

ROOMER

The Newsletter of the Traditional
Drama Research Group.
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PUBLICATIONS NEWS

Thomas Pettitt, The Early English Mummers' Play: A Contextual Reconstruction (Odense: Pre-Publications of the English Dept. of Odense University, No.31, 1985).

Thomas Pettitt, 'Tudor Interludes and the Winter Revels', Medieval English Theatre 6:1 (1984) pp.16-27.

Thomas Pettitt, 'Approaches to Folk Drama', The Edam Newsletter 7:2 (Spring 1985) pp.23-27.

Flavia Waters Champe, The Matachines of the Upper Rio Grande: History, Music and Choreography (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl, Stuart Cosgrove, Theatres of the Left 1880-1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) (History Workshop Series).

Jon Drake, The Fool and the Hobby-Horse: Their Role in Ritual Drama of Britain (Garsington: Southend Press, 1985).

Rudd Rayfield, 'Mumming in Minnesota [A Report on the first Minnesota Sword Dance and Mumming Ale - January 1984]', Morris Matters 7:3 (1985) p.6.

Diana Howard, Directory of Theatre Research and Information Resources in the U.K. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980).

Margaret M. Robertson, The Newfoundland Mummers' Christmas House-Visit (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1984 : Mercury Series) (Canadian Centre for Folk Studies Paper No.49).

SECOND MINNESOTA SWORD DANCE & MUMMING ALE

Minneapolis, Minnesota January 3 - 5, 1986

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In 1967, Cawte, Helm and Peacock (1) listed seven plays from Kent including four full texts and two fragments, all from the mid and west Kent regions. One fragment is of no known location and bears similarities to parts of a play from Broadway, Worcestershire (2). Two Kent texts, Bearsted and Milton Regis, were listed as being in the Vaughan Williams Library, but were later found to be 'missing'. Thus initial work in Kent has had to concentrate on retrieving missing texts and gathering scattered published material.

The Bearsted play came to light in a local school where it had been in use at some time. The text correlated well with other known fragments from Bearsted (3, 4) and with other Kent plays.

A play from Westerham had been introduced to Sundridge and performed up till about 1920. It was collected in 1953 by members of Ravensbourn Morris but had not been circulated. A copy is in the writer's possession. The West Malling play was performed till 1930 and possibly genuine fragments were included in an otherwise spurious text published in 1951 (5). Of a possible play from the Blackheath area we have but one fragment (6). Through the auspices of a local historian and library we have the text of the play from Milton, or Milton Regis, near Sittingbourne, which is transcribed here.

The current state of knowledge on Mid to West Kent mumming plays, as understood by the writer, is given in table 1. General features of the plays are presented in table 2. Specific points to note are the title 'Seven Champions' and the frequent equating of Johnny Jack with a sweep. Most follow the conventional standard outline of mummers plays, although Milton has some complications of form which will be enumerated below. Two plays (Westerham and West Malling) have a begging speech for 'All' at the end.

The Johnny Jack/Sweep character

Six of the plays include as the begging character a little Johnny Jack figure. Only in one, Westerham, is he totally conventional - i.e. is called Johnny Jack, has dolls on his back, refers to them and begs on their behalf.

Three plays, Bearsted, Milton, and Sutton, equate him with a Sweep, and at Shoreham with Quing Quang as he is in parts of Sussex and Hampshire (7). At Milton, Shoreham, and Sutton he has dolls on his back and refers to them as his family. In all the plays he begs but only in Milton on behalf of his family. In the full text version of Bearsted he begs for "All the men I have to keep". In the Bearsted fragment (8) and at Sutton and West Malling he appears meaner - "All the money I gets I keep". In the Malling play Johnny Jack and Chimney Sweep are given as two separate characters, but the words of the former are spurious. At Shoreham he has four lines which turn up in Westerham/Sundridge as a 'chorus' for All at the end - "So ladies and gentlemen there at your ease, Give us Seven Champions just what you please". This has a parallel in the speech of little Black Jack at Ovingdean, Sussex (9).

