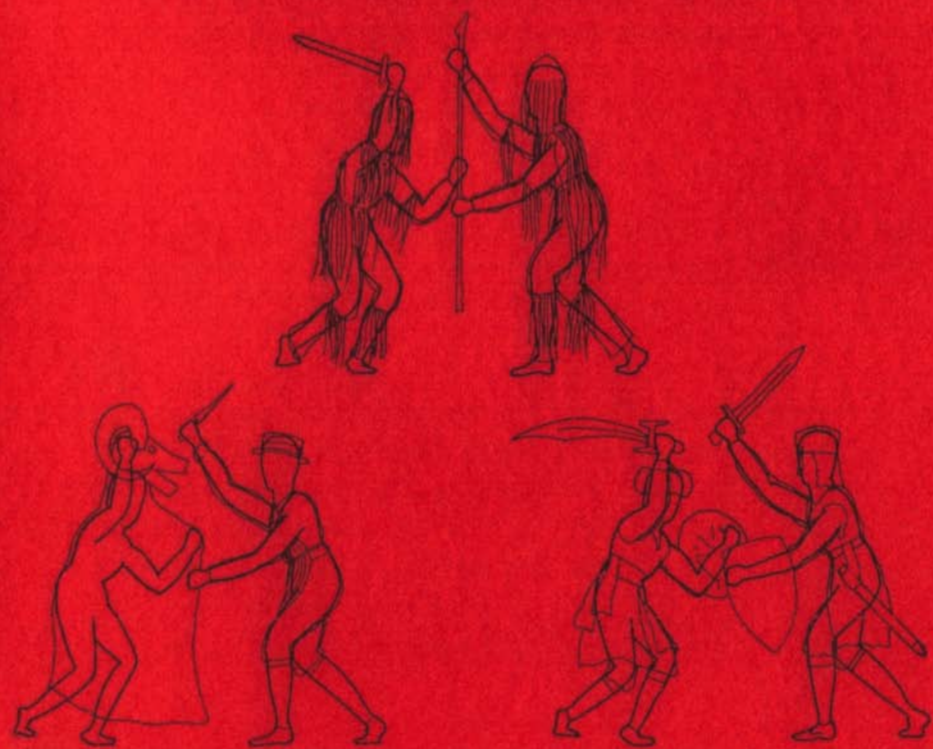


# SO YOU WANT TO START MUMMING...



options • pitfalls • suggestions

• by Ron Shuttleworth

M.R.P. £1.40

# SO YOU WANT TO START MUMMING?

Suggestions for Beginners.

by

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"Introducing the Folk Plays of England"

"Constructing a Hobby Animal"

Some years ago I lightly thought that I would jot down a few notes to help newcomers to mumming. I did not guess what I was getting into, but this is the result. — whether it was worth it is for you to decide.

RKS.

The Book is divided into five sections:

- A Forethought and Decisions.
- B Organisation.
- C Setting Up — Properties and Costumes.
- D Mumming in Schools
- E Learning More — Booklist, Contacts, etc.

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## Section A: FORETHOUGHT & DECISIONS

Before any work is started it is advisable to carefully consider a number of points so that mistakes can be avoided and your efforts directed to the best advantage. Below I have indicated the main areas of decision and listed most of the obvious options. I have also tried to show how your choice can affect future actions. It will be quickly seen that there are many inter-relationships between the categories (see introduction to Note A).

### I. INTENDED USE OF FINAL PRODUCT.

- a) Single performance or one brief "season".
- b) Continued existence with occasional performance or "season". e.g. annual performance at Christmas.
- c) Continuous existence with occasional performances through-out the year.
- d) Full-scale semi-professional group.

#### YOUR DECISIONS WILL AFFECT...

- 1) Type of organisation.
- 2) Complexity and durability of costumes, etc.
- 3) Choice of text(s).
- 4) General level of effort and expenditure.

### II. DEGREE OF AUTONOMY.

- a) Formed as an offshoot of an existing organisation and drawing from the general membership as required. This might result in a high turnover of personnel.
- b) As above, but operating more as a sub-group with a correspondingly more stable membership.
- c) A fully independent group.

#### THIS WILL AFFECT...

- 1) Number and responsibilities of officers.
- 2) Rehearsal storage and transport facilities required.
- 3) Finance.
- 4) Dedication and level of performance of members.

### III. FINANCE. (See Notes A)

- a) Costs supplied from an external source.
- b) Only source of funds is members' pockets and Group's earnings (from collections, donations and/or fees).
- c) All income paid to external funds. (Group has no financial control)
- d) Profit paid to external funds. (Group controls expenditure)
- e) All income retained by Group. (Financial autonomy)
  - i. Kept as Group funds.
  - ii. Divided amongst members.
  - iii. A combination of (i) and (ii).

### IV. OUTLETS FOR PERFORMANCE.

- a) Will the Play have to stand on its own or will it always be part of a larger show?
- b) Closed, private audience?
- c) Traditional touring – house to house?
- d) Busking – pubs and streets?
- e) Local venues only?
- f) Every opportunity that offers.

#### WILL AFFECT...

- 1) Ideal length of text. (e.g. a short text allows more performances, a longer one can offer more entertainment resulting in improved collections from larger audiences)
- 2) Choice of texts, costume, general approach.

### V. APPROACHES TO PERFORMANCE. (See Notes A)

- a) A single play – or would you hope to eventually enlarge your repertory?
- b) "Glass case" traditional, i.e. always conforming as closely as possible to a collected original.
- c) "Progressive" – allowing organic development from a traditional original.
- d) "Improved" – involving the deliberate modification of a single text.
- e) Collated – one where the separate parts are all traditional, but are assembled from several sources.
- f) Written – a composed text using the format of a Mummers' play. Often uses contemporary characters and situations.

#### WILL AFFECT...

- 1) Choice of texts and costume.
  - 2) Attitude to improvisation and the use of humour.
- Your decisions so far will help you with the next set of choices.

### VI. SOURCE OF TEXT.

- a) As local as possible.
- b) A good text – as local as possible.
- c) Good text regardless of origin.
- d) Collated or written text. {see IV, (d) or (e)}

### VII. COSTUME.

- a) Traditional –
  - i) Paper strips – newspaper, wallpaper, crêpe paper, etc., perhaps Christmas streamers and/or tinsel.
  - ii) "Tatters" – ribbons or strips or patches of coloured cloth, either spaced out or thick and close.
  - iii) Sashes and/or baldricks.

