

ROOMER

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Drama Research Group.
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THE NEW BURLSQUE - AN UNDRRESS REHEARSAL

Sandra Billington

The above is the title of an illustration from The Graphic (25 Dec 1891) which Paul Smith reproduced in Roomer (2.3.1982) inviting comments. Rather belatedly I should like to make some suggestions. The illustration was of a London theatre rehearsal: the players wore everyday dress but the properties carried showed that the plot was based on St. George and the Dragon. The large open mouth of the dragon's head with forked tongue seems to have a singer inside it because the director is conducting him; there is an orchestra behind and the two other protagonists appear to be listening (as are members of the chorus in the wings). But the two on stage are women. One carries the shield of St. George and the other has her hands bound. The question is what is St. George doing on the professional boards of an unnamed London theatre? The answer is, I think, lengthy, fascinating and goes back into the mists of time. Sketching some of it out here is perhaps a bit unsatisfactory for the reader but I will try to give what I think is the outline.

Firstly, it is beginning to be accepted that there is considerable interplay between Folklore and other aspects of culture and the 1891 illustration shows folk and 'legitimate' theatre in yet another phase of exchange. As John Jackson wrote in 1793, 'it is clear that folk drama, "village theatre", and the regular drama and travelling players ... participated in an intense inter-action.'⁽¹⁾ St. George found himself in all forms and the saint's very history is intriguing. Needless to say he has now been discredited as a living personage at all which is itself an interesting aspect of Folklore custom. Then at the same time, almost from the moment that the myth crept out of Asia Minor, St. George was taken as an inspiration for notable British warriors such as Richard the Lionheart, Edward III and Henry V. The combatitive saint was accepted as Britain's patron from about the seventh century; the Council of Oxford proclaimed a national day in 1222 and he was officially made Patron Saint in 1344. Consequently, we cannot even be sure who influenced who and whether the folk cult became the national one or vice versa. But as Henry V enjoyed St. George pageantry we do know that processions including St. George and the Dragon among other attractions - sometimes religious spectacle and sometimes wholly secular - grew in popularity through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so making the combat legend accessible to all, and it seems that St. George has straddled the culture barrier between nobs and plebs since that time. The first dramatic text is of course John Kirke's⁽²⁾ adaption of Richard Johnson's The Seven Champions of Christendome.⁽³⁾ The play was printed in 1638 and the title page states that the play had been popular for some time. The contribution which the romance and the play has made to folk drama has been

fairly assessed by E. K. Chambers; the most interesting point being that Slasher's frequent vaunt that his head is iron and his body steel corresponds with several descriptions of dragons and not simply armour.(4)

Then if we return to the seventeenth century we find that after the Civil War the romance element was converted into farce. There was a popular droll performed for some years in Bartholomew Fair called a farce of 'Valiant St. George and the Dragon'. The first performance was in 1686 and it is quite clear that the travelling players whom Jackson mentions spread this droll to Shropshire at least. Charlotte Burne gives the title St. George and the fiery Dragon to one of the May Day comic plays performed on a tressle stage by amateurs - ie. the folk. Nowhere does Burne tie the droll to the seasonal combat drama, despite the characters overlapping and despite mumming being a well-known feature of the book.(5) Throughout the eighteenth century the combatants were intermingled with other knockabout characters in the melange which made up the professional theatre in that century and Chambers specifies one full play at Covent Garden in 1789. But it was the advent of horses on to the stage which produced the next phase. In 1822 the Royal Amphitheatre presented an equestrian show based on The Seven Champions and Drury Lane, finding it hard to compete with the circus element, did itself put on a very interesting combination of folk entertainment and spectacle.(6) This was in December 1833.

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

THE UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS

Which has attended the
Production
OF
The Grand Equestrian
and Romantic Drama of

St. George and the Dragon

A Grand Old English Cavalcade,

Authenticities of Ceremony,
Knights with their Pages,
Squires and their Ladies,
Musical Instruments.

Morris Dancers,
Bands of the different Trades,
Minstrels and Bands,
Country, Pennant, &c. &c.

An Egyptian Marriage DIVERTISEMENT!
Mr. STANFIELD'S

SPLENDID DIORAMA!

The Great Cataracts of the Nile.
Dragon's Haunt by Moonlight.
Mr. DUCROW'S

Extraordinary Combat.