Unlike Devil Doubt in other counties, the Sweep is not required to actually sweep. Only by his name, and sometimes only in directions as opposed to dialogue is he referred to as the sweep. Chambers (10) mentions a Sweep with the line "All the money I get I mean to keep" but fails to indicate a location.

Up to at least 1890 Rochester had an annual May Day begging procession of sweeps, with a Jack in the Green (11, 12), although no connection has yet been proven.

The Milton Play - History

Most of what we know about the play we owe to Mr. Douglas Knowles of West Ridge, Sittingbourne, a local authority on the town's history. He was formerly the Milton postmaster (13), and was aged 77 in 1978 (14).

The play was performed by workers from local brickfields to earn beer money at Christmas, the last performance being in 1904. At that time there were at least five brickfields in the area but the work, and hence employment, was very seasonal; March to September. No comprehensive list of employees of the time is available but research continues into this aspect.

Thus, the men who performed the play may have been seasonally out of work and in need of the money, if only for the luxury of beer.

According to Mr. Knowles:

"People used to look forward to the Christmas tour, the players added a lot of their own words to the original play. They were very amusing characters. They used to visit about three pubs in the High Street each night and would do the odd charity show in a hall" (15).

The Doctor of the last performance, Bill Crook, gave Mr. Knowles a hand-written copy of the play in about 1961, and showed Mr. Knowle a photograph of the actors. The whereabouts of this photograph is now unknown, but the manuscript stayed with Mr. Knowles, who deposited a photocopy of it with Sittingbourne public library. In 1978 a local paper published an appeal for the play to be revived (16). A subsequent revival by a local team of mummers and sword dancers led to a typed copy being deposited in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. This typed copy is a performing version rather than a fair copy of the original manuscript. It reasonably sets out the play in such a way as to clarify the rhyming scheme and adds punctuation. In addition, as stated in a postscript, "the m.s....contained some spelling and grammatical peculiarities, these have been altered to a more regular form here". Thus, this copy may be of use as a performing version but contains too many alterations, including some misreadings, to be considered for serious study.

The Manuscript

This comprises six sides of hand-writing. The hand is clear but there is little attempt at punctuation, and none at layout of rhyme scheme. The title and brief notes are given as postscript rather than at the head of the text. An unusual and very valuable feature is a list of names of the players in the last performance of 1904.

The Play - some unusual features

1. Kentish features of the little 'Seven Champions' and the character of the Sweep.
2. Turkish Snipe takes the part of 'Room' before his normal, conventional entrance speech.
3. The Sweep has several speeches before his entry proper at the end of the play. For instance the dialogue with the Doctor (lines 53, 66) which could have been taken by any 'spare' character.
4. Banter with the Doctor is distributed amongst Sweep, Turkish Snipe, and King of Egypt. In some other traditions, e.g. Sutton at Hone, Father Christmas figures in such passages but here may be 'absent' in order to re-enter as Strongbone.
5. Sweep has a speech missing which is referred to as "The Sweep calls for Father Christmas which is Strong Bone" (lines 54/55).
6. Father Christmas re-enters near the end as Strong Bone. From his club he appears to be a Beelzebub character. Beelzebub does appear in three or four other Kent plays. Unusually at Milton, he proceeds to fight St. George and starts to win, but is stopped by the King of Egypt.
7. There are three fights, but only one ends in a 'fatality'.
8. The main fight is between St. George and Soldier Boy (Slasher) rather than the Turkish Knight. It is rare for both of these to be present, although another example is Shoreham.
9. Seven actors take what appear to be nine parts - the 'extras' being the Room character at the beginning and Strong Bone.

The following tables are given to clarify the state of knowledge of plays in Kent and some of their characteristic features.