- b) To part.
- i) "Traditional" e.g. red military coats, etc.
- ii) Contrived costumes.

#### VIII. DISGUISE.

- a) Applied face-colour — black, red and/or white.
- b) Hanging strips — paper, rag or ribbon.
- c) Masks.
- d) None.

#### IX. PROPERTIES.

- a) Simple — only absolute necessities e.g. wooden swords, doctor's bag.
- b) Additions introduced solely for effect.
- c) Contrived and complex — trick props, etc.

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#### 'A' NOTES TO PRECEDING LIST OF OPTIONS.

I) Most of the experience on which these notes are based derive from Coventry Mummers, founded in 1966. C.M. would fit into my categories as follows: I,d; II,c; III,e; IV,f; V,e; VI,b; VII,b/ii; VIII,d; IX,c.

Anyone facing the choices set out here may at first be strongly attracted towards the more sophisticated variations of text, approach, costume, etc. I should like to make the point that this is not necessarily the best.

Traditional approaches can be most effective and satisfying, particularly if a degree of natural evolution is permitted. Some local texts which seem unpromising when first read can prove to be very good plays in performance. Rural audiences in particular seem to appreciate a play with local connections.

If you are going to heavily modify, collate or write a text you should start by acquiring a thorough working knowledge of the subject by first studying the relevant bits of E K Chambers' book (see Section D) and then reading as many traditional texts as possible to get the "feel" of them.

#### III. FINANCE.

The whole question of funding and the disposal of income can be rather tricky. Initially the idea of making spending-money may be a factor in maintaining the interest of members. However, unless you can call on outside funds you are likely to find that a corporate kitty that can be used for group needs soon becomes desirable. The ideal structure may be hard to find and you should be prepared to change your policy as required.

After various trials, Coventry Mummers now put all income into the "bag", except for travel expenses and occasional refreshments. Out of the bag we pay for

festive events and contribute towards the personal costs where individual charges are made. With a team like ours the running costs are surprisingly high. A healthy sum in the bank has enabled us to undertake ambitious projects which needed a high initial outlay. Although they were ultimately successful, we might well have been put off had we been "severally and collectively liable" in the event of a disaster.

#### V. APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE.

This is another tricky problem and depends very much upon your circumstances. If you are a village side reviving your own Play then obviously you can do what you like with it. If, however, you are outsiders reviving a play in its home village, or you are going to announce it as "The Play from —", you are almost obligated to adopt the "glass case" approach.

On the whole the written, modernised play can cause problems except for a use limited in both outlet and time. Unless you have a gifted writer these plays rarely work as well as the traditional variety and topical allusions date very quickly. Napoleon or Nelson seem quite acceptable to a modern audience where McMillan or Marples would be out of place. (What's a "Marple"?) If you are going to stay up-to-date your team must be prepared to be constantly learning new lines — and forgetting the old ones !

#### APPROACH TO HUMOUR.

It is very tempting to play everything for maximum laughs in an attempt to achieve instant success. This can be both valid and effective, but the way is set with pitfalls. The action can so easily degenerate into self-indulgent tatting-about, and must be kept tight. As a generalisation, only permit "well-rehearsed ad-libs" and avoid in-jokes in which the audience cannot share. Not everyone should — or can — "play the fool". Remember that in most comedy groups, the "straight man" is as important as the comic. Anyone can be a pratt, but it takes talent and practice to be effective as a Fool.

It can be argued from strength that even in its earliest and most ritualistic form, the play or its forerunner is likely to have included humour and clowning. Even in the "straightest" versions the Doctor is usually funny. Most of the other parts are capable of being played for laughs, but never all at once. The Presenter may be dignified or a buffoon. If the Hero is to be a clown, his Adversary should be straight — and vice versa.

It is quite possible for nearly all the characters to play their parts with dignity, which would reinforce such humour as there is and could make an effective play. Much depends on the abilities and inclinations of your team — which may of course vary over time.

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## THE LAST AND MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Having considered all the matters which I have set out, you should now approach the most vital question of all.

### IF YOU START MUMMING, WILL YOU DO IT WELL?

If there is any serious doubt, I beg you to find something else. This must seem extremely arrogant, but it is just a cry-from-the-heart after many years of trying to upgrade the public image of Mumming. If someone plays golf badly they are accepted as a bad golfer and no-one blames the sport. People who only see poor mumming however, all too readily assume that it is shallow and trivial and cannot be done better — and this makes me SPIT !!!!

## SECTION B: GROUP ORGANISATION

You have now found out **what** you want to do and are in a position to decide **how** to set about it.

You are likely to need one or more officers. Initially all duties may be undertaken by one fanatic, but it may become necessary to divide the work and regularise the appointments. As an example I will describe the officers and duties in Coventry Mummies, who use titles based on those common to Morris Men.

*SQUIRE* or *CHAIRMAN*. He is elected annually but must not serve three consecutive term, which avoids the situation where someone has served for too long and nobody has the heart to sack him. He is the "strong-man" of the team, decides the programme at rehearsals and bookings and is looked-to to provide many of the initiatives which govern the way in which the Side develops.

When on bookings, he is our contact with the organiser and tells us what to do and when and how to do it, and at such times he has the authority to decide all disputed points by decree — you obey and complain later. It was the chaos experienced over this last point that was the original reason for creating the office.

*BAGMAN* or *SECRETARY/TREASURER*. He is elected annually, but an efficient one is likely to be re-elected until he positively refuses to serve.

The Bagman should ideally have a word-processor (or at least a typewriter) and a telephone and perhaps access to a fax. Both he and the rest of the team should always be conscious of his real importance as the first contact with prospective employers who may often base their opinions of the team, favourable or otherwise, solely upon the performance of the Bagman and the quality of his output. To this end, any team wishing to promote itself should invest in stylish business cards, letterheads and well-composed and produced correspondence,

publicity and information sheets — in fact a commercial and professional approach.

At club level, I think it decreases efficiency to separate the offices of secretary and treasurer. If the job is too onerous for one person it is better to appoint a deputy to handle the whole organisation of specific larger projects.

The *FOREMAN* most nearly equates to *DIRECTOR*. He is charge of rehearsing a play and, although given much gratuitous advice by everyone else, has the ultimate say in how it should be performed. He decides who shall play or understudy a part and, on a booking, is asked by the Squire to cast a play from the people available.

There is often more than one foreman, each having responsibility for a specific activity. Elected annually, they often offer themselves for a job as having something special to contribute.

