

ROOMER

The New Letter of the Traditional
Drama Research Group
Vol. 7 no. 1 1988



THE FUTURE OF ROOMER

Many thanks to those who wrote or phoned in response to our editorial in the last issue of Roomer, and for the supportive comments and suggestions made.

Roomer will certainly continue publication - providing we receive sufficient contributions to fill it. We will be aiming for roughly quarterly publication, and from now on a subscription pays for 4 issues.

PLEASE NOTE THAT SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR VOL. 7 ARE NOW DUE. The bank balance is pretty low, and we would therefore appreciate prompt payment!!

TRADITIONAL DRAMA CONFERENCE

The TD Conferences held in Sheffield used to be our main opportunity for meeting and exchanging ideas, and several people have commented how much they miss them. We haven't had one for a few years now, partly because of a general running out of steam, but mainly because Paul Smith, who did most of the organising, has spent so much time out of the country recently.

However, if there is sufficient interest, we may be able to organise something for late 1989 - either in London or Sheffield, organised by CECTAL or the Folklore Society in conjunction with TDRG, formal papers or informal seminar format - whatever seems appropriate. If anyone wants to support the idea please contact Steve Roud (18 Amberley Grove, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6ND; Tel. 01 654 6233) and we'll see what can be done.

NOTE TO FUTURE CATALOGUERS:-

Vol. 6 was dated 1986, although the last part was not issued until 1988. Each issue from now on will bear the actual year of publication, so there are no issues bearing the date 1987.

INTRODUCTION

The British broadcast media have not only documented British dialect and folk custom extensively, and made a significant contribution to British ethnography in doing so; but they have contributed to the popular perception of British traditional culture and have played a major role in its preservation and change.

The BBC Written Archives Centre near Reading does not appear to have been very widely used by folklorists attempting to study either customs themselves or the impact of the media on them. In this series of contributions to *Roomer* I hope to indicate something of the scope and nature of the material held in the BBC Written Archives Centre, and thereby introduce a very pleasant, important, but under-utilised resource to other folklorists working in Britain. All throughout, of course, thanks are due to the staff of the Centre.

Part two of the series will be: **The BBC's Influence on Folk Customs: A Case Study**; and Part three: **BBC and Mummig: An Initial List**.

A.W.BOYD, SOULCAKING AND THE BBC

In his Doctoral dissertation, Paul Smith capsulates the history of the Antrobus (Cheshire) Soul-Cakers, and in doing so necessarily refers to Major A.W.Boyd of Frandley House, Antrobus, and his

..well known...patronal interest in the local Souling play traditions. As early as 1927, Boyd had written a paper on 'The Comberbach Version of the Soul-Caking Play' (Boyd 1927), indicating that had spent a considerable time researching the subject. The extent of his patronage can be demonstrated in that the BBC broadcast the Comberbach play from his home, Frandley Brow House [1], on 31st October 1934 and also in 1936 (Boyd 1939 [b], 44). Similarly, he financed a film of the Antrobus team in 1954 and when the BBC wished to broadcast the play in 1955 from recordings made in 1954, they contacted Boyd for permission and not the Antrobus team themselves [2]. It is also possible that a second revival, or at least a strengthening of the tradition, took place shortly after the Second World War and Boyd possibly had a hand in this also (Boyd 1951, 68).

(Smith 1985, 147)

The BBC Written Archives Centre holds material which can supplement Smith's statements and help us to amend or clarify others. The chief sources of information in this case are the **Programmes as Broadcast** (the broadcast logbooks, hereafter referred to as PasB's); the **Radio Times** and **London Calling** magazines; and file N18/288 Artist: Boyd, A.W. 1946 (-1959) (3).

The 1934 broadcast of the Comberbach Soulcakings took place on Wednesday October 31st. It was part of a programme on the Northern Region service of the BBC entitled 'Nutcrack Night', and went out

between 7.45 and 8.28 in the evening. The PasB and the **Radio Times** of 26.10.1934, p.318, both describe the programme in these words:

'Nutcrack Night' or Hallowe'en in the North. A radio study in superstition and folklore by D.G. Bridson, in which is included a relay of the Comberbach Soul-Caking play from Frandley House, Cheshire.