Exalted Temples of Gibraltar. Columns of Liban Babel. Ascent of a Pyramid.
Triumphal Entry into the City of Memphis

Many Performers in his Charge,
St. Michael, of France, with Bears,
St. Andrew, of Italy, with Dragons,
St. James, of Spain, with Wild Beasts,

Performers of various in his City,
St. David, of Wales, with Whirligigs,
St. Patrick, of Scotland, with Giant's Head,
St. Andrew, of Scotland, with Serpents.

THE PRINCESS SARRA UNDER A GORGEOUS CANOPY!

Sublime with Honours,
Knights carrying Weapons,
Members of the Royal Household,
Ladies on Horseback.

St. George's mounted on his Charger Bayard, with the Conquered
Dragon lying at his Feet.

And only to be
Rightly
Overlooked,
consequently also to
praise of the House, &c.

Will be Performed every Evening!!!

The playbill reveals that the management were aware they were using folk play material. In 'The Unprecedented Success of The Grand Equestrian and Romantic Drama of St. George and the Dragon' 'A Grand Old English Cavalcade' was included. One feature was a performance by Morris Dancers. The aesthetic descent into folk entertainment apparently worked: the bill advertised the fact that crowds rushed in immediately the doors were opened.

There is further evidence that the folk play still being performed was adapted in other ways to suit readers and more genteel performers. The Illustrated London News (Dec 1842) shows a collection of Christmas characters headed by a 'king' and 'queen'. They are a bizarre assortment. Doctor Lance-'Em kills rather than cures; the St. George caricature, Sir Ill-'Em-And-Eat-'Em, sits on the head of a giant and claims that:

With my bid club I knock 'em down like skittles,
Then bowl off their heads and consume 'em for wittles. (7)

An equally bad joke is given to Nibble'em the Dragon. However, the dragon's face is not unlike that of the 1891 picture.



SIR ILL-'EM-AND-EAT-'EM.

"Kill 'em and eat 'em," the motto—my face
In its beauty reads to the whole human race;
With my big club I knock them down like skittles,
Then bowl off their heads and consume 'em for *wittles*."



NIBBLE'EM, THE DRAGON.

Sir Nibble'em, oh! with his ale so hot!
He drinks it gingered and swallows the pot.
With his inside filled with a pewter flagon,
Oh, what a life must Sir Nibble'em *drag on!*

William Sandys in 1852 published his study of Christmas traditions and prints what he calls a 'mock play'. This more genteel version of St. George and the Dragon opens with Alexander saying:

Silence, brave gentlemen; if you will give me an eye,
Alexander is my name, I'll sing the Tragedy. (8)

Published with it is the real play of St. George, which Sandys says was performed in the West Country. Interestingly, there is a dragon but he makes no claim of a body of iron and steel. Another version was published in London in 1886 called Christmas revels or the Puritan's discomfiture (9) and this departs further from the basic combat ritual. However, these publications do show an awareness that something generally went on at Christmas even in the later years of Queen Victoria's reign, by which time Londoners had grown either too poor or too genteel to tolerate much in the way of old customs. But the Christmas illustration of 1891 is further evidence of the adaptability of the old story to the expectations of the public. It is appropriately the pantomime which has taken over, making St. George the principal boy and the dragon, I guess, the character the children love to hate. A dancer can be seen, the theatre is gas lit and there is an opera prompt box at the front of the stage - all of

which suggests the theatre was Covent Garden. It seems fairly certain that the production had no links with seasonal ritual in the Folklore sense and as it is so late in the century and taking place in London I would hazard the further guess that it was following the nationalistic trend of the British Empire rather than wishing to support plebian games. But it would be nice to think that the audience remembered the real thing.