*RAGMAN*. This is a courtesy title for the person who stores and maintains the costumes and properties. He needs to have safe storage space to house all the gear and a vehicle capable of carrying it, and ideally should be prepared to attend most events. He should have, or have access to, the skills and equipment needed to clean repair and maintain the equipment.

Unless each part is only performed by one team member, it is important to keep this duty under the control of as few people as possible — preferably one — or chaos will result.

*COMMITTEE*; Coventry Mummies do not operate through an executive committee, Our regular weekly rehearsals always include a business meeting at which all and any matters are discussed and at which everyone has equal voting rights. Booking offers are put forward and if they are accepted in principle the Bagman asks each individual if he can attend. A "yes" at this point is taken as a firm commitment to turn out.

A word here about decision-making procedures. Amongst morris dancers who often seem to expect their officers to tell them what to do, we are known as a very democratic team. Morris is a disciplined activity and its practitioners are perhaps amenable to discipline in other areas. Good mummies, on the other hand, are elastic and capable of improvisation, and it seems that these sort of people often resent being ordered about without consultation. The business meeting is therefore vital, and it is important that time be allowed for topics to be fully discussed to everyone's satisfaction — unproductive though this often appears to be.



## NEW MEMBERS

When you start, your group will form itself from those who express an interest, but some will probably drop out. Some teams have a very stable membership but sooner or later you are going to be faced with two questions –

### 1) What should be the numerical strength of your team?

You can, of course, be open to all who want to join, but this creates problems if you are an year-round team. Unlike a dance group who can ring the changes to keep everyone involved, it is difficult to give every member of an oversize team their chance to act. You can also run into problems if you are expecting your employers to provide travel expenses and/or event tickets. The ideal is probably the essential minimum who will turn out to every show. Because this level of commitment is hard to maintain you will tend to add extras as reserves. Unfortunately, as the need for dedication decreases, the attitude of members tends to become more lax and you will still occasionally find it hard to raise a team no matter how many people you have. The need to maintain commitment and to achieve the ideal operational minimum is likely to be a continuing problem.

### 2) Choosing new members

It is vital that all your team should get on well with each other and that there should be no personal animosities. Even within this situation Coventry Mummers have found that a long period of frequent performances can produce conflict and backbiting which, however, evaporate after a good rest. With this in mind, we use a system which is totally undemocratic but which seems to work. No-one JOINS Coventry Mummers. When a vacancy occurs we discuss potential recruits – people who have expressed an interest, etc. and vote on a short-list in order of preference. The top name is then asked and if he accepts, he has already been voted in. This avoids people applying and being disappointed. Voting is strictly on the blackball principle and if only one existing member has strong objections, that name is out.

## FEES

If you are going out for fees, beware of underselling your-selves. Like any commercial enterprise, you should aim to charge as much as possible with regard to the quality of your product and the state of the market. The advantages are many and include a tighter attitude within the team – if you are getting good money you must give good value. A healthy bank balance means that you can do much to enhance your team or support other chosen causes.

It is always possible to reduce your fee for deserving cases, but beware of going out for nothing. It is perhaps unfortunate, but in this day and age people take you at your own valuation – if you go for nowt, you're worth nowt. Consider the

following example where you are asked to perform at a charity fête. If you offer to go for nothing you will have to park half a mile away and chase after the organiser for information. There will be nowhere to change and your show will be located off in a corner whilst something else is also happening. How different if you are charging a good fee (whilst implying that it would be more were they not a charity). If they are paying you, it means that they really want you. There will be someone deputed to look after you, a changing room, and a prime spot in the programme. Do well and they will think that you are "great". If you enjoyed yourselves and donate your cheque to their charity, they will think that you are wonderful. You have achieved the same result financially, but you have had a better time and enhanced your reputation. If its still a lousy gig you can always keep the money.

Charity organisers have a very efficient grapevine and if you accept one free booking you will be bombarded with other invitations. Initially this may be a good way to gain experience, but you should be prepared to break out when you are ready.

## REHEARSAL

If you are going to have regular rehearsals and meetings I think that it is important that you should give thought to where you hold them. Coventry Mummers have a private room on licensed premises and the meetings have a lot of the character of a social get-together. I have come to believe that this makes an important contribution to cohesion and team spirit and gains heavily over the meeting in a school hall where half the members leave as soon as possible to get a drink. Even if you all go to the same pub it is rarely possible for everyone to sit together and this can lead to internal groupings and divisions. A pub which will allow exclusive use of a room would be ideal, but landlords tend to start seeking rent. We use a Social Club where the bag pays the small membership charge and we can then have a private room free.

It has been my experience that it often takes time for mummung ability to become apparent. With a new team you will have to use intuition, but as soon as you have got going it is a good idea to swap parts about a bit – at least in rehearsal and at less-important gigs. Not only may this reveal hidden talent but it develops a reserve of understudies.

I have noticed that it usually takes new members time to get used to making a fool of themselves in public – including those with theatrical experience. You may find that disguise can have an amazing effect upon an apparently shy person who, when their face is hidden, can behave in an extremely extrovert manner.

It should be noted that mummung seems to have traditionally been a male activity. Apart from the pressures of social conventions there may have been a practical reason for this. When performing to a large crowd, and particularly

when outdoors, you have to really shout to get the words across. Unfortunately many women's voices do not sound too well at this sort of volume.

This question of volume is important unless you are restricting your performances to small venues with good acoustics. It is vital for the dialogue to be **audible and understandable** and many revival mummies fail badly on this point. Most people have a loud voice in there somewhere, but need practice and confidence in order to find it. The folk-singer Frankie Armstrong teaches a method which will produce a big, carrying voice in almost anyone. She sometimes runs "workshops" which are well worth attending.

There is a subtle but important difference between a mummung performance and a theatrical performance. I cannot explain it, but there is something self-conscious about theatrical delivery which just does not "feel" right in a mummies' play. To demonstrate this, try switching channels on your T.V. and guessing whether the person you see is an actor or an "actuality recording" — mummies are **not** actors. Some years ago, Coventry Mummies presented a number of shows in the foyer of a major theatre. We were told that the professional actors enjoyed watching us because we broke all the rules that had been knocked into them during their first week at RADA. That is how it ought to be. Other aspects of theatre can be used, however — For instance you could seek advice from a "fight arranger".

#### AFFILIATIONS

For all but the tiniest operation, a vital requirement is THIRD-PARTY INSURANCE. If you doubt this, think of the possible consequences of the end of a broken sword whistling into the audience! It is also a condition of some local authority venues. The organisations which accord this to their member clubs include those for Morris Dancers, with which Mummies have much in common.