The prominent place accorded the Soul-Cakers in this 1934 programme is indicated not only by their mention in the programme description, but by a large photograph of the Soul-Cakers which heads the **Radio Times** Northern Region listing for October 31, 1934, and their mention again in a long paragraph following the one just quoted.

The PasB - which refers to them as the Comberbach "Mummers" - shows further that the Soul-Cakers were the last but one item broadcast in the programme. It makes no mention of Boyd, which indicates that he neither spoke nor was paid for the use of his house, normally quoted in PasB's as "facilities".

The 1936 broadcast of the Comberbach Soul-Cakers (called Comberbach "Mummers" again in the PasB) took place in the Northern Region Service on Sunday, November 1. The PasB -

5.43-6.00 L The Comberbach Mummers.
An Ancient Play as
Performed at the Frandley
House, Comberbach, with
preface and commentary by
A.W. Boyd.

indicates that the Soul-Cakers were given about fifteen minutes and a programme slot to themselves, with an introduction and short talk by Boyd. The "L" indicates that Boyd and the Soul-Cakers were paid on a local contract basis: the PasB does not indicate how much, but it is likely that Boyd received several guineas and each of the Soul-Cakers something in the region of a guinea. This would be a substantial amount for a mummer to receive in 1936 terms, and therefore ought to be verified by comparison with other such occasions as research develops.

The importance of Boyd to the post-World War Two Soul-Cakers as conjectured by Smith is corroborated by material in Boyd's BBC file. On August 31, 1946, he re-opened correspondence to the BBC with this letter:

The Cheshire Soul-Cakers who perform their ancient traditional mummers' play on the last day of October, broadcast from here in 1934 and 1936 and were heard with great interest, as was evident from later correspondence.

I am writing to suggest that a broadcast this year would arouse equal interest. It is now ten years since they were last heard (D.G. Bridson directed the first broadcast and Aubrey Herbert the second) and few of the younger generation will have heard them.

There are two gangs who perform the play - one at Comberbach and the other at Antrobus, two villages next to one another - and I am sure either would be delighted to broadcast. The Comberbach team consists of young men, none of whom had acted till last October; the Antrobus team are older, and many of them have been acting in the play for many years. The two previous broadcasts were done by the Comberbach team. If you think there is a chance of a favourable reply to my suggestion I can get in touch with the members of either team and would be happy to make such arrangements as were needed.

I have for the last 25 years taken considerable interest in this play so as to keep it alive.

The letter came at a time when a number of people within the BBC were taking an active interest in dialect and folk customs (4); indeed, that Christmas BBC Midlands produced a programme which included the performance of three mummers' plays (5). In this instance, the BBC hired Boyd to give a brief - about 3-1/4 minutes - talk about the Soul Cakers which was broadcast on Northern Region's 'Topical Talk' programme on Wednesday, October 30, 1946, at 6.25 pm, for which Boyd was paid three guineas (6). Muriel Burton, the BBC Northern Region Assistant Publicity Officer, was Boyd's guest at Frandley House the next evening, and wrote to the editor of *London Calling* on November 1, 1946:

I went to see the soul-caking plays referred to on October 31st at Mr. Boyd's house, and attach a few further notes on the play. Press photographs were taken, and if you are interested, I will send you a selection. I attach a press cutting with a photograph. (7)

London Calling (the BBC's magazine for overseas listeners) subsequently published Boyd's script, with three of the photographs: The Black Prince and King George fighting; the Black Prince dead with King George, Quack Doctor and "weeping mother" standing over him; and the Wild Horse and its Driver (Boyd 1946). "From Immemorial times", said the lead-in to Boyd's article,

mummers in Cheshire have, every season, from Hallowe'en until the end of the year, performed a play consisting of a fight between St. George and the Black Prince. An important part of the mummers' ritual is 'soul-caking' - Cheshire dialect for 'asking for alms'. A.W. Boyd, one of the country's most eminent naturalists, here describes the VILLAGE MUMMERS OF CHESHIRE.

