

Meet the Mummers

An entertainment devised, written and presented by the Stony Stratford Mummers on 25th January 2006 as part of the “Stony in so many words” literary festival.

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TICKET: ADMIT ONE

Meet the Mummers

Wednesday 25th January, 7.45pm
at The Crown, Stony Stratford.
Admission £3



The Stony Stratford Mummers
www.stonymummers.org.uk

A 'Stony in So Many Words' event

Origins of Stony Mummers

Derek has 'opened the door' on tonight's proceedings and in true Mummers style we welcome you all. We hope you will be entertained, as well as informed, by our 'literary' presentation, and I will start by giving you the background to Stony Stratford Mummers.

The Mummers began when a group of dedicated folk performers decided that they would entertain those in the town at Christmas time. These friends had come together to sing Christmas Carols, and one year they decided to perform a Mummers Play.

It was in this year, 1974, that Stony Stratford Mummers was born. Rod Hall, who now lives in Yorkshire, was one of the main protagonists in the formation of the Mummers and he was also instrumental in setting up the now famous Folk on the Green.

I remember coming to Stony Stratford and sitting in The Plough to witness one of the first performances of Stony Mummers (1974). I knew Rod (we were students at the same establishment) and occasionally came to Stony to visit friends. By coincidence, in this particular year I had just directed my first Mummers play with students at Buckingham School. I had found a play in an old children's anthology, where they were often published pre-1970, and as a young enthusiastic teacher I thought it would be fun for the kids to perform at the end of term. (I still have the script, although regrettably I did not take down its source!). This play has fourteen characters and opens with Father Christmas, so was ideal as it could involve a whole class in its production. Our plays are more manageable now! Little did I realise I would still be involved with Mummers and living in the area all these years later! Apart from one Christmas in the mid-late 1980's Stony Mummers has performed every year since its inception.

During the 1980's several of the players were drawn from the now defunct Stony Stratford Morris, Only Julian (Gt Holm) and Derek now remain. Old Ted is from Castlethorpe, Don from Hanslope but the rest of us are from The Stratfords and Wolverton.

My first outing as a player came on 17 December 1986 when Paul was playing Bighead. He found himself dashing off for the birth of his daughter as we were about to set off to perform in the town, so I had to step in as this character at the last minute. I have been 'stepping in' ever since.

'Why do you do it?' you may ask. It's great fun, it keeps a tradition alive, and it raises money for charity.

In the early 1990's I decided to start keeping records of what we did, albeit in an ad hoc way, and it was at this time that we started collecting with particular charities in mind. We had always passed the hat round, and informally the money went to paying any expenses and giving the rest to a charity such as Oxfam. It was in 1990 that we decided to split the collection between a local and a national/international charity and by formalising this, collecting became

another reason for our entertainment. From this date we have raised just over £2,500 for charity.

For those involved, each year performing with the Mummers has become part of the seasonal cycle of their year. The call goes out at the end of October, or the beginning of November, and we have two meetings before processing into town for the annual Lights Celebration, the start of Christmas in Stony, and our performance schedule. My front door opens and in walks the first person with 'In comes I....' We decide a play and so the seasonal round begins!

It is one of our traditions to perform in the local village pubs on the Friday evening before Christmas. We hire a mini-bus to take our play round North Bucks, although this year we ventured over the 'border' into Northants. The tour has to be planned to coincide with the visit of the Chip Van to Thornborough (how group traditions are born, family story, bath?).

We often perform in the town on the Saturday, starting with Wassail and mince pies at my house before going out into the street in the late morning. After several street performances The Mummers process to the Sundial House of Roy and Maggie Nevitt where we perform in their hallway, thereby following the ancient tradition of performing in someone's home. They treat us to Mulled Wine and delicious seasonal delights to help us on our way, out into the cold December afternoon. Should they be away? We retire to the Fox and Hounds for some festive cheer!