THE MORRIS RING. The longest established. For male teams.

THE MORRIS FEDERATION. Originally The Women's M F. All.

THE OPEN MORRIS. All.

Addresses of current officials could be obtained from —

ENGLISH FOLK DANCE AND SONG SOCIETY. (See Section D)

The EFDSS is custodian of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library which is the most readily-accessible place to research Mummung.

It also has a policy of preferentially booking artists who are members. It publishes an annual Folk Directory.

There may be a Federation of folk-oriented clubs in your area which could be useful for contacts, outlets and recruits.

## SECTION C: SETTING UP

Before you start, it is advisable to know a bit about the subject — the types of text, the different approaches to costume, etc. My own booklet (see Section D) will start you on the right lines if you can find nothing better.

### FUNDING

At the start, you may not know how long your team will last and be reluctant to put out much money for the gear. However, you should be prepared to pay for good materials as the work involved in making-up poor is the same or greater than for using the best. There is a great difference between saving money and doing something on the cheap, and considering the labour input there is no economy more false than that of using second-rate materials. You could best economise by keeping things simple. In an established team, a Ragman should have unquestioned access to whatever funds are needed to achieve and maintain your standard.

### RESOURCES

Before you start getting involved with your design you should find out what resources are available to you from members of your team. To this end you should interrogate everyone and list what each can do, get done or scrounge from their work, family, friends and neighbours. Do not accept a quick answer — get everybody to really think about it. Having acquired the information do not be shy about using people for the maximum advantage of your team — or about handing out the thanks and credit.

Use this list try to design your gear within its parameters.

Much of the following advice relates to the more complex approach, so you will have decide how much applies in your case.

STRENGTH AND DURABILITY of props and costumes must be of the highest possible order. Until you have experienced it you will not believe how much harsh treatment can be afforded to your gear, so always assume a very high level of wear, mis-treatment and abuse. For example all clothing seams should be doubly strengthened at points of wear. It will be found that anything that can unscrew will do so eventually.

I MUST STRESS again that design, and if possible, construction should be kept in the hands of as few people as possible — preferably one, as in this way you can hope to achieve something with an underlying feel of continuity. If you were to send your team away to make their own costumes the result might well be individually excellent, but is likely to look collectively messy. If the costumes are to be similar to each other then each person could make his own. It is a good idea to write a tight specification and set of instructions detailing where personal variation is allowed — and where it isn't. Drawings would help, as you will be

amazed at the differences and variations of interpretation that can arise from one simple idea.

#### **PROPERTIES NEED TO BE**

**VERY VERY STRONG.** The misuse accorded to props is quite exceptional, and there is no such thing as a gentle fight. I often wonder how many props-men give up after watching their lovingly-made creations disintegrate in the hands of unfeeling vandals!

**PACKABLE.** If your gear is to be portable then it must fit suitable containers and transport. Nothing should be too long to fit across a vehicle. This means that spears, staves etc. may have to be made in demountable sections – electrical conduit or steam-pipe with threaded collars is useful here. A golf bag or trolley can be very handy for carrying long, thin items.

The imaginative use of commonplace items can produce interesting props and is, I believe, in the direct line of tradition from the old mummers who made use of whatever came to hand. **SWORDS** can be made of wood, metal or fibreglass. Fibreglass can be made into very impressive weapons but it will not withstand vigorous combat and disintegrates quickly and dangerously.

One way to make visually effective metal weapons is to weld or rivet together the edges of two identical sheets and then to give strength and thickness by forcing something up between them.

No wooden sword is everlasting. After many tries I developed the following idea. I made simple cross guards out of sheet metal, which have a largish hole to pass over the "blade". At this hole are two tabs bent forwards which go under a worm-drive hose clip to fix each guard onto a simple "natural wood" stick, barked and pointed. There is one extra to provide a spare, and broken sticks can be simply and rapidly replaced using a screwdriver.

I have seen a two-hundred year old mummer's sword which has a basket guard made from a very thick piece of leather. With all types of sword, avoid making an area of weakness when fitting a guard, as the base of the blade is the point of greatest stress.

Note – shields are not necessary or particularly traditional.

#### **COSTUMES SHOULD BE**

**SIMPLE** – Something on the body, on the head and in the hand should be enough to establish a character. When dressing to part avoid attempts at historical accuracy or the audience will start looking for anomalies. They seem

happy to accept whatever conventions you set – if you costume as I suggest, no-one will worry if St George is wearing fashion shoes and a wristwatch.

**UNIVERSAL FITTING** – Unless you all dress alike, when each man can keep a costume made exclusively for him, all costumes should ideally be made capable of fitting everybody. This can limit the style of garment as you may have anything from a five-foot barrel to a seven-foot beanpole. If, like us, you have a seven-foot 'phone box, you also have my sympathy.

**EASILY MAINTAINED** – i.e. do not soil easily, washable and colour-fast. (Imagine the character lying on the road in the rain)

**EASY TO PACK** – crush proof and crease-resistant. Unless your Ragman is always there to pack everything himself, costumes tend to get stuffed into cases anyhow. Brimmed hats etc. can take up a lot of space unless they nest into one another.

**EASY TO PUT ON** – You should be able to costume up in the open street. St George may look great in silver tights but it's not worth it if he has to find a public lavatory to change in. I think that regardless of the gender of the others, the "Betsy" character, like a pantomime Dame, should be played by a man. The costume therefore needs to be modified to accommodate both the larger frames and the general clumsiness of men.

Television has had a profound effect upon what the general public regards as "good", both in dialogue and visual effect. Even rag coats need to be thought about. The random use of small-patterned fabrics in washed-out colours usually looks tatty. Go for stronger colours and try to achieve some sort of order or pattern. The strips of cloth can be arranged to give the effect of patches, or stripes of colour – vertical, horizontal or diagonal. A great deal of labour goes into the making of a rag coat, and it is only marginally harder to make a good one.

I have seen an effective approach where each coat's main colour is different, so the team has a "yellow man", a "red man", etc.

It may be easier to first fix the rags/ribbons onto horizontal tapes, which are then sewn onto the coat. If you cut each bit of rag longer and attach it about one-third along its length, you will get the effect of two pieces.



## COSTUMES: PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

Contributed by JEAN SHUTTLEWORTH

Most mummers start with a single one-off show at, say, Christmas to "see how it goes". If they enjoy themselves and get audience encouragement they then progress to (a) do it again next year, and then (b) keep their repertoire going and perform as often as will.