Boyd's text, designed to be spoken slowly and distinctly in 3-1/4 minutes, was necessarily short:

This year, the custom of presenting the 'soul-caking' play is being maintained in the Cheshire villages of Comberbach and Antrobus. This play, which is said to go back to pre-Christian times, and to indicate the immemorial belief in survival after death, is, in its present form, an odd mixture, in which comic figures play a prominent part.

The performers are all young men from the villages; a farmer, farm labourers, the milkman, a wagon driver, a bricksetter, and the like, who have learnt from their fathers and grandfathers the nominy they recite. 'Nominny', by the way, is a dialect word for speech or rigmarole.

Briefly, the play consists of a fight between King George (originally St. George) and the Black Prince. After the Black Prince is killed in fair fight, his mother rushes in and weeps over him, calling for a doctor to restore him to life. In comes the Quack Doctor and declares, 'If a man has nineteen devils in his heart, I can cast twenty-one out'. He brings the dead man back to life, and there the actual play ends.

Then, two comic characters enter, 'Dairy Doubt' and 'Beelzebub' with his dripping-pan, and they are followed by the big moment of the evening - the capers of the Wild Horse. This is a real horse's skull, painted in white and red, with jaws that snap. It is supported on a pole, and carried by a man under a rug. Its driver, in hunting pink, describes its adventures and qualities.

The Comberbach horse is descended from a famous local horse:

This horse was bred from Marbury Dun
The fastest horse that ever run
Run fourteen mile in fifteen hour
And never sweat a hair.

The Antrobus horse, however, comes from Sevenoaks, a township in that parish:

This horse was bred in Sevenoaks,
The finest horse e'er fed on oats
It won the Derby and the Oaks,
And now it pulls an old milk float.

The horse was once regarded as a symbol of fertility, and in past generations there was often a fight between gangs of 'soul-cakers' to capture the horse's head, and so secure fertility for their own village. (Boyd 1946).

The BBC preferred to deal with traditional performers through local contacts. It was therefore through Boyd that Peter Kennedy was introduced to the Antrobus team for recording purposes in 1954. It was Boyd again who was contacted when the BBC wished permission to process Kennedy's field-recording onto permanent discs, with the implication that the BBC would hold the broadcast rights to that specific recording. It was for this reason - and not, as Smith states, because the BBC wanted to broadcast the play (there was clearly no broadcast in 1955) - that the BBC contacted Boyd in 1955. Marie Slocombe, of the BBC Recorded Programmes Permanent Library, wrote to the Northern Region's Programme Executive on 1.12.1955:

In October of last year, on his way to a folk music recording expedition in N. Wales, Peter Kennedy took the opportunity to record the Antrobus [sic] Soul Cakers' traditional performance at 'The Wheatsheaf' Inn on All Souls' Eve, 30th October.

We would like to put this recording, which includes the Souling Song sung by the Mummers, into R.P. [Recorded Programmes] Permanent Library. Mr. Kennedy suggests we write for permission to the person through whom he met the Soulakers, who is Major A.W. Boyd, Frandley House, Antrobus [sic], Northwich, Cheshire, and send him a suitable donation to be passed to the leader, Mr. Wilfred Isherwood.

I should be grateful if you could kindly arrange this for us, and suggest 5 guineas might be a suitable sum to offer.

I'm afraid we must also apologise for being so long about it, but Peter Kennedy has been on several long trips since then, as well as working on a weekly series of programmes, and we have only just finished sorting out last year's recordings! (8).

The Northern Region Programme Executive wrote to Boyd on December 13th and received Boyd's signed acceptance on the 19th (9).