NOTES

1. Jackson is remembering his youth in Yorkshire about 1740. See John Jackson, The History of the Scottish Stage (Edinburgh; 1793) pp.409-11.
2. John Kirke, The Seven Champions of Christendom (J. Okes, London; 1638). [See British Library 644.b.22].
3. Richard Johnson, The Most Famous History of the Seaven [sic] Champions of Christendome..., (Cuthbert Burbie, London; 1596). [Copy in the Bodleian Library].
4. E. K. Chambers, The English Folk Play (Oxford; 1933) pp.174-85.
5. Charlotte Burne, Shropshire Folklore; A Sheaf of Gleanings (London; 1883).
6. Reproduced here with kind permission from the Victoria and Albert Theatre Museum.
7. 'Twelvth Day', Supplement to the Illustrated London News Sat Dec 31 (1842) pp.548-9.
8. William Sandy, Christmastide: its History, Festivities and Carols
9. Christmas Revels: or, the Puritan's Discomfiture (R. Washbourne, London; 1886). [See British Library 11777aa2(2)]

FAIR COMMENT (Reprinted from Nelson's Column, Folk London Dec/Jan 1983/4)

IN COMES LITTLE DEVIL DOUBT

So sad! In ROOMER (you know, the newsletter of the 'Traditional Drama Research Group') Vol III No 1, Sam Richards of Totnes really puts the clog in. Oh! very nicely, but steel-capped for all that. Isn't it about time we got a bit beyond St George and Robin Hood and Chapbooks he sez... How about local pantomimes? Punch and Judy? Street Theatre? Toasting Contests? Party Games? Monologues? And if not, why not, sez he! Well, I am sorry you played it so soon, Sam, for I think that ROOMER would have gone on happily chewing its St Georgian cud until Vol XXIII if left to itself. And there you go wondering "is it possible to justify the word 'Traditional' even in the narrow context of the mummers' play?"

Right on! - or exit left, as some texts have it. It is quite likely that there will be more 'traditional' about the National Theatre's forthcoming 'Cinderella' than in most grass-root mummery-flummery. What intrigues me, however, is a remarkable omission from Sam's own additional panorama of traditional drama! A ceremony of unquestionable lineage and yet still commonplace. And paradoxically it remains invisible to the extent it is truly traditional. For we only tend to take note of these things when they have become alienated from us. Can you name it?

SUMMARY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE CENTRE FOR ENGLISH CULTURAL TRADITION AND LANGUAGE, UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD ON SUNDAY 20 NOVEMBER 1983

Present: Duncan Broomhead, Idwal Jones, Doc Rowe, Derek Schofield, Paul Smith

Apologies for absence were received from Dave Bathe, Peter Millington, Steve Roud and Peter Stevenson.

1. The minutes of the last meeting (7 July 1983) were agreed.

2. Publications

- a) Roomer Paul Smith reported that there was now sufficient material for six issues, this included four very long items which would each run to about twenty pages. These four items included an article on camp skits, the Preston concordance and the Helm handlist. It was suggested that the articles could be spaced out, e.g. two articles per volume. New material is always welcome.

Regarding the decision not to publish any more double issues, Derek Schofield asked what the difference was between double issues and sending two issues in the same envelope!

Paul reported that there were currently about sixty subscribers.

- b) Edwards and Bryning Chapbook It was reported that the printing cost had been £15, but no bill had been received. Stocks of the publication are with Steve, Duncan, Derek, the Folk Shop of EFDSS and CECTAL. As the number of actual chapbooks was now limited, it was agreed to enquire the whereabouts of further stocks held by Geoff Buckley.

- c) Checklists The Oxfordshire list has been delayed and is now not likely to be published until mid 1984

Idwal reported that he and Peter Millington were preparing a Nottinghamshire list and had been checking the references on the computer. However the process was slow and little work had been done recently.

Doc Rowe stated that he had not yet received a quotation for printing the checklists. It was thought that Peter Millington had not yet obtained a quotation either.

Doc Rowe stated that his Devon list was now to hand and could be published in Roomer. His Sussex list was also nearing completion

It was suggested that a short list of West Country references compiled by Bob Patten could also be included in Roomer.

Duncan Broomhead reported that his Cheshire list was progressing but no progress had been made with the Greater Manchester list by either himself or Peter Stevenson.

- d) Research Guides/Information Sheets The first sheet 'Basic Questions to Ask' has been published in Roomer.

The sheet on biographical information had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. Paul Smith agreed to rework the sheet in response to comment.

Derek Schofield stated that he had made no progress with the guides on newspaper sources and surveys. Paul stated that he was awaiting these guides before completing the guide on periodical sources but he agreed to prepare this anyway.

Paul reported that his photograph collections guide was very long and needed redrafting. It was suggested that it be kept to two pages if possible. Paul wanted to include the problems of access, cataloguing and cost.