So the first reaction is to try to costume on a rock-bottom budget. But, as ever, you get what you pay for.

You should have a general discussion on basic costume attitudes. If you are doing a genuine revival of a local play and you have evidence of your predecessors' costumes, this will be your foundation. These are just as likely to be "to part" as "traditional rag" – but remember that they will have been based on what was around at the time, such as genuine old red soldiers' coats in the attic.

You will need someone in charge of general design no matter whether you decide on

- a) traditional "rag".
- b) recreating old traditional costumes – or
- c) your own designs of "to part".

a) Define precise details of materials, design and method of construction, and enforce a disciplined approach. Each mummer could be responsible for his own outfit, if whoever is going to make it studies samples first. Full and clear instructions should be set down in writing and given to each actor, with the team ensuring amongst themselves that every set is up to standard.

(b) and (c) require somebody who can handle a sewing machine confidently. The ideal would be closely connected with the team of mummers to share their enthusiasm – for that is probably the vital factor. Someone with granny's straight-stitch Singer who enjoys sewing will be a greater asset than the novice with the latest all-bells-and-whistles electronic model.

You cannot buy paper patterns for mummers' characters but anyone experienced in making clothes should be able to visualise how to adapt commercial patterns. Some pattern firms (McCall, Simplicity) carry a range of fancy-dress designs that might give a foundation on which to construct a costume. Look at non-fashion garments too; with extra width in the skirt, a loose housecoat design looked good as a farmer's smock.

Prowess: do not ask your costume-maker to attempt more than they think they can do to their satisfaction. If not happy with the result because of too-stringent demands, they may lose heart.

Every costume must be appropriate to the character of the part. I once saw a team where each man had obviously been responsible for the production of his own costume. None were duff, but by far the most impressive was a black outfit beautifully embroidered with occult symbols in gold – but it was for Devil Dout, the least important part in the play!

Embroidery is rarely essential and can usually be added later, and it does give a quality to a costume. A simple zig-zag sewing machine can actually produce quite impressive embroidery by using the zig-zag on the minimum "satin stitch" setting and varying the width of the stitch as you sew. Pseudo-smocking can also be achieved, after doing the donkey-work of putting in the drawing-up threads, by working a simple open zig-zag across the pleating. Large appliqué decoration can be effective and easy with a zig-zag stitch around the edges of the motifs. Remember the effect you want is essentially theatrical and not for close inspection. An expert in the audience may applaud the genuine article, and the embroidered will get a kick out of seeing it being worn – but it is essentially an ego-trip.

### FABRICS

When you have decided on the costume designs, make a firm shopping list of colours and weights of fabrics, and stick to it. Do not go hoping to see something that will "do". Plain bright colours have more impact than patterned fabric, if only to contrast with your audience. All florals will date; a loud pattern may look comic but can more often reflect bad taste and, if on a female, have an anti-female knocking element. If you want to get away from "plains", use basic geometrics: broad stripes, large check gingham, but not when they are fashionable. (Buy and put aside for the next set of costumes if you look so far forward) Constantly remember you must make your costumes say "Look at me!", as most mummers' shows take place in the middle of the audience, and you must catch and hold the eye.

Quality is a matter of cash availability against experience in storing costumes. If your costumes are used once a year and otherwise kept each in a bag in a wardrobe, a cheap cloth that is not crease-resistant may well suit your purpose. For regular performances, that sort of care will be impracticable. The bulk of the costumes are likely to be kept in large suitcases and trunks, folded, we hope rather than bundled in anyhow. Some creasing is unavoidable, but obligatory ironing for each outing will be resented. "Crease-resistant" is a relative term. Generally woven fabrics tend to crease while most knitteds are better tempered. Watch lightweight synthetic knitteds; some of these hang wrongly as they tend to cling to the body. Heavier knitted fabrics, synthetic or cotton-fleece (for sweat-shirts) are ideal, though not cheap. They have clear strong colours, wash easily and hang well, but can scuff and suffer cuts with hard usage. Always wash new strong or dark-coloured synthetics separately in case the colour runs. St George

can be a problem here; wash the red material for the cross before you sew it onto the white background or it might go pink — all over.

Consider transparency in fabrics when actors have ordinary clothes underneath. We have a female character with a dress of white voile that had to be lined to look convincing. Later, black breeches became club custom, so for this character they had to be covered with long bloomers.

Decorations can be added with fabric colourings but the method has to be matched with the fabric composition, and they can also lose quality seriously when washed. Try them out before you commit yourself on a costume as some give disappointing results.

Think about the nature of the character when you select the cloth. The combatant that is beaten and has to lie on the ground needs something easily washed, while those who just stand around will probably only get their gear washed when beer has been spilt down it. This is a hazard that needs swift attention so “dry-clean-only” outfits should be as few as possible. Simplicity is essential. Aim for dressing in minimal locations — behind a car etc.

Do not be tempted to use some fabric that you happen to have by — unless it is exactly what you want. Old curtains, bedspreads, etc. tend to look out of place because the colours of household fabrics somehow do not agree with clothing colours. I have bought curtainings on special occasions but they come much heavier and bulkier than you expect. If you have a market with drapery stalls, have a good look at their ranges. They seem to get lines that the ordinary departmental stores don't have, besides being keenly priced.

Measure each performer for maximum girth (wherever!), height, and hat size, and note in team files. You will then know your limits. Make every costume fit everyone by making each one extra outsize and using elastic to pull it in to fit. This means that you must not skimp on quantities when buying fabrics, and club financial policy must allow for this. Velcro also helps with adjustable sizing, and use it generously : it will repay the expense. It must be sewn on by machine, as it grips too strongly for hand stitching. Men hate having to fiddle with hooks, buttons, tapes, etc., and so these all need watching and sewing back on. Pockets for small props, or cash and cigarettes, are useful especially if the costumes restrict normal access.

If for some special reason you have a particular costume that is not big enough to fit everyone, there must be a general understanding that the fatties do not play that part. Height is not so critical: a tall man in a dress on the short side only looks comic, but a short man trying not to trip in too-long skirts is a menace. A tailor-made coat too narrow? If irreplaceable (but not too valuable) e.g. a genuine uniform jacket, be wholesale, slice it up the back and insert a panel of matching fabric: no-one will notice the difference.