Boyd's talk in 1946 referred to both the Comberbach and Antrobus Soul-Cakers. He was hired by the BBC to give another talk on the Soul-Cakers in 1957. The Comberbach team had by then packed up (Pattison 1975, p.5), and his talk concerned the Antrobus team alone. Boyd was given slightly less time than in 1946, and though I haven't been able to find a script, it is very likely to have been similar to the first. Twenty-five seconds of the 1954 recording was used for colour, along with thirty seconds of a Souling song, apparently pulled from BBC stock, as shown in the appropriate section of the Northern Region PasB for Thursday October 31, 1957:

13.10. The Week Ahead
(Topicality Unit)
Taking Part:
Oliver Shapley Narrator, live from Manchester Studio
A.W. Boyd Talk on the Antrobus "Soul-cakers"
Play" (pre-recorded in Manchester
Studio on 30.10.1957 to TMR
3670 and copied on 30.10.1957
to C/DMR 3670) 03' 10"

Discs used:

Folk Customs: England
The Antrobus Soulakers A.B.R. BBC Collection
(pre-recorded at Wheatsheaf Inn, Antrobus (P. Kennedy) (10)
Northwich, Cheshire) Lib. no. 22345

Disc A. Band 2 - Souling Song (Trad. n/c) 00' 30" (11)
Disc B. Last part of play 00' 25"

Boyd was paid four guineas for the talk (12). It was Boyd's last on the topic of the Soul-Cakers. He died in 1959.

The extant BBC material, published and unpublished, therefore adds a fair bit of information both on the history of the Comberbach and Antrobus Soul Cakers and on Boyd's relation to them. It indicates something about the BBC's procedures and relations with local customs, gives specific broadcast dates from which searches in local and national newspapers can be undertaken, and raises various questions for further research.

An obvious question relates to the actual and perceived roles of the BBC in the survival of local customs. Boyd remarked in his 1946 letter that "I have for the last twenty-five years taken considerable interest in this play so as to keep it alive", implying an expectation that BBC attention would help. To the extent that he was correct, was it the publicity which helped, or the boost to the Soul-Cakers' sense of importance, or was it the money the Soul-Cakers made from the occasional broadcasts which helped keep the custom going? In other words, did the BBC create an economy of fame and money within which selected local customs thrived?

If so, did the customs that "came over" best on radio thrive at the expense of other, less suited customs? If so, what impact did the rise of television then have?

Boyd's earliest published interest was in the Comberbach Soul-Cakers (Boyd 1927), and it was the Comberbach Soul-Cakers which benefited from BBC broadcasts between the wars. In Boyd's 1946 letter, though he mentions Comberbach, it is the Antrobus Soul-Cakers whom he puts forward gently but more strongly for broadcast. Does this indicate a shift in his loyalties? Would such an otherwise unattested shift suggest a reason why the Comberbach team failed in the early 1950's while the Antrobus team carried on to the time of Boyd's death?

Does the strength and consistency of BBC attention, mediated by Boyd - the 1946 talk, visit and articles; the 1954 recording; the 1955 payment; the 1957 talk - account in part for the ability of the Antrobus team to reform in 1963 after contact from an EFDSS representative (Pattison 1975, p.15), and therefore continue to thrive in a period of renewed interest in 'folk' activities? If so, what questions does this raise about the nature and influence of personal and media patronage on 20th century customs? What research do we do to arrive at the answers?

NOTES

1. Smith consistently refers to this as "Frandlely Brow House". Boyd (1939b, p.44) refers to it as "Frandlely House", as does the correspondence in BBC file N18/288 Artist: Boyd, A.W. 1946.
2. Smith does not footnote this information. It does not derive from Boyd (1951, p.68), cited at the end of the paragraph, and is partly incorrect - see later in the text.
3. On the cover of Boyd's file, N18/288, there is a note in pencil:

"Old file in store 1933-1939". This file, which could probably have told us a great deal about the Comberbach Soul-Cakers' broadcasts between the wars, has been destroyed: see the nearly illegible microfilm of A.W. Boyd card on "Films 3/4. Registry Cards. Personal Bals-Bradby".

4. This is a topic I am currently researching. I hope to have an article prepared shortly.

5. "St. George and the Dragon", BBC Midland Region, 24.12.1946, 20.30-21.00. This broadcast involved the Uttoxeter, Malvern and Chipping Campden Mummers.