Stony Mummers have sometimes performed in the summer. Festival 350, The Waterside Festival at Greatt Linford and Stony Live, have been such occasions. We've played Halloween in Campbell Park and in recent years have joined other members of the Morris Federation at the end of September for their annual celebrations; then we have performed in Yorkshire and The Lake District with Morris Dancers from around the UK.

Over the years more than fifty people have been involved in the Mummers. Some have played only once and others have been involved for more than twenty years. We welcome anyone who shows an interest in the tradition. There has always been a core of regular players, many of whom are with us this evening and who will deploy their talents to entertain you.

The Hero/Combat and The Wooing traditions are the sources for our plays. Unlike some Mummers who perform only one play, we draw on a repertoire of several from these traditions, sometimes adapting them, depending on the number of performers and circumstances. The songs in the Hero/Combat, and a dance at the end of our play, are also our additions.

Whether you are experienced in the tradition of Mumming, or are new to it, during this evening we hope you will be entertained by the '90 minutes traffic of our stage'.

Julian will now present you with a **brief** history of Mumming.

A Brief History of Mumming

- Mumming is a custom, it is a social activity and it is street theatre.
 - Mumming at Christmas time has been recorded for around 320 years, but exactly how old is it?
 - Well, prior to 20th Century it was recorded in almost every significant village/ habitation in England.
 - It was also found in Scotland, the Welsh Borders, South Wales, and English-speaking areas of Ireland. Also in New England , and parts of Canada
 - The common factor is the English language and English-speaking traditions
 - The roots of mumming may or may not be ancient – we do not know.
 - The first surviving recorded reference was 1685 – Cork, Ireland
 - However there are plenty of other 17th Century references in England to dancing, singing, Maying, numerous ‘players’ some ‘mummers.’
 - Evidence for Mumming pre-1650s is maddeningly elusive!
 - Mumming may well be older than this BUT
 - Mumming in the form in which we recognise it started in this era
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- The common feature in all mumming plays was and remains **a death & resurrection**.
 - The fact it is found in every mummers play suggests a common origin at some time point at or before this time.
 - Why did communities feel the need for a death & resurrection ritual at this time of year? There are no records of why it started. To mark the annual seasonal cycle – the time of year when the shortest day is reached and the life cycle starts again?
 - To coincide with the start of the church’s annual cycle? Well, mumming was **never** a religious custom and had no links with church festivals.
 - So there can be no proof for any theory – each remains an unproven hypothesis.
 - Mumming texts may have been influenced by Richard Johnson’s massively successful legend, the “*Famous Historic of the Severn Champions of Christendom*” , published in 1596
 - It tells how St George, son of the Lord High Steward of England, was stolen just after his birth by an enchantress. He was kept by her for fourteen years, when he imprisoned her in a rock and freed the other six champions whom she was keeping captive. After staying nine months in **Coventry**, the champions set out on their individual travels, one of whom, George went to Egypt to kill a dragon.
 - This done, George won the hand of Sabra, the King of Egypt’s daughter, who was courted by the Black Prince of Morocco.
 - We still say this line today in our plays – “and by these means I won the hand of the King of Egypt’s daughter”