**HATS** If you need broad-brimmed hats for male or female characters, look at sunhats at holiday resorts. Some ladies' hats in a synthetic 'straw' are very durable, and withstand crushing. Turn the brim up at the back and stitch in place and you have a passable poke bonnet. Many types of hat can be stretched by steaming over an open saucepan. Most old hats for men are too small for modern heads, so watch what you buy. If you can find out everyone's hat sizes somehow, you will at least know the minimum size that you need. The old most-popular size of 6<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> is easy to find, but sizes of 7-7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>+ are of more use today.

#### CHARITY SHOPS/JUMBLE SALES

These seem to be a easy cheap solution when starting out, but are likely to be a false trail. Bright colours may attract but if you pick up a bundle of gaudy items, you may find that nothing looks quite right and it all looks tatty. Curb the temptation to seek garments for any female characters to be worn by men: their broader shoulders and chests will just split them. However some large sizes might be useful; a red fashion coat unbuttoned might suit a soldier, and evening clothes fit out a doctor for very little. For female parts, brimmed hats look better than modern sit-on-top styles, but still watch their sizes, especially for men wearing wigs. If you want false hair it may be easier to attach it to the inside of the hat as a single unit.

When you reach the situation where you are replacing old costumes with new, do not dispose of the original set. You, or a successor, may learn from their construction; they are available to lend to youngsters wanting to have a go (never, never lend your current ones — they are too vital to risk), and if disaster hits the present lot, you are not wholly without, and the show goes on.

## SECTION D: MUMMING IN SCHOOLS.

This booklet was written more for adult teams and is probably of less use to people working with children, so here are some observations which I hope will be relevant to school teams. [I have used male pronouns etc for simplicity. for 'he' read 'he/she/it'] **Please read the rest of the book, though, because some of the sections are very relevant and have not been repeated here.**

#### CASTING/INTERPRETATION.

PRESENTER needs a good voice with command and presence to gain attention.

COMBATANTS. At a recent session with a mixed class of nine-year old children one of the questions asked was what to do if the fight made one of the participants feel nervous. My reply was that the wrong fight was being used, but this points to the need to consider fights and fighters very carefully. Ideally, I suppose combatants should be matched for aggression, but it may by necessary

to impose a structured or low-violence combat. It might help if the most aggressive of the pair had to lose. Safety can be increased if they never actually get within a sword's length of each other. A slash is a safer "killing stroke" than a stab.

There are many, many ways to arrange a fight. (I use the word 'arrange' deliberately). Possibilities include:

- \* Large 'heavy' weapons which must not only be seen to be heavy to lift, but require the recipient of a blow to 'give' to the weight
- \* Conventional fencing. Professional fight-arrangers identify three basic strokes – an overhand diagonal down-stroke, one coming in horizontally, and an underhand stroke delivered diagonally upwards. These can come from either side, i.e. backhand or forehand, which gives the six elements from which most fights are composed.
- \* Ritualistic approach where, for instance, combatants might countermarch in time with their speeches, striking their opponent's sword at each pass.
- \* Simulated combat in which the pair continuously and rapidly rattle their swords together, and move quickly as a unit, forward and back, etc. This is visually more effective than might be supposed.

There are also humorous fights of many kinds. Examples include:

- \* Ill-matched weapons.
- \* Unlikely situations – a large person with a huge sword is chased by a tiddler with a small one.
- \* Trick props which fall to bits or perform in unexpected ways.

DOCTOR is traditionally played for laughs. He seems to be definitely in the mould of the quack doctor and patent-medicine salesman, showy with a line in fast patter. In some plays he has long speeches of a sort of nonsense which has been labelled 'Topsy-turveydom'.

JACK FINNEY is seen as 'cheeky' and is often the doctor's assistant.

I believe that any "female" character should be played by a male. The exception might be the "Lady" in the Wooing play.

In general the old mummings often based their characterisation on observation. I see no reason why modern mummings should not do the same, and utilise any special idiosyncrasies of the team.

Try to 'typecast'. If you have a comedian/humorist, use him. An Indian doctor in a white coat would be within the experience of most people.

How about a Rasta character (who could "rap" his lines!)

Traditional teams often included a performer – singer, musician, etc – with the generic title of 'Big Head, who used the basic lines:

In come I, that ain't been yet  
With my big head and little wit  
My head so big and my wit so small  
And I'll sing a song/play my \*\*\*\*\* to please you all

Sometimes a dancer called himself 'Cleverlegs', inserting this title after "In come I".

#### PROPERTIES AND COSTUMES.

Originally it would seem that Mummings' costumes were identical, and disguise of the wearer was an important element. (Hence the name 'Guizers') It is for this reason that so many speeches begin 'In come I, \*\*\*' – there were few visual clues to the character. Dressing 'to part' came later.

When I started to write about costumes for school use, I began to realise that the parameters can be totally different to those of an adult team to whom durability is the prime consideration. In a classroom situation the design and construction of costumes may well be an important part of the exercise, and even if the thing is going to be done year after year, the complete costumes will not be handed on, although their frameworks might be. The requirements therefore are simplicity of design and construction, and cheapness of materials and their availability in the school situation.

The simplest costume is probably a broad sash worn over one shoulder. This can be of cloth or crêpe paper and looks well if each character has a different colour. Traditionally this goes with a blackened face as a disguise.

Another traditional but more complex dress used strips of rag attached by one end so that they hang and flutter, sewn thickly onto coat and trousers. Tall hats like inverted paper bags have long strips which hang over the face and conceal the wearer's identity.

A simple and practical way of achieving a reasonable effect would be to sew, glue or staple the strips onto a long carrier tape which is draped over the shoulders to dip to a v-point in the centre of front and back. They should hang vertically when worn. This could be supplemented with similar bands at the waist and/or knee and elbow. If each strip is cut long and attached at about one-third of its length, it will give the effect of two strips. crêpe paper is effective and quite durably if it doesn't get wet. Hats can be made of card in variety of styles.

The more complex construction uses an old shirt or something, or a custom-made garment of which the tabard with ties at the side is the simplest and most versatile. This is also the simplest foundation if you are going to dress to part. A

good compromise might be simple colour-coded costumes with 'to part' hats – helmets for combatants, crown for a king etc.

So much depends upon the age and abilities of the class, the time allowed, and finance and resources available. For instance will parents help, or can you involve the needlework class in making costumes and the wood/metal workshops in constructing your props?