6. In N18/288 see correspondence from News Editor Robert Reid to Boyd on 9.9.1946; Boyd's replies of 11.9.1946 and 30.9.1946; and an internal BBC document dated 22.10.1946.

7. In N18/288 see correspondence from Muriel Burton to the editor of *London Calling* 1.11.1946.

8. In N18/288 see correspondence from Marie Slocombe to Northern Region Programme Executive, 1.12.1955.

9. In N18/288 see correspondence from Northern Region Programme executive to Marie Slocombe, 19.12.1955.

10. This form of notation was suggested by Miss Owen of the BBC's Copyright Department to T.H. Eckersley, the Permanent Library Organiser, in a memo of 9.9.1952 (file: R46/502 Rec. Gen. Stock Music Recording Scheme: Folk Music Policy and Finance 1951-1956), to prevent misunderstandings about the holder of copyright in oral material collected on behalf of and paid for by the BBC. "[I]f it is to be shown as 'So-and-so's Collection' ", she noted, "it will be quite impossible for the person dealing to realise that in fact it is not his collection but one made for the B.B.C. by him". Consequently, "I feel when these collections are made on the instigation of the B.B.C. they should be shown as 'B.B.C. Collection'. If you want the name of the B.B.C. collector given this can be shown in brackets after 'B.B.C. Collection' ". This formula clearly defined the BBC's copyright for those concerned with use and finance while meeting the interests of those concerned with cataloguing and retrieval.

11. "Trad. n/c" indicates "traditional" material, considered to be in the public domain, and hence no copyright charge.

12. In N18/288 see correspondence to Boyd 4.11.1957.

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BOYD, A.W. (1939a), 'Mummers' Play at Christmas', *Notes & Queries*, 14th Jan. 1939, pp.30-31.

BOYD, A.W. (1939b), 'The Mummings' Play', *Notes & Queries*, 21st Jan. 1939, p.44.

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BOYD, A.W. (1951), *A Country Parish: Great Budworth in the County of Chester* (London: Collins, 1951)

PATTISON, Susan (1975), *The Antrobus Soulcaking Play* (Unpub. M.A. Thesis, Institute of Dialect & Folklife Studies, University of Leeds, 1975).

SMITH, Paul (1985), *Variation in the Manner of Adoption of Cultural Traditions: A Conceptual Framework and Application* (Unpub. PhD dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1985).

NOTE: Due to expansion of their storage facilities the BBC Written Archives Centre will be closed for several months at the beginning of 1989. The facilities for users of the archives are restricted in any event, and it is necessary to write or phone beforehand to reserve a place, preferably two weeks in advance. The more the people at the Archive know about the subject of research, the better. For information and reservations contact: Written Archives Officer, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, Peppard Road, Reading RG4 8TZ.

THE WEST MARDEN TIP-TEERING

[West Sussex, SU 7713]

Collected by the late Mervyn Plunkett from Fred Glew, North Bersted, Sussex, 31st March 1959. Transcribed from a typed copy (with occasional MS additions) in Mervyn's papers.

Characters -	Old Father Christmas	Turkey Snipe
	King George	Prince of Fairland
	Valiant Soldier	Doctor Good

All sing -

In Dixieland where I was born
A place where milk and 'oney flows, 'oney flows
We're all going 'ome to Dixie
We're all going 'ome to Dixie
Yes, we're all going 'ome to Dixie 5
And we 'ave no time to tarry
We 'ave no time to stay
It's a rocky road to Dixie
And Dixie is far away.