It was suggested that a guide be published in Roomer on bibliographic references - how to write and interpret them. It was suggested that MHRA, Chicago, Folk Music Journal and Croom Helm style guides be used and referred to.

Doc Rowe offered to prepare practical guides, particularly on copying photographs and tape recording techniques. It was suggested that these include bibliographies of useful articles, etc. Reference was made to John Blacking's guide on tape recording, the Lancaster University guide and the Terry Yarnell booklet.

- e) Monographs and Other Publications Paul suggested the possibility of re-printing the booklet on Jamaican folk plays.

3. Collections

- a) Helm Collection Checklist Paul stated that there were two computer print-outs of the checklist but that it was necessary for people to look through and check these before any further progress could be made.
- b) Ordish Collection Checklist Paul stated that all gaps in the collection had been filled with the exception of the Tarvin, Cheshire play.
- c) Cross-Index to ERD Paul reported that this was nearing completion.

4. Indexing and Archiving

The archiving slips were welcomed; Paul, Derek and particularly Duncan reported that they had used them with ease and success.

Derek suggested that it was now important to see some results in the form of quarterly lists and the setting up of the archive at CECTAL.

It was agreed to ask Peter Millington to send out more forms to everybody and to ask him to get in touch with Paul regarding the archive.

5. Finance

In the absence of Peter Millington, the current financial position was not known. Those who had driven furthest did not wish the travelling expenses to be equalised.

6. Future Meetings

The next meeting was arranged for Saturday, 31 March 1984 at CECTAL. Paul Smith agreed to give the closing presentation - The Plou Boys as Usual -2/6.

7. Any Other Business

Derek reported that he had obtained a copy of Margaret McCormick's dissertation for the TDRG archive. (Part of the dissertation has recently been published in English Dance and Song).

Following the meeting, Idwal Jones gave a talk on Plough Bullocks and the Law, to an audience which included Craig Fees and a group of morris dancers from Doncaster, as well as TDRG members.

The English Folk Dance and Song Society announces a one-day conference

A L LLOYD MEMORIAL CONFERENCE

Saturday 4 February 1984 10.00 - 17.30 hours

At Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY

Fee: £5 (including refreshments)

Cheques should be made payable to The English Folk Dance and Song Society and sent to:

Dr Ian Russell, Bridge House, Unstone, Sheffield S18 5AP

The aim of this conference is to reflect on some facets of the work and achievements of the late A. L. Lloyd. It will, unfortunately, not be possible to cover all aspects of his work due to considerations of time. We shall not, for example, be able to cover his contribution to the artistic policy of Topic Records, his influence as a song stylist, or his contribution to international folk music studies. All of these we must leave for future consideration. In this conference we shall focus on his work in industrial song scholarship, his role as a film maker, and the ideas and theories of his seminal work, Folk Song in England, together with a biography and memoir. Five papers will be presented and it is hoped to have available examples of the film and recorded-sound output of A.L. Lloyd both as a collector and performer.

Conference Chairman: George Deacon

PROGRAMME

- 10.00 Coffee and registration
- 10.30 Introduction by Leslie Shepard
 Roy Palmer, 'A. L. Lloyd and Industrial Song'
 Dave Arthur, 'A. L. Lloyd (1908 - 1982): A Biography'
- 13.00 Break for lunch (available at nearby restaurants and pubs)
- 14.30 Barrie Gavin, 'A.L. Lloyd: Folk Song on Film'
 Vic Gammon, 'A.L. Lloyd and History: A Reconsideration of Aspects
 of Folk Song in England'
- Closing discussion

ABSTRACTS

A.L. LLOYD (1908 - 1982): A BIOGRAPHY

Dave Arthur

Bert Lloyd was arguably the most influential force on the current folk revival in England. It is surprising that despite his very public life as a singer, journalist, broadcaster, and folklorist, little is known of his background. The few tantalising bits of biography are generally embellished with equally tantalising apocryphal tales. This contribution will try to sift the fact from the fiction, from Bert's birth off Tooting High Street in 1908 to his death in Greenwich in 1982.

