Hamer, Frederick B. (19 George St, Bedford), 'Mumming Plays' (Letters to the Editor), The Observer 5 April 1936 p.13d. Mr. Hamer pointed out that plays were performed at times of the year other than Christmas, giving the example of the Pace Egg play from Midgley, which he saw in 1935. "This Midgley play has been broadcast, as has a similar Good Friday version from Rochdale". He continues: "Yet another version of the same play is, I believe, given on November 5 by the "Plotters" of Ryburn Valley.
 (NOTE: The River Ryburn flows through Ripponden and Sowerby Bridge in West Yorkshire. This reference presumably comes from The Pace Egg: The Midgley Version by H.W.Harwood and F.H.Marsden (Halifax, The Authors, 1936 ; 2nd Ed. Halifax, D.S.Bland, 1977) which state that the Plotters recite lines "which are certainly derived from some version of the Pace Egg" (p.1 in 2nd Ed.). There is, however, no reference to the 'Plotters' in Cawte et al. English Ritual Drama (London, Folklore Society, 1967).
6. Fletcher, John P., 'Mumming Plays' (Letters to the Editor) The Observer 12 April 1936, p.9a. The 12th of April was Easter Sunday, and Mr. Fletcher asked for information on where Pace Eggers performed that weekend. He recalled earlier correspondence about the Boxgrove and Broadway Mummings, and wrote: "A correspondent has sent me most interesting information and photographs of the masqueraders at St.Kitts, British West Indies, where the players consist of the Doctor, St. George, the King of Egypt, and a Saracen maid. The players wear uniforms". Fletcher also adds a reference to Jack-in-the-Green: "I remember seeing it at Hadham, Hertfordshire, forty years ago -- I think the party came from Hertford".
 (NOTE: This location is not included in Roy Judge's The Jack-in-the-Green (Cambridge, D.S.Brewer, 1979).

There was no further correspondence on the subject published in The Observer during the rest of April, May or June, 1936.

The Fletcher correspondence, often sought by collectors in the past, including the compilers of English Ritual Drama (op.cit.), and now finally located, reveals itself to be of minor importance. The correspondence is peculiar, however, in that it is largely confined to plays which, at that time, were still being performed. As such, the list is not exhaustive, as the pages of English Ritual Drama, and the collections of present-day researchers, reveal. Surprisingly, perhaps, few references to previously unlisted plays are given, and all the published letters come from well-known writers on the subject of folklore.

Information on the other plays listed by Mr.Fletcher in his letter of 29th March 1936 would certainly be of interest, but could only be revealed by reading his collected correspondence, which is by now likely to have been destroyed.

I am grateful to Dr. E.C.Cawte for the information that there is correspondence between Fletcher and R.J.Sharp in the latter's manuscript collection. However, there is no correspondence with Fletcher in Fred Hamer's manuscripts in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

"PLAYGRAPHS" - A COMPUTER PROGRAM TO AID THE PLOTTING OF PLAY STRUCTURES

P. T. Millington

In Roomer Vol. 1:2 I presented an idea for visualising the structure of plays by means of graphs. These graphs are fairly fiddly to plot and, therefore, I have written a computer program which speeds up the process. The program is written for the Sinclair ZX81 with 16kbyte memory, preferably with printer. This is currently the most widespread home microcomputer. With adaptations the program can be made to run on most computers which use BASIC. Figs. 1 to 5 give examples of the program in use and Fig. 6 gives further completed graphs. Appendix I gives the program listing.

Fig. 1 - Initial display

```

PLAYGRAPHS PROGRAM
-----
1. LIST CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF
  APPEARANCE
2. ASSIGN LETTERS CONSECUTIVELY
  TO EACH CHARACTER - A,B,C...
3. DEVISE AN 8-LETTER LABEL FOR
  EACH CHARACTER
4. NUMBER THE SPEECHES - 1,2,3..
-----
PRESS NEWLINE WHEN READY
  
```

Fig. 2 - Display when inputting the heading and number of characters

```

INPUT HEADING FOR THE GRAPH
"JERUSALEM,LINCS."
INPUT NUMBER OF CHARACTERS
  