- A constant theme of Johnson's romance is the triumph of Christianity over Islam. Most, but not all mummers' plays have themes that portray a Muslim, Turk or Moor as anti-hero and a Christian Saint, King or Prince George as hero.
- Before the 20th Century mumming was a custom passed down from each generation by word of mouth. Despite oral transmission the story of the play, and the character's speeches have remained remarkably similar across Britain down hundreds of years.
- But speeches could also be modified – indeed they frequently were. Like all oral customs a natural evolution developed as each generation performed the words, each embellishing them slightly.
- Folklorists first began recording mummer's plays at the end of the 19th Century and the height of collecting was in the first years of 20th Century. Their influence was both a curse and a crucial salvation. They made performers self-aware for the first time and from this time people consciously sought to 'improve' the plays to bring the text and action more in line with literary conventions.
- Before the start of the 20th Century mumming was a custom practiced by ordinary people – farm workers, apprentices, stable-lads. It was done mostly in the kitchens, halls and yards of ordinary homes and farms.
- The gentry were also familiar with mumming though - the mummers were often welcomed as strange visitors up at the manor house or the big hall and the generous financial donations from the head of the family were always welcomed.
- But mumming was a custom of ordinary people, with no formal links to organised art, music or the theatre.
- It was also, largely, but not exclusively a rural activity.
- It was a male-only custom; the female characters were always played by men dressed as women
- The size of the groups could vary but were generally between 5 – 9, the number decided partly by the number of characters in the play, but sometimes also by the number of people wanting to take part and share the takings.
- Mumming most commonly took place in the weeks around and between Christmas and New Year. In some of its regional variants it was performed as early as All Souls Day at the end of October (Cheshire Soul Caking Plays) and in Lancashire and Cheshire, as late as Easter (Pace Egging.)
- Wherever they performed accounts often speak of the members of the household gathering in the kitchen or hall and in a state of great excitement
- Their arrival was often the crowning of the day. It was a welcome diversion from the drudgery of daily toil for most of the onlookers and something strange and slightly 'exotic.'

From “The Times”, 3rd January, 1914

“If you please, the mummers have come”. A shuffling of feet on stone flags, a hoarse base whispering, with a few strangled “hems” as of a nervous singer about to perform... already the actors are in possession of their green-room, the long dark passage leading to the kitchen. The maids - town-bred and strange to such doings - half-frightened, half-giggling, stand peering into the dim shadows, where beings of more than mortal stature jostle one another.... on each head towers a huge fantastic head-dress covered with pieces of tinsel and bright-coloured rag, which gleam in the firelight as the wearer moves....the mummers wear rudely fashioned coats and trousers of flowered chintz and gay flannelette - all but one; he always has a distinct and traditional costume of his own. The whole household is called together, the big kitchen table is pushed back, there is a momentary hush of expectation, and then out of the darkness into the ruddy glow steps one of the figures, and as the others join him you see that every face but two is blackened.”

- Disguise and a sense of strange visitors were essential parts of performance. The performers blackened their faces – using burnt cork or soot.
- Being an essentially rural custom disguise was important – communities were small. These people might be your neighbours, or your workers or the sons of your friends and could easily be recognised.
- The disguise was completed with sometimes elaborate costumes, coats or smocks completely covered in strips of material, the strips also hanging down over hats and covering the performers’ faces.
- In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries these sometimes evolved into more conventional costumes representing the trade or appearance of the particular character – a doctor’s suit, a soldier’s uniform, an English lady, or a clown’s garb
- Mummers would have their own ‘country’/ territory and would keep to their own ‘rounds’ taking in houses in villages and walking out to isolated farms and houses. Often these circuits would cover many miles.
- Performers would move on as soon as they had completed their performance. They had many other houses and farms to reach to complete their annual round.

- When they arrived the performers entered the room silently and stood either in a line or semi-circle. They then stepped forward to speak their lines before stepping back to allow the next performer to take over.
- Many witnesses of mummers in 19th Century remark on style of delivery – the performers ‘declaiming’ their words, as if speaking by rote, not dramatising.
- They tended to speak almost automatically and deliberately, as though to minimise the chances of the individual performer being recognised

From ‘The Mysteries of Mumming’, The Crypt, Vol.2 (1828)

“They proceed, first of all, to the Squire’s house; where, if they can obtain a passage through the dogs, they are sure of meeting with friends and patrons among the gossips of the servants’ hall. Master’s permission is easily gained; and then one of them opens, in a sort of indistinct murmur between a growl and a grunt something of a monotonous sing-song; only broken by the blows which he hits, with his wooden sword, against the handle of his pike.”

- Why the flat delivery? – Some say it was because mummers were not used to acting and unskilled in characterisation. Or that speaking in flat tones was essential to disguise. Most likely is that the strictures of ‘the custom’ meant it **must** be performed that way for it to be done correctly.
- To our modern ears it would sound monotonous, lacking in interest.
- A great feature of today’s performances is the sense of ‘street theatre’ and the techniques each performer learns to maintain a sense of action, momentum and humour.
- The doggerel survives, and is constantly honed and developed!
- The annual rounds of the mummers was an important occasion for the whole community
- It marked the turning of the season and brought a strange and exotic power into people’s homes, together with a meaning that even the performers could only grasp at.