Let us now consider specifics:

COMBATANTS will require wooden swords plus spares to cover breakage. A simple cross-guarded broadsword is adequate, but alternatives can have a knuckle-bow, or a basket guard made from stiff plastic. A stout glove will minimise the effect of over-zealous fencing. A "broadsword" can be made to seem very weighty by making it out-of-balance and very blade-heavy

Helmets can be made from saucepans, plastic buckets, etc. but ones with non-radiused edges look better. With these, as also with masks, it is important not to cover the mouth or to impede the voice.

An effective 'helmet' can be made along the following lines. Think of a simple royal crown consisting of a headband with two strips over the head at right-angles. Adjust the strips to fit more closely to the head, and carry them down below the headband. The front one becomes the nasal. the two at the side go down past the ears and are cut to come forward along the jaw-line, and the one at the back widens out to protect the neck. Sprayed silver and worn over a dark, close-fitting skull-cap. If you want to simulate chain mail, I have done very well with sprout-bags from the market, sprayed silver. This uses a lot of paint, but is realistically stiff. It is better than knitting which is very hot and has to be treated with size before spraying.

Fierce moustaches, beards, etc. can be applied with poster paint.

DOCTOR. Traditionally wears a frock coat and a top hat, with a gladstone-type bag to carry his props which include a large 'tooth' and the 'pullers' – pliers, or coal/cooking-tongs. A modern doctor could dress in hospital whites, etc. There is a lot of scope for the improvisation of "cures" – transplants, etc. and for other topical business.

## SECTION E: LEARNING MORE

BOOKS WHICH HAVE BEEN WRITTEN SPECIFICALLY ABOUT MUMMING ARE:

TIDDY, R.J.E. **The Mummers' Play.** Clarendon 1923 / Paul Minet 1972.

Thirty-one texts & five discussive chapters based on lectures. The first specialised book, but posthumous so the completeness of the ideas is uncertain.

CHAMBERS, Sir Edmund K. **The English Folk Play.** Clarendon 1933/69.

Deep but dated thinking, with five texts including Ampleforth and Revesby. Weak on Wooing Plays. Important, as it dissects the plays, creating the terminology to define the various parts of the action and the different characters. Recommended as the first book for a newcomer to Mumming. Chambers discussed folk plays in his two-volume work *The Mediaeval Stage*, Clarendon, 1903. The later book repudiates this, but his earlier work seems more in accord with modern ideas

CAWTE, E.C., HELM, A. & PEACOCK, N. **English Ritual Drama: A Geographic Index.** *Folk-Lore Soc.* 1957

A most important book which, though ageing, is still the first place to seek information about plays from a specific area. The significance of the Index makes it easy to overlook this book's several discussive chapters, five sample texts & most extensive list of references. Sadly the value as a tool is limited by quoting only the earliest (often obscure) source although the material may be reprinted more accessibly. Amendments & additions were published in the magazine *Roamer*, qv.

BRODY, A. **The English Mummers & Their Plays: Traces of Ancient Mystery.** *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, 1970.

The first full-length work of scholarship since Chambers. Increases in the number known plays caused shifts in what was considered significant. Recommended as the newcomer's second book. Three texts.

HELM, A. **The English Mummers' Play.** *FLS*, 1980.

The ideas seems a bit archaic, but must be viewed as the last (posthumous) work of an indefatigable collector & prolific writer & lecturer. 18 texts.

HAYWARD, B. **Galoshins: The Scottish Folk Play.** *Edinburgh UP*. 1992

I, A Socio-Cultural History; II, Commentary on the Performance. 45 texts. (Includes all known Scottish textual references)

Also important are:

HALPERT, H. & STORY, G.M. (eds) **Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland - Essays in Anthropology, Folklore & History**. U. of Toronto Press, 1960/1990 [pbk/ISBN 0-8020-6767-0]

Early patterns of English traditions have sometimes been preserved in former colonial areas (cf 'Appalachian' ballads) & although "Mumming" here mostly means Christmas visiting in disguise, this excellent book gives insight into the feelings & beliefs of Mummers in an earlier age. Three texts.

GLASSIE, H. **All Silver & No Brass**. Indiana Univ. Press, 1975

The Author spent visits over several years studying a rural district on the Ulster border. He looked not at the plays but at the players & how they & their community benefited from the performances. Like the previous book, this is more sociological, but still valid & interesting.

GAILEY, A. **Irish Folk Drama**. Mercia Press, Cork, 1969. 100pp. pbk.

Comprehensive; cites associated dramatic customs. Five texts.

Other authoritative works are:

SHARP, C.J. **Sword Dances of Northern England**. Novello. 3.vols, 1911-13 / E P Publishing, 1 vol, 1977.

Has dance notations, also play fragments, calling-on songs & text of Ampleforth.

CAWTE, E.C. **Ritual Animal Disguise**. F L S, 1978.

A definitive work which includes the Ram & the Horse in plays.

*Mention should be made, I suppose, of:*

ALFORD, V. **Sword Dance & Drama**. Merlin, 1962.

Postulates that the dance is associated only with mining sites.

Most books can be obtained through the Library Service. This usually works on several levels. Requesting a book may produce the reply that it is "not available", but this often means locally. Persistence will generate increasingly wide enquiries which will usually be successful in the end.

BOOKLETS ON THE SUBJECT. - A5-ish unless shown otherwise

HARWOOD, H.W. & MARSDEN, F.H. **The Pace Egg - The Midgley Version**. *The Authors, 1935 / David Bland, Halifax, 1977*. History & Text.

HELM, Alex. **Five Mumming Plays for Schools**. EFDSS / FDS, 1965.  
Brief notes & four plates of costumes. 45pp.

HELM, A. & CAWTE, E.C. **Six Mummers' Acts**. Guizer Press, Ibstock, Leics, 1967.  
Notes, two plates, some sketches of costume. 48pp.

HELM, A. **Cheshire Folk Drama**. Guizer, 1968.  
Notes, discussion, list of plays, two plates, five texts. 58pp.

GAILEY, A. **Christmas Mummers & Rhymers in Ireland**. Guizer, 1968. Fine appraisal, much information, two plates, six texts. 44pp

HELM, A. **The Chapbook Mummers' Plays**. Guizer, 1969.  
Detailed consideration, analysis, lists of plays, two texts. 54pp

HELM, H. **Eight Mummers' Plays**. Ginn & Co. 1971.  
Lucid introductions & notes. Eight colour plates of costumes. 72pp.

CAWTE, E.C. **In Come I - An Introductory Leaflet to the Mummers' Play**. EFDSS, 1972. Sample text, list of references. 20pp

SPRATLEY, P. **Mid-East Mumming**. EFDSS, 1977.  
Three Wooing-Play texts & "Poor Old 'Oss". 28pp.