```

Fig. 3 - Display when inputting character list

```

JERUSALEM,LINCS.
-----
CHARACTER A = FOOL
          B = SARGENT
          C = LADY
          D = DAME J.
          E =
-----
INPUT CHARACTER LABELS SINGLY
  
```

Fig. 4 - Display when plotting speeches

```

JERUSALEM,LINCS.
-----
DOCTOR   :
RIBBONER :
E.SQUEEZ :
DAME J.  :
LADY     :
SARGENT  :
FOOL     :
          +-----+
          |           |
          |           |
          |           |
          |           |
          |           |
          |           |
          +-----+
          SPEECHES
-----
***** CONTROLS *****
S=LAST SPEECH :B=NEXT SPEECH
0+LETTER=DELETE :Z=END
PRESS CHAR. LETTER FOR SPEECH 15
  
```

Fig. 5 - Final graph

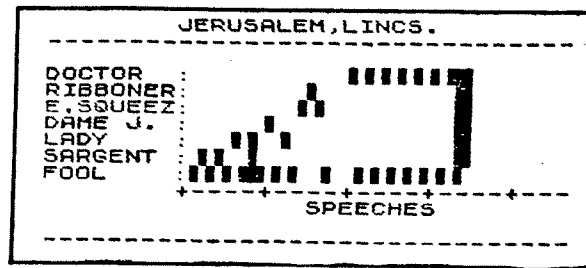
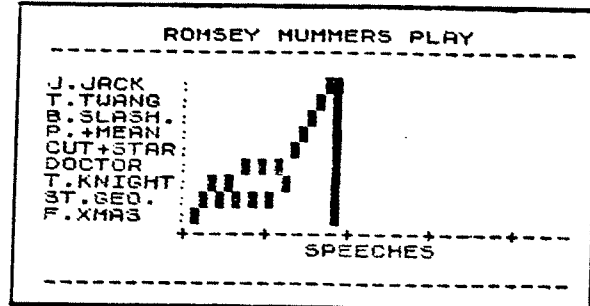
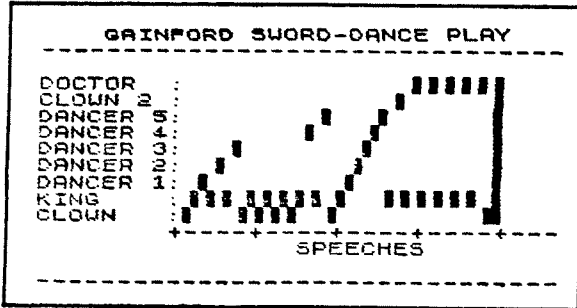