From T. F. Ordish, “Survival in Folk-Lore”, December 1922.

“It was the day after Christmas Day 1891...there had been frost and, during the night, a heavy fall of snow. It was a brilliant morning, the sky cloudless and blue, the sun shining on the glistening and sparkling expanse before me... presently I saw moving through the defiles of white,...coming up from the direction of the village, what at first looked like a gorgeously coloured rope. Presently this appeared as a file of moving figures, attired in all the colours of the rainbow. On they came in the direction of the house... and I was about to seek out my host to enquire as to the meaning of the extraordinary spectacle I had witnessed, when I heard a loud knocking at the kitchen door. Going in the direction of the sound, I encountered members of the family and guests flying down the stairs and through the hall, excitedly exclaiming to each other “The Mummers! The Mummers have come!” Entering the kitchen with the others, there before me, erect and silent in single file as they had come, but facing inwards to the room, I beheld the figures...whose ascent through the snowy scene I had watched from the window. In silence they waited till every sound was still, and then they began.... Each in turn left the line of figures, announced himself “In comes I, so-and-so” and when his part was finished resumed his place in the row of standing figures. Unrecognisable through the streamers which depended from their headgear, these lads of the village enacted mystery ...”

From a view to a death in the Mumming

JEREMY

As you've already heard, mummers' plays have as their central plot elements a death – or at least a serious injury – and a resurrection. The two principal types of mummers' plays – combat and wooing – differ mainly in the way they arrive at the death, and that's what we're going to look at now.

We'll start with the combat play. The combat begins with a hero figure, most commonly St George or King George, who come in, boasts about his prowess and issues a challenge. The speeches usually include elements of the legend of St George and the dragon: here's the speech from the Broadway play collected in Worcestershire in 1909.

SAINT GEORGE (read by TED)

In comes I, St George, St George –
The man of courage bold.
With sword and spear all by my side,
Hoping to gain a crown of gold.
'Twas I that slew the fiery dragon
And brought him to the slaughter,
So by those fiery means I hope to gain the King of Egypt's daughter.

JEREMY

That's the bit Julian referred to earlier

SAINT GEORGE

Seven years was I shut up in a close cave
And after that cast in a prison where I made
My sad and grievous mourn.
I saved fair Zipporah from the snake.
Which no other mortal man could undertake.
I fought him most courageously
Until I gained the victory.

JEREMY

And then comes the very concise challenge:

SAINT GEORGE

Show me the man that dares me!

JEREMY

The Ilmington Play from Warwickshire, published in 1923, is one of the smallest sub group of mummers' plays, having as its hero none other than Robin Hood – his challenge is more developed:

ROBIN HOOD (read by SHEILA)

Then where's the man that dares to bid me stand?
I'll cut him down with my courageous hand.
I'll cut him, I'll hew him
As small as flies
And send him to Satan
To make quincepies.
Quincepies hot, quincepies cold
I'll send him to Satan before he's three days old.

JEREMY

Quince pies, or mince pies often make an appearance in the speeches of either the hero or his enemy. In and in places like Heptonstall in the Calder Valley where the same play is performed every year to a regular audience, the audience joins in with "mince pies hot, mince pies cold, mince pies in a pot, nine days old". So let's try that now....

(Gets audience to declaim the lines "Mince pies...")

By the way the Heptonstall performances are at Easter, making that play one of the Pace-Egg subset of mummers' plays.

Now the hero's enemy makes his appearance.

In the Broadway Play there are no fewer than four enemies, starting with the most traditional one of all, the Turkish Knight:

SAINT GEORGE

Show me the man that dares me!