Location	Map reference	Date extant	Time of appearance	Content	Class.	Source**	Comments
Bearsted	TQ 8055		Christmas	T FT F F F	H	VauC VauC History Chambers	Lost From local school Description & 1 line 2 lines
Blackheath?	TQ 3876						
Milton Regis	TQ 9064	1910	Christmas	T T	H	VauC Sitt. Pub. Lib. VauC	Lost [as transcribed here] Performing version of ditto
Rochester	TQ 7369	1890s 1899	Christmas	F NT	H	Thorndike Harris	Description only
Shoreham	TQ 5261	c1900	Christmas	T	H	Smith	
Snodland	TQ 7061	1888		NT	H	AdaC	
Sundridge	TQ 4854	c1920	Christmas (just before)	T	H	Willetts Coll.	
Sutton-at-Hone	TQ 5570	c1895	Christmas	T	H	PLUC Hawks	Coll. by Ravensbourne Morris Men. As Westerham
Westerham	TQ 4454	1896/7	Christmas (just before)	T	H	Willetts Coll.	
West Malling	TQ 6857	1930	Christmas	F	H	Cronk Willetts (1985)	Coll. by Ravensbourne Morris Men. As Sundridge Full text given but mainly spurious
Unlocated				F	d/H	VauC	

** For an explanation of the abbreviations for sources used here, see Notes and References (below).

TABLE 1 Kent Mummers Plays (up-date of list in English Ritual Drama)

LOCATION	TITLE	PLAYERS	PARTS	OPENER	COMBATANTS ++Fatality	OTHERS NEAR CENTRE	DOCTOR	OTHERS NEAR END	COLLECTOR	OTHER FEATURES
Bearsted	Seven Champions	7/8	8	Room (Gardener)	King George +Little Slasher	Guard	Noble Doctor	Father Christmas Beelzebub	Jack Sweep	
Blackheath								Be-elzebub		
Milton Regis	The Seven Champions	7	8/9	Turkish Kn. (Room) Old Father Christmas	St.George Turkish Snipe +Soldier Boy Slasher Strongbone	King of Egypt	Noble Doctor	Shim Shack the Sweep		
Rochester	The Seven Champions of Christ- endom							Beelzebub		
Shoreham	The Seven Champions	6	6	Old Father Christmas	St.George +Turkish Knight	Bold Slasher	Doctor		Little Quing Quang or Little Johnny Jack	
Sutton at Hone	(Mummers)	6	6	Father Christmas	+Turkish Kn. Bold George		Doctor Dodd	Be-elzebub	Johnny Jack the Sweep	
Westerham	The Old Christmas Champions	6	6	Old Father Christmas	King George +Turkish Kn.	Old Woman	Italian Doctor		Little Johnny Jack	'All' at end Music at end
West Malling	The Seven Champions				St.George				Chimney Sweep	'All' at end
Unlocated	(Mummers)		3		+A 'Sir'	B Lady	Doctor			Dance at end

TABLE 2 Features of Kent Plays

LOCATION	CHARACTER NAME	DOLLS	REFERS TO FAMILY ON BACK?	BEGGS?	BEGGS FOR FAMILY OR OTHERS?	"I MEAN TO KEEP"
Bearsted (History)	Little Jack Sweep	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Bearsted (YWL)	Jack Sweep	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Milton	Old Shim Shack the Sweep	6 + 1 large	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Shoreham	Quing Quang named Little Johnny Jack	several + 1 large	Yes	Yes	No	No
Sutton at Hone	Little Johnny Jack the Sweep	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Westerham	Little Johnny Jack	4 + 1 large	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
West Malling	Chimney Sweep	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