Fig. 6 - Further graphs of plays in ERD



Appendix I - Program Listing

```

1 REM PLAYGRAPHS 31.1.82
2 REM VARIABLES
3 REM A=GENERAL COUNTER
4 REM C=NO. OF CHARACTERS
5 REM H=NO. OF SPEECHES
6 REM S=SPEECH COUNTER
7 REM Y=PLOTTING CONSTANT
8 REM C$(*)=CHAR. NAME ARRAY
9 REM H#=HEADING
10 REM S#=KEY PRESSED DURING
11 REM SPEECH PLOTTING
12 REM INTRODUCTION
13 PRINT TAB 7;"PLAYGRAPHS PRO
GRAM"
14 GOSUB 1000
15 PRINT "1. LIST CHARACTERS I
N ORDER OF"
16 PRINT " APPEARANCE"
17 PRINT "2. ASSIGN LETTERS
CONSECUTIVELY"
18 PRINT " TO EACH CHARACTE
R - A,B,C..."
19 PRINT "3. DEVISE AN 8-LET
TER LABEL FOR"
20 PRINT " EACH CHARACTER"
21 PRINT "4. NUMBER THE SPEE
CHES - 1,2,3..."
22 GOSUB 1000
23 PRINT " PRESS NEWLINE WH
EN READY"
24 IF INKEY$="" THEN GOTO 24
25 CLS
26 REM HEADING INPUT
27 PRINT " INPUT HEADING FOR
THE GRAPH"
28 INPUT H#
29 PRINT TAB ((30-LEN H#)/2)
;"H#";
30 PRINT " INPUT NUMBER OF
CHARACTERS"
31 INPUT C
32 CLS
33 PRINT TAB ((32-LEN H#)/2);H
#
34 GOSUB 1000
35 PRINT AT 19,0;
36 GOSUB 1000
37 PRINT " INPUT CHARACTER LA
BELS SINGLY"
38 GOSUB 1000
39 DIM C$(C,8)
40 PRINT AT 2,0;"CHARACTER";
41 FOR A=1 TO C
42 PRINT TAB 10;CHR$(A+37);"
"
43 INPUT C$(A)
44 PRINT C$(A)
45 NEXT A
    
```

```

200 REM GRID PLOT
205 CLS
210 PRINT TAB ((32-LEN H#)/2);H
#
215 GOSUB 1000
220 PRINT
225 FOR A=C TO 1 STEP -1
230 PRINT C$(A);" "
235 NEXT A
240 PRINT TAB 8;"-----+
-----"
245 PRINT TAB 16;"SPEECHES";"
"
255 GOSUB 1000
260 PRINT AT 17,0;"***** C
ONTROLS *****"
265 PRINT "S=LAST SPEECH :B=N
EXT SPEECH"
270 PRINT "0+LETTER=DELETE :Z=E
ND"
280 REM PLOTTING SPEECHES
285 LET Y=-38-2*C
290 LET S=1
295 PRINT AT 21,0;"
"
300 PRINT AT 21,0;"PRESS CHAR.
LETTER FOR SPEECH";S
305 LET S#=INKEY$
310 IF S#="" THEN GOTO 325
315 IF S#="5" THEN LET S=S-1
320 IF S#="6" THEN GOTO 315
325 IF S#="0" THEN GOTO 395
330 LET S#<>"0" THEN GOTO 375
335 LET S#=INKEY$
340 IF S#="" OR S#="0" THEN GOT
O 355
345 IF S#<"A" OR S#>CHR$(37+C)
THEN GOTO 315
350 UNPLOT 17+S,Y+2*CODE S#
355 UNPLOT 17+S,Y+1+2*CODE S#
360 GOTO 315
365 IF S#="Z" THEN GOTO 500
370 IF S#<"A" OR S#>CHR$(37+C)
THEN GOTO 315
375 PLOT 17+S,Y+2*CODE S#
380 PLOT 17+S,Y+1+2*CODE S#
385 LET S=S+1
390 IF S>47 THEN GOTO 500
395 GOTO 315
400 REM GRAPH PRINT
405 FOR A=17 TO 21
410 PRINT AT A,0;"
"
415 NEXT A
420 COPY
425 STOP
430 REM PRINT A LINE OF HYPHENS
435 PRINT "-----"
440 RETURN
    
```

Christmas Customs in Chesterfield, Derbyshire (SK 3871) Dave Bathe

The following extract is from The Derbyshire Times 2nd January 1869. The article's main interest is in its mention of several different customs being performed in the same area on the same day.

"The Christmas Festivities of 1868

...On Christmas Eve the streets of Chesterfield presented an animated appearance. All classes were to be seen, old and young, wending their way in pursuit of the pleasures of the night, intent on preparing for the festivities of the coming day. The shops claimed a large share of attention, they were gaily decorated with magnificent displays of Christmas ornaments and all sort of fancy nick-nacks of the usual class. Occasional crowds assembled at intervals to see a set of "mummers" gaudily attired, or perchance a band of "Ethiopian Minstrels" plying their calling. Both were well "encouraged". Next might be seen a lot of youngsters who glory in the traditional "Oud Tup o' Darby". Some few little girls might be heard singing "A wandering, those blessings to implore" and "Christians awake" when it was high time for them to be in bed. The next thing which particularly attracted notice was a party of young fellows dressed with more evident taste than many of the party of "mummers" to be met with and who commanded more listeners. The long swords were worn at their sides with a military air. The lot proceeded into a large room in a public house which was speedily filled by lookers on. The fellows, who were evidently getting "merry" enough, after a few preliminaries, commenced their grand Christmas play of "St. George". The broad humour displayed in their comments of the marvellous doings of St. George was eminently characteristic. St. George dares any other valiant Knight to enter the lists against him, upon which Slasher accepts the challenge. St. George then gets himself into a fighting attitude and says:-

Stand back Slasher, let no more be said
For if I draw my sword I am sure to break thy head.