FC In comes I Old Father Christmas, welcome - welcome not, 10
I 'ope Old Father Christmas will never be forgot

'Ere I am an' a short time to stay
I'll show you sport and pastime before I go away
Room room ladies and gentlemen, room room I pray
I am the man that leads the Noble (or Naval) Captain all 'is
merry men the way 15
Step in here young men I pray

All We come we come we merry merry come
Go sound your trumpets and beat your drum
From shore to shore let loud your cannons roar
Step in King George all on the British shores 20

KG In comes I King George, from England I did spring,
Now some of my wonderful works I'm going to begin`
First in a dungeon I was shut up, erected on a rock and stone
That's where I made my sad place to moan
By these means I won the First King of Egypt's daughters 25

VS In comes I the Valiant Soldier just lately come from France
Sword and buckle by my side I'll make King George dance
I've been through England, Ireland, Scotland, Spain
Many a French dog in my time I've slain
So neither unto you will I bow or bend 30
Nor I never took you to be my friend

KG For why, Sir, for why, Sir, d' I ever do you any 'arm?

VS Yes you 'ave, you sassy cock, get you gone
Get you gone you sassy cock, undrawn or slain
Why you ought to be stabbed, you sassy man 35

KG Stab for stab, it is my fear
'ppoint the place, 'n' I'll meet you theer [sic]

VS My place is 'ppointed on this ground
that's where I mean to lay your body down

KG Across the water I'll arrive and meet you there if I'm alive 40

(Exit VS)

FC Since 'e's gone with 'is strict charge
Step in 'ere the Turkey Snipe

TS In comes I the Turkey Snipe
Come from my Turkish land to fight
To fight that man o' courage bold 45
If 'is blood runs 'ot I'll turn it cold

KG Oh Turk oh Turk, oh do not vapour
Or I'll cut you down with my rusty rap'er

(They fight. TS is bested)

KG Go 'ome, go 'ome, you Turkey Snipe
Go to your Turkey land and fight 50

Go to your Turkey land and tell
What champions we 'ave 'ere in Old England dwell

TS Off goes I with my strict charge
God bless the Noble Captain, likewise 'is noble guard
God bless them all, beneath we go
Because our blood it doth run so 55

(Exit TS)

FC Since 'e's gone with 'is strict charge
Step in 'ere the Prince of Fairland

PF In comes I the Prince of Fairland
To beg these foes to fearless stand
Stand our King, stand,
Ruler o'er the seas and all our British lands 60

(Here they presumably fight)

KG Be'old, be'old, what 'ave I done
I've cut 'im down like the setting sun
But is there not a Doctor to be found
To rise this young man from the ground? 65

FC Yes there is a Doctor to be found
To rise this young man from the ground
Step in 'ere, Doctor,

DG In comes I old Doctor Good
With my 'and I stop the blood
Stop the blood and 'eal the wound
And raise this young man from the room (ground) 70

FC Oh you clever little Doctor, you, what do you do?

DG I can cure the eesy peesy palsy and the gout
A strain within and a strain without
If a man falls down and breaks 'is neck I can set 'un again
Or else-I won't 'ave not a penny farthing of my fee 75

FC What is your fee Doctor?

DG Ten pound 80

FC Ten pound is a lot of money Doctor

DG I know it is a lot of money but you'd better pay that than 'ave
this man laying about your 'ouse all over Christmas

FC Well, what is your easiest charge?

DG Well, you being a poor man I'll charge you £9-19-11-3/4d -
that's a farthing on the price you being a poor man

FC Well, you'd better carry on Doctor 85

DG I've got a box of pills in my pocket called loz'berry drops
And a bottle of medicine called . . .
I place one pill in his mouth and one drop on 'is temple
Strike a light in 'is 'ole body
See! 'e moves a leg already! 90

(PF revives)

FC So 'e do, Doctor, clever little Doctor you are

DG Clever? I sh'd think I am clever, I can tell you more lies
in an 'alf 'our than you can find true in seven years

FC I'll believe you that, Doctor

All join round and sing:

Sarah's got a lovely face and oh such winning wiles
She'll really drive you frantic with 'er fascinating smile 95
When first I went to see 'er I fell on my knee to beg
And as she was listening to my suit I chanc'd to touch
'er leg

Not 'er real leg - oh dear no - it was 'er wooden leg. First
I thought it was the leg of the sofa, but when she began
to move I was ready to drop. She saw my confusion and
rose to leave the room, and as she did so.. 100
'Er leg came down with a dot-and-carry-one
She stump'd along so gaily
There's many worse girls go square on their pins
Than lovely Sarah Bailey.
etc.