TURKISH KNIGHT (read by Eric)

I am the man that dare, the Turkish Knight,
Come from native Turkish land to fight.
I'll fight St George, the man of courage bold,
If his blood is hot, I'll quickly make it cold.

JEREMY

St George kills him. In some plays, Turkish Knight becomes Turkeysnipe. Other enemies of our hero include Beau Slasher, Bold Slasher, Captain Slasher, Cut and Slash, Bull Slasher, Black Prince of Paradise or Paradine, Black Morocco King, King of Egypt, Noble Captain, Captain Thunderbolt, Oliver Cromwell and even Saint Patrick.

Sticking with the Broadway play for now, the next enemy to enter is the Soldier:

SOLDIER (read by BARBARA)

In comes I, the valiant soldier,
Cut and Slasher is my name.
Straight from the German wars I came.
'Twas me and seven more
That slew eleven score,
All brave marching men of war
Many a battle I've been in
I'll fight St George, the noble King.

JEREMY

St George kills him too.

Next in the Broadway play comes the Lady – perhaps a fugitive from a wooing play, or a character who got lost and ended up in the wrong performance:

ENGLISH LADY (read by JEREMY)

Halt, halt! St George!
Why not have me for a wife?
See what a beautiful lady I am!

SAINT GEORGE

That word from thee deserves a stab.
I'll draw out my knife
And end thy worthless life.

JEREMY

And he does. St George is now beginning to look more like a homicidal maniac than a national hero. Food for thought there!

Finally in the Broadway play, the Frenchman appears – presumably straight from the Revolution of 1789:

THE FRENCHMAN (read by SUE)

In comes I, the Frenchman bold,
And I've sworn by the blood of man
That I'll never be controlled.
I'm here tonight to plant my tree
To plant my tree – Liberty.

JEREMY

Well, the great hero of English Liberty kills the Frenchman too. There are now no fewer than four bodies lying on the ground representing, if you like, the threat of

foreign beliefs like Islam and of French Libert , the danger of rebellion in the ranks of the army, and the temptations of female flesh. Nice going St. George!

In the play from Longborough, a few miles from Stow-on-the-Wold, the order of entries is reversed, and the villain – Bold Slasher – comes in first and takes the initiative, to be followed by – a minor variation here – Prince George:

BOLD SLASHER (read by ERIC)

I am Bold Slasher, Bold Slasher is my name,
With sword and buckler by my side
I hope to win the game
I am the Turkey Champion
From Turkey land I came
I'm come to fight the English Champion,
Prince George is called his name
I'll cut him and I'll slash him as small as little flies
I'll send him to the devil till he's nine days old

PRINCE GEORGE (read by TED)

I am Prince George this noble night, I shed my blood for England's right
Here I walk and here I stand, here I take my sword in hand
So do to God guard your life, sir

BOLD SLASHER

What do you say to your life sir?

PRINCE GEORGE

Pound of bread and cheese and a knife sir

BOLD SLASHER

We'll have a little more satisfaction before we die, sir.

(GEORGE AND SLASHER either freeze or circle threateningly throughout JEREMY's next speech)

JEREMY

Bold Slasher, in spite of his confident beginning, seems to admit the inevitable outcome there! And so to battle.

I've been asked by the management to emphasise that what you about to see is incredibly dangerous and should be attempted only by highly trained professionals. Don't try this at home! Unfortunately, we don't have any highly trained professionals here, but what the heck... So Ted and Eric are going to do battle instead. If you are of a nervous disposition you might prefer to look away.

To battle!

(The protagonists fight and Prince George is laid low)

After the death there is sometimes, as you'll see in our play at the end of the evening, a character who wreaks revenge for the hero's death and drives off the enemy character.

So much for the combat plays for the moment.

On now to the wooing plays. These are not completely different to the combat plays, and share many characters with them. But they have an extra group of four characters all their own. The extra male characters are the Farmers' Man and the Recruiting Sergeant. The other two are female characters, Dame Jane (or Old Jane, or Lane Jane or just Jane) and a Lady Bright and Gay (or just Lady). These parts were, of course, played by men, a tradition we respect even though we have women mumpers in our company.