They fight, and Slasher falls wounded, and the audience applaud the deed. One man who had been intently watching the affair slowly drew his pipe out of his mouth and with mock gravity said "Well done, lad, thou floored him stunning". Slasher afterwards arose and poured forth his woes, and described the culmination of his wonderment in the words:-

To be struck out of seven senses into four score
The like was never seen in old England before.

The whole of the performance concluded by Beelzebub entering with a brush and exclaiming:-

Money I want, money I crave
If you don't give me money I'll sweep you to the grave.

The performance was pronounced to be "first class", and the tragedians in addition to gathering a good harvest of coppers were regaled with beer and plumcake found by the landlord. The next party of "mummers" were dressed differently to the last, but not less gaudily, and seemed to be an importation of Staveley [SK 4374] colliers who came to try their luck at the town of the crooked steeple. A lot of people who had congregated round the band seemed to be picking fun out of one of one of the "Mummers" who was desirous of being unnoticed. The lads cheered, and upon going to see what was the reason it was found that one of the men, who was dressed in female attire to represent "Maid Marian", in the play of "Robin Hood and Little John" had some of his attire dangling about his legs in a decidedly inelegant style. The representation of "Robin Hood and Little John" or the "Merry Men of Sherwood Forest"

was better than that of "Bold Slasher". "Friar Tuck" seemed to please the intent listeners on entering with these words:-

Murrah for the Friar, he's often a liar
Tho' clad in a cowl and gown

which extorted many broad grins, and one said "That's true enough". The whole concluded with a song. The "Waits" next claimed a share of attention, and bands of musicians and singers were traversing the streets "making night hideous" until a late hour. A party of singers commenced "Christians awake" and had got through about a verse when about 60 or 70 young men came up, some possessed of wind instruments which they began playing and the rest singing:-

Up in a balloon, boys
Up in a balloon,
All amongst the little stars
Seeking out the moon
Up in a balloon, boys
Up in a balloon,
There's something awful jolly
In being up in a balloon

which drowned the "Waits". The proprietors of the wind instruments of course remained masters of the situation but whether the trombones and the bassoons suffered at all from the effects of roast beef, plum pudding and beer cannot be said, but some of them sounded very shaky in the hands of the instrumentalists. People were assailed on every hand "Ah-wish-yer-a-merry-Christmas-a-happy-New-Year-a-pocket-full-o'-money-and-a-cellar-full-o'-beer-a-good-fat-pig-to-kill-next-year-pleeas-will-yer-gee-mee-a-Christmas-box!". The excuse is for asking that "Christmas comes but once a year". Perhaps in some respects that may be a blessing. "

PUBLICATION NEWS

Anon, 'Mummers on Parade', National Geographic World 76(December 1981) p.12-17. (Pictorial commentary on the Philadelphia Mummers Parade)

Asa Nyman, 'Mapping of Popular Beliefs, Legends and Calendar Customs: A Survey of the Atlas of Swedish Folk Culture II...', ARV, 35(1979) p.87-119. (Pages 104-107 include comments and maps relating to Mumming on Lucia Day (December 13th) in Sweden.

ROOMER: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP

Research in any field is, as often as not, hampered by the lack of communication between individual researchers, and Traditional Drama is no exception. We are acutely aware that there are many people doing valuable work who have little or no contact with others in this field and, consequently, no opportunity to compare notes or air their views.

ROOMER then is designed to fill this gap by providing an informal forum. It includes notes and queries, details of publications, out-of-the-way texts, information on work in progress, in fact anything that may be of interest to those working in the field of Traditional Drama. As such it relies heavily on participation by subscribers. Therefore, if you have any potential contributions we would be most grateful to receive them.

Back volumes of the newsletter are currently available at the cost of the annual subscription. For further information regarding ROOMER and the work of the TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP contact:

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