The following additional information is taken from a letter from Mervyn Plunkett to Alex Helm, dated 13th May 1959.

I am enclosing the text of the West Marden Play as performed at Hurst-pierpoint by the Glews of Marden. Glew told me at Easter that the last of the previous generation of W. Marden performers died only just before Christmas. This is infuriating, because I could have got the 'original' Marden text and hence could have compared the interesting differences between the version of the 1880 generation and that of the 1865 generation (which I am sure existed)....

I am sure that some of the contestants' speeches have become a bit confused and will try to see Glew over the weekend. They wore -

No hats. All wore trousers of unbleached calico with shredded stuff down the seams "like cowboys' chaps". All wore calico jackets, buttoned, covered haphazardly with patches and tufts of coloured material. The fringe was cut to a special pattern (I once interviewed one of Glew's nieces who remembered cutting out the jackets when they renewed them). I also once met Glew's sister-in-law. She said that her husband died in

1940 and was born in 1855 or thereabouts. Glew, however, says that this must have been his uncle's wife. The pattern of the jacket fringe was -



Most carried wooden swords. No music...

NOTE [by Steve Roud]

The copy of the text from which the above is transcribed, has several hand-written alterations as regards assigning speeches to characters, and presumably this is the result of Mervyn's further questioning of Mr. Glew, although Mervyn's next letter to Alex Helm (24th May 1959) states, "I failed to see Fred. Glew (Marden Tip Teer) over Whitsun".

The 'stage direction' following line 40 is given by Mervyn as "Exit TS", but it seems obvious that it is the Valiant Soldier who exits here.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL DRAMA (SITM)

In *Roomer* 6:4 (1986) p.33, Tom Pettitt reported on the 1986 SITM Conference, and commented on the growing interest in traditional drama which is apparent in the field of medieval drama study. As a result of suggestions made by Tom, members of the TDRG will be taking part in SITM's **6th International Colloquium** to be held at Lancaster in July 1989. Those who have agreed to contribute are Georgina Boyes, Craig Fees, Paul Smith, Doc Rowe, and, of course Tom Pettitt. Details have yet to be arranged, but we will be hosting one whole afternoon session, and also presenting an exhibition of British Mummers Play material.

One of the main themes of the Colloquium is to be 'Festive Drama', and planned sessions include:

- The Festivities of Hocktide: A New Look at the Evidence
(Sally-Beth MacLean)
- Some Considerations on Florentine Christmas Plays
(Konrad Eisenbichler)
- Shrovetide Performances in the Low Countries
(Marjoke de Roos)
- An Examination of the Relation Between the Shepherds Play and the Disruptive Figure of the Medieval Folk Drama
(Christine Richardson)
- Holy Week Performances of the Passion in Spain: Connections with European Medieval Drama (Manuel Gomez, Lara & Rafael Portillo)
- Clerical Views of Festival in Late Medieval England
Marianne G. Briscoe.

The Conference will run from 13th - 19th July: anyone interested in further details should contact Meg Twycross, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Lancaster, Lancaster LA1 4YT.

PUBLICATIONS NEWS

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Popular Drama in Northern Europe in the Later Middle Ages: A Symposium, Edited by Flemming G. Andersen, Julia McGrew, Tom Pettitt, and Reinhold Schroder (Odense: Odense University Press) 252pp., Illus., Pbk., ISBN 87 7492 671 3, D Kr. 170,00.

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The following is a review by Peter Robson of Vols. 1 - 6, published in *Folk Music Journal* 5:4 (1988) pp.510-512. It is reprinted here by kind permission of both the author and the Editor of *FMJ*, Ian Russell.