A.L. LLOYD AND HISTORY: A RECONSIDERATION OF ASPECTS OF FOLK SONG IN ENGLAND

Vic Gammon

This paper will focus on some central aspects of Folk Song in England including Lloyd's theory of the relationship between historical and musical change, his intellectual debts, and the standing of his work in the light of recent research.

A.L. LLOYD: FOLK SONG ON FILM

Barrie Gavin

The speaker will look at the achievements of Lloyd's past work and what it tells us of the pitfalls, problems, and significance of song on film. It will include a description of working with A.L. Lloyd as a collaborator on film and discuss the social and political value of making films of folk song and folk singers.

A.L. LLOYD AND INDUSTRIAL SONG

Roy Palmer

This paper will examine Lloyd's role in bringing industrial song to the fore in the post-war folk revival, his adaptations of texts and tunes for performance, and the uses he saw for industrial song including the influence of industrial song on people and on modern song writers.

INTRODUCTION

Leslie Shepard

As a contemporary, the speaker will give a personal impression of the man and his work from 1937 onwards. He will refer to Lloyd's political position and his books, The Singing Englishman and Corn on the Cob. The talk will be illustrated by 16 mm film and tape recording of Lloyd (c. 1950) made as part of the project that led to Come All Ye Bold Miners.

MUMMERS SEMINAR

W/E 13-15 APRIL 1984

Stafford House, Keymer, Sussex

A residential weekend for people interested in practical mumming. It will cater for all levels of knowledge and experience and an important feature will be the opportunity to meet and talk to other Mummers and enthusiasts.

A maximum of thirty places are available: accommodation is in separate rooms with washbasins (bring your own bedding or sleeping bag). All meals are provided, including a Saturday evening feast.

The draft programme below is flexible and will consist of discussions and instruction on practical aspects. Nearly all the extant printed material will be available for perusal and it is also hoped to show some films.

This weekend is run on behalf of The Morris Ring but is not restricted to Ring members or to members of Morris sides.

Friday 13 April

8.00 - 9.00 Session 1 - Background to Mumming, the Ritual, types of play and costumes.

9.00 - 9.30 Practical Session in groups.

Saturday 14 April

9.30 - 10.30 Session 2 - The Dame and other fringe characters - Father Christmas, Black Jack, Belzebub.

11.00 - 12.00 Practical Session in groups.

2.30 - 3.30 Session 3 - Combatants. St. George, The Turk, Noble Captain.

4.00 - 5.00 Practical Session in groups.

Sunday 15 April

9.30 - 10.30 Session 4 - The Doctor and The Cure.

11.00 - 12.00 General Discussion.

Enquiries and bookings (inclusive fee £20 each, to be sent with application). Closing date for applications Wednesday, 15 February, 1984.

C. Bennett, 82 Tisbury Road, Hove, East Sussex. BN3 3BB Tel: 0273 733128

THE FOLKLORE SOCIETY - ANNUAL ESSAY PRIZE

The Folklore Society is pleased to announce that it intends to offer annual prizes for the best scholarly papers submitted on any topic pertaining to Folklore - interpreted in the broadest sense. The competition is open to all United Kingdom residents; entries and enquiries will be treated in confidence.

Prizes will be awarded in the following categories:

1. For undergraduate students at a United Kingdom institution of Higher or Further Education.
2. For Postgraduate students at a United Kingdom institution of Higher or Further Education.
3. For individuals resident in the United Kingdom but not in full-time education nor specifically engaged full-time in Folklore or related studies.

In each instance the prize will be a cheque for £50 plus £50 worth of books selected by the prize-winner from The Folklore Society's current list of publications.

The prizes will be awarded at the Society's A.G.M. which is held annually in March.

Further information can be obtained from Annual Essay Prize, The Folklore Society, c/o University College London, Gower Street, London. WC1E 6BT

PUBLICATION NEWS

Thomas Pettitt review of David Wiles, The Early Plays of Robin Hood (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), Folk Music Journal 4:4 (1983) pp.421-4.

J. Edward Rigg, 'Traditional Drama and Related Customs' BUZZ (Winter 1983) p.4.

Richard Bourne, 'Mummers' BUZZ (Winter 1983) pp.21-22.

Mary Rohrberger and Dorothy H. Petty, 'The English Folk Hero and Elizabethan Tragedy' Journal of Popular Culture, IX:3 (Winter 1975) pp.629-637.

ROOMER: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP

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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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