We'll have a look at the Sproxton Play from Leicestershire which, like most wooing plays has some of the plot delivered in song.

After the Fool kicks off the proceedings, the Recruiting Sergeant comes in:

SERGEANT (read by VICKI)

In comes I the Recruiting Sergeant
I've arrived here just now
I've had orders from the king
To enlist all jolly fellows that follow the carthorse at plough
Likewise tinkers, tailors, peddlers, nailers, all that take to my advance
The more I hear the fiddle play, the better I can dance.

JEREMY

Then comes the Farmers Man – good soldier material:

FARMERS MAN (read by DEREK)

In comes I the Farmer's Man
Don't you see my whip in hand?
When I go to plough the land I turn it upside down.
Straight I go from end to end
I scarcely make a balk or bend
And to my horses I attend
As they go marching round the end
I shout ' Come here, jee woah back '.

JEREMY

Yes, indeed.

Now enters the Lady. She has been seeing the Farmer's man, who wants to marry

her: but she's not making any promises, and he's threatened to enlist.

(LADY, FARMERS MAN and SERGEANT take the stage and enact the next sequence)

LADY (sung by JEREMY)

Behold a Lady bright and gay, good fortune and sweet charms,
How scornful I've been thrown away right out of my true love's arms,
He swears if I won't wed with him as we some day p'raps may,
He'll 'list for a soldier and from me run away.

SERGEANT (sung)

Come all you young fellows that are bound for listing,
List and do not be afraid,
You shall have all kinds of liquor,
Likewise kiss that pretty young maid.

FARMER'S MAN (sung)

Thank you sir I like your offer
Time and away do sweet like pass
Dash to me wig if I'll grieve any longer
For that proud and saucy lass.

LADY

Now since me lover's listed and entered volunteers,
I neither mean to sigh for him nor yet to shed one tear,
I neither mean to sigh for him, but I'll have for him to know,
I'll have another sweetheart and along with him I'll go.

JEREMY

And so the fickle lady runs off with the Fool, while the Farmer's Man goes off to the wars, perhaps to return as the Soldier in the Broadway play!

So where does the death come from?

In the Sproxton play Beelezebub enters and issues a very St George like challenge, taken up by the fool:

BEELZEBUB (read by DON)

In comes I Beelzubub
Over my shoulder I carry my club
In me 'and a drip leather pan
Don't you think I'm a funny old man?
Any man or woman in this room dare stand before me?

FOOL (read by JONATHON)

Yes, I dares, 'cos me 'ead is made of iron
Me body's made of steel
Me hands are made of knuckle bone
No man can make me feel

BEELZEBUB

What? I don't care if your 'ead is made of iron
Your body made of steel
Hands are made of knuckle bone
I can make you feel
I'll smish you, smash you as small as flies
Send you to Jamaica to make mince pies.

JEREMY

Hold it there for a moment please! Let's invent a new bit of mumming by adding the audience participation we rehearsed earlier on. So, Beelzebub, please give us the last two lines again and then we'll all join in with "Mince hot, mince p ies cokd, mince pies in a pot nine days old".

BEELZEBUB

I'll smish you, smash you as small as flies
Send you to Jamaica to make mince pies.

ALL + AUDIENCE (as many times as it takes to get a good response)

Mince pies hot, mince pies cold,
Mince pies in a pot
Nine days old.

JEREMY

I have a vision of a time some decades from now when a young researcher from the university of Deanshanger is researching local folk customs of the late 20th century. He meets one of you in you corner of the common room at the old folks home and over a cup of tea you tell him what you remember of the Stony Mummers. "Oh yes" you say, " there always used to be a bit in their play where the audience joined in. Now what was it. I think it was 'Mint pies new, mint pies old, mint pies go to pot, nine years old.' Yes, that was it." The researcher goes on her way clutching her notes of this remarkable and possibly unique variation on the mice/quince pies theme. And so the Chinese Whispers of collection accumulate.