TABLE 3 Johnny Jack / Sweep in Kent

NOTES and REFERENCES

1. E.C.Cawte, Alex Helm & Norman Peacock, English Ritual Drama (London: The Folklore Society, 1967) p.48.
2. Alex Helm, The English Mummers' Play (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S.Brewer, 1980) pp.36-7.
3. A History of Bearsted and Thurnham (Bearsted & Thurnham History Book Committee, n.d. [1978] p.136.
4. Sir Edmund Chambers, The English Folk Play (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933) p.40.
5. A.Cronk, A Short History of West Malling, Kent (Privately published, 1951. See also Carl Willetts, 'West Malling, Kent', Roomer 5:3 (1985) pp.23-4.
6. Private communication, M.Scott to Carl Willetts.
7. Chambers op.cit. pp.66-7. In Hampshire, where 'Twing Twang' is most common, he is nearly always associated with Johnny Jack, one performer usually taking both parts and, indeed, Johnny Jack and Twing Twang often seem to have been regarded as one character, despite having two names (information from Steve Roud).
8. As note 3.
9. R.J.E.Tiddy, The Mummers' Play (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923) p.205.
10. Chambers op.cit. p.68.
11. Russell Thorndike, Sybil Thorndike (2nd Ed.; London: Rockliff, 1950) p.32.
12. Edwin Harris, Curious Kentish Customs (Rochester: Edwin Harris & Sons, 1899) p.11.
13. Private communication, D.S.Cousins to P.Smith.
14. [Faversham] Gazette and Times 26th January 1978, p.30.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

ABBREVIATIONS TO SOURCES USED IN TABLE 1

AdaC	Robert C.Adams Collection (as communicated to Alex Helm)
Chambers	See note 4 above
Cronk	See note 5 above
Harris	See note 12 above
Hawks	Material from the Mervyn Plunkett Collection, published as 'The Sutton-at-Hone Mummers' Play', <u>Ethnic</u> No.1, January 1959, pp.18-19.
History	See note 3 above
PluC	Mervyn Plunkett Collection
Sitt. Pub. Lib.	Milton Regis play manuscript in Sittingbourne Public Library, as transcribed here.
Smith	Alan Smith, 'A West Kent Christmas Mummers Play', <u>Kent County Journal</u> Vol.7 No.4, Jan.-Mar. 1947, pp.97-8.
Thorndike	See note 11 above
VauC	Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Collection
Willetts (1985)	See note 5 above
Willetts Coll.	Carl Willetts Collection.

THE MILTON REGIS PLAY

Reproduced from the manuscript in Sittingbourne Public Library by kind permission of the collector Douglas Knowles.

The following transcription keeps as close to the original as possible as regards spelling and length of lines, although the spaces between the speeches has been increased to make it easier to read and line numbers added for ease of reference. The superscript second letter in the abbreviations for 'Saint' and 'Doctor' have been rendered as ordinary lower-case letters. The original writer (presumably Mr. Cook) often drew horizontal lines, of varying lengths, between different speeches and sometimes between the name of the speaker and his words. At first glance, these appear to be underlinings of words or parts of words, but on close examination it is clear that they are used merely as separators and have thus been omitted here,

Turkish Snip He Speaks

Open the door and let me in I beg your favour for to win
 Whether I rise die. stand or fall. I'll do my Duty to please you all
 Room, room guard room give me room to rise
 I have come to show you some pretty sport to pass away this
 Christmas thime. the new activity the old activity that 5
 you have never seen before. I am the little man that
 Leads Old Father Christmas up to the door

Father Xmas Speaks

In comes I Old Father Christmas Welcome here or welcome not
 it is to be hopes that Old Father Christmas will never be forgot
 Christmas comes but once a year and when it comes it brings 10
 good cheer all in this House a merry place
 So step in the King of Egypt and clear the way

King of Egypt speaks

In comes I King of Egypt plainly does appear walk in
 St. George, St. George my only son and heir walk in
 St. George and act thy part and show the People 15
 in this room the true and Glouriness of thy Heart
 Heart strong and bold nothing to be seen but shineing gold
 now is the time of day to see the upstarts Dragon
 to fire away walk in St. George and clear the way

St. George, speaks

In comes I St. George..St. George just from Old England 20
 Sprange one of those mighty wonders that ever first
 began first a Dungeon I did sleep and next to a rock
 of stone I did most grievly mourn ubtil I come to
 understand there was a bold Turk in this land
 Oh where is this man against me stand. I'll cut him 25
 with my sword in Hand.