PRESTON, M.J., SMITH, M.G. & SMITH P.S. **Morris Dancers at Revesby**. CECTAL. U of Sheffield, 1976. Copy of original play ms. A4, 36pp.

- **An Interim Checklist of Chapbooks Containing Play Texts**.  
*History of the Book Trade in the North, 1976*. A4, 52pp.  
Essential tool for the study of the chapbooks.

- **Chapbooks & Traditional Drama, Alexander & the King of Egypt**  
*U of Sheffield, 1977*. Scholarly. 3 texts. A4, 38pp.

LEACH, R. I. **The World of the Folk Play. 2. Folk Play Texts**. Harrap's Theatre Workshop, 1978. Aimed at schools. Fair, but weak on Sword Plays as it ignores the need for a competent dance team. Less than practical on animal figures. 4to. 32+ 32pp

MILLINGTON, Peter T. **An Interim Checklist of Nottingham Folk Plays and Related Customs**. TDRG, 1984. 42pp.



SHUTTLEWORTH, R.K. **Introducing the Folk Plays of England.** 18pp. *The Author*, 1984. Very basic. Cannot be praised too highly & should be bought by all. Packed with information dispensed with wit & style, it would be excellent value at twice the price. By the author of this booklist.

HELM, A. **Staffordshire Folk Drama.** *Guizer*, 1984. Fifteen texts.

ROUD, Stephen. **Mumming Plays in Oxfordshire: An Interim Checklist.** *TDRG*, 1984. Map, comprehensive list & two sample texts. 40pp.

DRAKE, Jon. **The Fool & the Hobby-Horse; Their Role In Ritual Drama of Britain.** *Author*, nd. Propounds pagan Celtic origin. 52pp ill.

BROWN, David. **In Comes I: An English Mummers' Play.** *Cotswold Music Ltd, Tewkesbury*, 1988.. A4. 18pp. Aimed at Junior schools. Two pages of background, a topically-modified collated text & how to make easy "to part" costumes. Score & band parts (Recorders etc.) for the "Mummers' March".

SMITH, Paul S & John D.A.WIDDOWSON. (eds) **TRADITIONAL DRAMA STUDIES**, CECTAL & The Traditional Drama Research Group.

1. 1985. **Papers read at the Traditional Drama Conference 1975.**

2. 1988. **Papers read at the Trad Drama Conferences 1978/79/81.**

Academic but important

DOEL, Geoff & Fran. **Mumming, Howling & Hoodening: Midwinter Rituals in Sussex, Kent & Surrey.** *Meresborough Books, Kent*. 1992. 64pp. Texts from Compton, Sussex; Dover; & Hindhead, Surrey.

CORRSIN, Stephen D. **Sword Dancing in Britain: An Annotated Bibliography.** *Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Leaflet no.21. EFDSS 1993. 34pp.* This is NOT a comprehensive list and concentrates on those references available at the VWL.

Many of the above have lists of references & further reading. Much of this material can be found at one or more of the following.

**Centre for English Cultural Tradition & Language.** [CECTAL/"Sectal"]

University of Sheffield. tel. (0742) 768555 ext.6296

Library open to the public but check before visiting. Their important collections include that of Alex Helm on m/f.

**Folk-Lore Soc. [FLS]** University College, Gower St. London, WC1E 6BT  
Their important Library (inc. Helm) is here & most is open to the public. (tel. 071-380 7095) At the time of going to press, the FLS is producing a series of computer-based Bibliographies and Indexes on disc, including one on Mumming and with a Gazetteer of texts in the pipeline. These are to be marketed through **Hisarlik Press, 4, Catisfield Road, Enfield Lock, Middx, EN3 6BD; tel. 0992 700898.**

**English Folk Dance & Song Society, [EFDSS]**

2, Regent's Park Rd. London, NW1 7AY. tel. 071-485 2206 They lend books to Members & make a small access charge to others. They hold runs of magazines & Journals & many manuscript texts & have important Collections including that of J M Carpenter (microfilm).

University libraries allow public access & house books on folklore

"ROOMER" The Newsletter of the Traditional Drama Research Group. [TDRG] Important material. Ceased 1990. Back-numbers – Steve Roud, 18, Amberley Gr, Addiscombe, Surrey, CR0 6ND. tel.081-654 6233

**THE MORRIS RING.** A national organisation for male Morris Dancers & Mummers. They have an active & expanding Archive (see below)

**TEXTS** For texts from a specific locality, first consult the Geographic Index, Galoshins, etc. Your Local Studies Centre or County Archive may have material. but many older archives store folk plays under the names of their villages, which can be tedious. You could approach the bodies listed above, who might help or tell you of some local specialist.

If you *do* find unpublished texts or information please document them fully for those who come after, ideally sending copies to the EFDSS & the Morris Ring. Put them into your local Archives - where any donation, even printed material, improves your standing with archivists who treat you much better as a contributor

## The Folk-Play "Archive"

**This assembles photocopies of everything that has been written about Folk Plays & related subjects.** Not selective as to quality, it considers everything, good or bad, which could have been read by anyone. Not specifically included are:

- \* Simple references to a team appearing, etc.
- \* Texts in general, although some special varieties are included. These exceptions comprise Longsword plays, composed plays, chapbook texts & plays notable for interesting or unusual features.

**The Archive includes all published specialist books & booklets, together with ephemera & trivia, also video & audio tapes.**

**There are at the moment 101 volumes with 7283 sheets in 1619 separate items.** (A volume is 'full' at about 100 sheets.) & there is an author index on cards. The Archive is being actively developed. I can supply copies of the Tables of Contents to the volumes, at a fair, nominal price. *(These contain bibliographic details more extensive than anything currently available)*

There is a special section holding unpublished works of scholarship - Theses, etc. which presently has 39 items totalling 4981 sheets in 25 volumes.

**I can now say that, to the best of my belief & within the stated parameters, this Collection holds more material than any other publicly-accessible collection in the Country!** If anyone challenges this, or has a like interest, I shall be delighted to collaborate as kindred spirits are few & far between.

Access, including evenings & weekends. can be accorded to any serious enquirer by arrangement. Accommodation can sometimes be provided. The Archive is portable & is available, with its archivist, for relevant events on an 'expenses' basis.

Photocopies of much of the material can be supplied to members of Ring clubs & often to others. **Donations of material will be received with gratitude & delight, & payment if required.**

R K S. iii.94.



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