And now back to the action.

(BEELZEBUB hits FOOL with a club then hits on shoulder. FOOL falls to ground as if helpless)

JEREMY

No glorious combat there, just a swift homicide.

In other wooing plays the death involves the second extra female character – Dame Jane. She comes in carrying her infant and accuses the Fool of being the father. Sometimes he accepts this and they marry. Sometimes, he denies paternal responsibilities. Then two characters fight and one is killed. Sometimes Beelzebub or St George comes in and knocks down Jane – or the Fool... Sometimes the Recruiting Sergeant kills Beelzebub – and yes, the Doctor still cures him!

I hope you're beginning to get a feeling for the way the plot actions and characters mix and mingle from one play to another.

Here's one rather eloquent wooing play sequence version involving Dame Jane, Tom Fool and Beelzebub. It's from the South Scarle Plough Monday play collected in 1882: South Scarle is in Nottinghamshire. I said earlier that we usually have the female parts played by men, but Mumming is one long exception to all the rules, so here Dame Jane is read by Sheila.

DAME JANE (read by SHEILA)
(She is carrying an infant)

In comes I, old Dame Jane
Neck as long as a crane,
Dib-dabbing over the meadow.
Once I was a blooming maid,
Now I'm a down old widow, *(turns to TOM FOOL)*
Tommy lad, a long time I've sought you,
Bur now at last I've caught you
My love for you ne'er lasted,
And since you called me what you did
Tommy lad, take to your bastard.

TOM FOOL (read by JONATHON)

Child, Jane, it's none of mine -
'Tis not a little bit like me.

DAME JANE

Look at its eyes, nose, mouth and chin,
It's as much like you as ever it can grin.

TOM FOOL

Who told you to bring it to me?

DAME JANE

Th' overseer of the Parish
Said I was to bring it to the
Biggest fool I could find -
And I thought you was him.

TOM FOOL

Take it away you saucy Jane and begone!

BEELZEBUB (read by DON)

In comes I, old Beelzebub
On my shoulder I carry a club
What old woman can stand before me?

DAME JANE

I can - my head is made of iron
My body lined with steel
Me shins are made of knuckle bone
And you can't make me feel.

BEELZEBUB

Well if you head is made of iron
And your body lined with steel
And your shins arc made of knuckle-bone
I still can make you feel.

(BEELZEBUB fells her and her infant with his club)

Those lines “my head is made of iron, my body made of steel” are some of the commonest lines in Mummers’ plays – but several different characters get to use them. In our play later you’ll here a version of them spoken by Bold Slasher.

But we’ll stick with Beelzebub to end this part of the evening.

He most commonly makes his appearance towards the end of the play, perhaps reminding us by his presence that we are all liable to end up in his hands if we don’t mend our ways. Sometimes he just introduces the next character, sometimes he’s the one who asks the audience for beer and money. In every script I’ve seen he considers himself “a jolly old man”.

As it’s Burns Night, here’s a Beelzebub speech from the Scottish lowlands. This untypical speech actually **opens** the Yule-Boys play from Galloway – collected in 1824. Untypical it is, but it begins with the four lines that appear almost universally.

BEELZEBUB

Here come I, old Beelzebub,
And over my shoulder I carry a club;
And in my hand a frying-pan,
Say don't ye think I'm a jolly old man.
Christmas comes but once in the year,
And when it comes it brings good cheer,
For here are two just going to fight,
Whether I say 'tis wrong or right.

My master loves such merry fun,
And I the same do never shun;
Their yarking splore with the quarter-staff,
I almost swear will make me laugh.

JEREMY

Before you ask, I don't know the exact derivation of "yarking splore"! But it doesn't really matter – the meaning is as clear as that of much of the non-sense that gives mumming it's unique quality.

Interval

And now for the Cure or Resurrection.....

SUE

In Part 1 we left a medley of characters dead or bleeding on the floor, in fact 4 in the Broadway play Jeremy introduced in the 1st half, but more usually it is just Saint George in the hero/combat play and the Fool in the wooing play. (We could leave them all there!!), but perhaps we should do something about them! And so we come to the next part of the play – the Cure or Resurrection and we can introduce the larger than life character of the Doctor.