Roomer started life in 1980 as an 'occasional newsletter for researchers in traditional drama'. Its editors and early contributors subsequently formed the Traditional Drama Research Group (TDRG) and *Roomer* became the Group's newsletter. As well as publishing *Roomer*, TDRG has produced a number of research guides and county checklists of mumming plays and has provided the main support for the annual Traditional Drama Conference at Sheffield. That conference, first organized in 1978, has in turn recently given rise to the journal *Traditional Drama Studies*, published jointly by TDRG and Sheffield University's Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language.

Roomer itself is an A4 format newsletter, usually of about 10 sides, clearly set out and well reproduced, except for copies of illustrations and photographs. Its content varies considerably between issues and no doubt depends less on a defined editorial policy than on the quantity and type of material submitted by its fairly small band of contributors. Similar considerations presumably determine the way in which issues of the newsletter, like the apocryphal London buses, sometimes fail to materialize for some time and then arrive in convoy.

The majority of *Roomer's* content over its first six volumes has been of an informative nature. It has outlined research projects in progress, advertised and reported conferences and seminars, listed and reviewed publications relating to traditional drama and reproduced obscure or inaccessible texts, articles, and newspaper reports. The remaining items have been of a more discursive type and have related to generalized techniques of research procedure and data analysis, or to the specific research interests of individual contributors.

Clearly a lot of the content of *Roomer* is only going to be of interest to active researchers in traditional drama. Indeed, some of the more recondite articles could only be understood by such individuals (if then). Nevertheless there is a great deal of material which deserves a wider circulation. For example, E.C.Cawte has contributed a series of 'Amendments to *English Ritual Drama*', which corrects and extends the content of that seminal resource. Elsewhere the detailed guidance on techniques such as tracing old photographs, newspaper surveys, and documentation of research results is likely to be of value to researchers in other fields of folklore. In this context it should be noted that it is extremely difficult to constrain folklore research within perceived categories as Keith Chandler, ostensibly a researcher into morris dancing, shows in 'Mumming at Chadlington' (*Roomer* 6, No.5).

Nevertheless categorization exists, at least among specialist journals and it is therefore necessary to consider the nature of the subject area denoted 'traditional drama' to which *Roomer* is dedicated. To most of us the obvious answer is that traditional drama means mumming plays and certainly the early issues were devoted solely to that

subject. However, Sam Richards, in a typically trenchant letter to *Roomer* (3, No.1) challenged this orthodoxy by suggesting a reappraisal of the scope of traditional drama to take in forms such as Punch and Judy, street theatre, role-playing party games and so on.

As a result the editors began, rather dutifully I feel, to include these and other manifestations of traditional drama in its broadest sense into *Roomer* and a similar broadening of scope simultaneously occurred in the programmes for the annual Sheffield conference. There is insufficient room in a short review to discuss the definition of traditional drama. Suffice it to say that, for this reader at least, while the theoretical justification for a broader definition is unassailable the practical effect on *Roomer* of assimilating such a change has been to dilute its content without, I would think, attracting a wider range of subscribers.

The Sheffield conference has not been held for two or three years, *Roomer* appears with decreasing frequency and there must be some question as to whether traditional drama research is running out of steam. Certainly it is not running out of material since articles on their local findings by researchers such as Roly Brown (Berkshire), Derek Schofield (Staffordshire), and Carl Willetts (Kent) show that much information, both written and oral, remains to be collected and analyzed. Perhaps the answer lies in the well-known difficulty attending all aspects of research into cultural tradition, namely that it is carried out by a fairly small number of dedicated people, almost always in addition to a full-time job, and that it depends for its dissemination upon an even smaller number of people such as the editors of *Roomer*. Under the circumstances, the proliferation of specialist newsletters such as *Roomer*, *Folk Song Research*, and *Talking Folklore* might not be the best way either of using the limited time of the editors or of ensuring that research results achieve the widest possible circulation. Perhaps the time has come for a single newsletter or journal on current research.

In the meantime, as *Roomer's* editors regularly point out, newsletters cannot be produced without contributions. So perhaps those of us who are hoarding the results of our own research on mumming plays, or even traditional drama, should play our part in ensuring the continuing arrival

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