Turkish Snipe. speaks

I am this Turkish Snipe from Turkey shore I come to seek
 Those trembling words of life I thought I heard a word

Blaspheme out. Dress me of my Turkish name Oh where is
 This man against whom I stand I'll cut him down with 30
 my sword in Hand, pull out your sword and fight
 pull out your purse and pay for Satisfaction I will have
 before I go away

St. George, speaks

Satisfaction to me you crave no Satisfaction shall be
 Shall you have. for in less than five minutes time you 35
 will be my slave, stick up, stick up it shall be shown
 the best of Battles that ever was known the clock strikes
 one the time draws nigh get off you Dog or else you die

Then St. George and Turkish Snipe Fight
 and Soldier Boy (intervene)

Soldier Boy 1st speaks

In comes I little Soldier Boy slasher his my name
 Sword and buckle by my me side I am sure to 40
 win the game

King of Egypt speaks

Oh cutter, Oh Slasher dont talk so hot for there his
 a man in this room what a little thing he has
 got. He will hack you and cut you has small
 as a fly and send you to the bake House to 45
 make a mince pie

Soldier Boy 2nd speaks

Lie. Lie you little dog it does not lay in his
 power to hack me and cut me has small has
 a fly & send me to the bake House to made a
 mince pie. for my Head is made of brass my Body 50
 is made of steel my legs and arms of rock and
 stone no sword shall make me feel

Then the Soldier Boy & St. George fight
 Soldier Boy gets wounded. and the
 Sweep catches Soldier Boy. and the Sweep
 calls for a Dr.

The Sweep calls for a Dr.

Oh Doctor Doctor. is there a Dr. to be found

Dr. speaks - Oh yes there is a Dr. good and dear who has
 traveled this country both far and near 55

Turkish Snipe - How far have you traveled Mr. noble Doctor
 said

Dr. speaks - Far enough to earn my Bread and cheese and
 make my cheeks look red

King of Egypt - no farther Mr. noble Dr.
 speaks

Dr. speaks - Oh yes through Italy. Ditaly falls of Spain and
 now returned to old England again to cure this 60
 man who lies here slain Twenty pounds I want
 for my pay

Turkish Snipe said I will see that paid Mr. noble Dr.

Dr. said better man than you I hope 65

Sweep said I will see that paid Mr. noble Dr.

Dr. said. yes you will do

Dr. said

I have a little bottle in my left hand coat pocket called
the Golden Hospital. It will cure the Hipsy Palsy
cout, pains within or pains without Here Jack take abit 70
nip.nap Shure it up your Tip Tap arise Jack and fight
again. The Soldier Boy rise's

Dr. then said,

Behold. Behold you see what I have done I
rose this man from the ground I've healed his
wounds and cleansed his Blood and gave him 75
stuff to do him good

Then Sweep calls for Father Christmas
Which is Strong Bone

In comes I old Strongbone might man and well known
with my club I'll break St. George's precious bones

Then St. George said

Ha, Ha Strongbone might man thou art indeed with
my glittering sword I'll pierce you to the Heart and 80
make you bleed

Then they both fight

King of Egypt said,

Holt. Holt. Strongbone dont strike him anymore for
his wounds are very sore.

FINAL,

The last one is the Sweep He said

In come I little old Shim, Shack with my Wife
and Family on my back. Some at the Workhouse 85
and the rest will be there when I get Home
so dont forget the Box Gent's Please

The Sweep got one big Doll that suppose to be his
Wife, and six small Doll's sewn on his back

The Seven Champions

Was played by old Mittonians over 90 years ago
the last time it was played Christmas 1904
I am the last surviving one who played Doctor
Part in that year

The Characters Were

St. George. Bob Kemp)	
Turkish Snipe - Jumbo Kemp)	
King of Egypt - David Hodge)>	All was Brickfield
Doctor - Bill. Crook)	Workers
Soldier Boy - Steve'y George)	
Father Christmas Joe.Stears)	
Sweep - Dick Whitingdon)	

BEMBRIDGE, ISLE OF WIGHT (SZ 6488)

Collection Stephen Roud. Letter from Frank O'B. Adams, 10.5.1977. Mr. Adams was 'nearly 82' when he wrote, but died within a few days of posting it.

"I was born and lived in Bembridge, in the Isle of Wight, and remember when very small 'The Christmas Boys', but it was in 1911 when I took part, and although some of the characters are forgotten, some of it still remains.

Firstly, there was no written script. It was handed down, year after year by word of mouth. Of those characters I remember there were the Doctor, Turkish Knight, Johnny Jack and his wife, St. George, and others - about eight or nine altogether dressed in home-made costumes.

In 1911 I was St. George, and as far as I can remember my part was

In comes I, St. George, tonight
 The man that wears the stars so bright
 I come here tonight to save that pretty maid
 And kill that Turkish Knight
 With my glittering sword and spear I won ten crowns of gold
 I fought the fiery dragon and brought him to a slaughter
 By means of which I won the King of Egypt's daughter
 Where is that Turkish Knight? (Enter the Turkish Knight)

What was said then I don't remember but there was a clash of swords and he was killed. St. George was dressed in a suit covered in coloured frills, sewn on, with a helmet with a pampas grass as a plume. Turkish Knight had baggy trousers and blouse, with fez. The Doctor, with a top hat and black bag had pills and medicine, and in his dialogue

I can cure the itch, stitch, palsy or gout
 Or any rheumatics that go in and out
 Broken legs or broken arm
 I can very soon cure the pain

Little Johnny Jack was dressed non-descript, with a bag of dolls on his back - his family...

In comes I Little Johnny Jack
 With wife and family at my back
 They are large and I am small
 But I'M the best man of them all

His wife, with a broom, came along sweeping, saying

Sweep, sweep, all I find I'm going to keep

Johnny turns and says

What did you say, you dirty old faggot?
 I'll give you a warming

And they have a row.

It was great fun, I know that, especially spoken in dialect. For instance it was never Turkish Knight. It was 'Turkey Snipe'...if it was being played in one of the village inns, the Doctor or Little Johnny Jack would enter the scene with one of many sayings, one being

Ten O'clock and no-one here?
 It's time the big-heads did appear

(Walk in the Big-Heads) which was the signal for a collection for the 'Boys'...".

NOTESSTUART PIGGOTT COLLECTION

From time to time, we get enquiries about the plays collected by Stuart Piggott in the 1920's - usually seeking further information as regards sources and the whereabouts of his original field-notes or manuscripts. For the information of future researchers, the following extracts from a letter written by Prof. Piggott in December 1984 to one such enquirer is worth publishing:

"Your letter was a reminder of a remote past indeed, when as a schoolboy I collected texts of Mummers' Plays (including one from this village, where my family lived) [West Challow, SU 3688, formerly Berks. but now Oxon.]. This collecting was part of a general antiquarianism on my part which turned into prehistoric archaeology, though I have always retained an interest in folklore.

....When E.K.Chambers published his The English Folk-Play in 1934, I sent him all my transcripts and notes, which he intended to use should there be a second edition..."

The task now is to locate E.K.Chambers' Folk Play manuscripts!!

SOVIET FILMS

It is hoped that copies of the Soviet Folk films announced in the last issue of Roomer (5:4, 1985, p.31) will remain in this country and be available for showing at future Traditional Drama Conferences.

MASKS AND MUMMERS OF SCANDINAVIA

Accompanying this issue of Roomer is a leaflet about Carsten Bregenhøj's film and exhibition on Scandinavian 'Mummers'. The film was shown at the 1985 Traditional Drama Conference, and it is hoped that both film and exhibition will be touring Britain in 1986.

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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