The 'Quack Doctor' character is a common factor linking most recorded Mummings plays, which could actually be renamed "Quack Doctor" plays. The doctor is the character who generally enacts the cure and resurrection part of the play. He is sometimes given a name e.g. Dr Brown or Dr Parr, often rhyming with the following line.

JEREMY

In comes I old Dr Brown,
The best old doctor in the town

SUE

..but more often is addressed merely as 'The Doctor', or given the accolade 'most noble doctor'. In keeping with the mumming tradition that plays can, and have changed over the years, to suit current time and/or locality, in 2004 this character was played by Eric in a leather jacket entering to the lines:

Doctor: 'In comes I, the doctor'
All: 'Who?'

and as you've guessed, the cast humming the signature tune from a certain popular TV programme!

Now **The Doctor** has been a stock character in stage drama for many centuries and in fact an early version of a doctor's speech had been published as a broadsheet in the 17th C. He was also an important character in the pantomime tradition, also prevalent in the 17th C, transferred across Europe from Italian Commedia dell'Arte.

The resurrection narrative within the mummings' plays loosely follows three stages: first of all the call for the doctor, then the doctor explains himself, and finally the diagnosis and cure:

WE'LL START with the **call for the doctor** and see how this important character makes his entrance first in a hero/combat play from Ilmington in Warwickshire which the group performed at the Morris Federation Weekend in Rippon? in September 2004, **and** secondly in the Sproxtton Wooing play Jeremy showed us in part 1.

SHEILA
(*Example 1 Ilmington*)

MOLLY Doctor, Doctor, do thy part
 Robin Hood is wounded through the heart,
 Through the heart and through the knee,
 Ten guineas to a doctor I'll freely gie,
 Come in Doctor.

DEREK & SHEILA

(*Example 2 Sproxton*)

Farmer's man: Oh Belzie, Oh Belzie, what hast thou done?
 Thou's killed the finest man under the sun.
 Here he lies bleeding on this cold floor
 Faith never to rise no more.
 Five pound for a doctor.

Beelzebub: Ten pound for him to stop away.
 What's the good of having a
 doctor to a dead man?

Farmer's man: Sixteen pound for him to come in.
 Step in doctor.

SHEILA

NEXT in the Ressurrection section comes the **Explanation**, which is where we find out a bit more about our Doctor fellow and his credentials! Regardless of the play, the Doctor is always asked to explain himself in relation to some or all of the following questions:

(lines delivered alternatively by Sheila/Sue/Di)

How did you become a doctor?
Where have you travelled?
Where have you come from?
What illnesses can you cure?
How much do you charge?
Are you prepared to 'do us a deal' on the price?

SHEILA

One of the endearing features of **the Doctor** is his exaggeration of his own skills, which, if you listen very carefully, is in fact complete rubbish! He has some wonderful nonsensical lines, which simply slip off the tongue. He is introduced at different times, depending on the play, and cures different people in differing ways.

(Jeremy on stage to model accessories!!)

SHEILA

To ply his 'trade' the Doctor has various 'props' - a horse, a doctor's bag containing the 'tools of his trade', and various other refineries, such as a top hat and kid gloves and corduroy walking stick, depending on the play. He may hand the horse to a member of the audience, with a warning it may BITE!, or more often it is handed to another character in the play who we will meet in just one minute.

Here are 2 contrasting excerpts showing the doctor's entrance in **firstly a hero/ combat play** from Antrobus in Yorkshire, one of our most popular plays through the years, which is in fact a Cheshire Soul Caking play. Now the Soul caking plays, as the name suggests were confined to parts of Cheshire and performed primarily around All Souls day!! in ?

(indicate the side of the stage it is to be performed)

and then a wooing play, our old friend Sproxton!

(indicate the other side).

(Performed with 2 different doctors one either side of the acting area. The sergeant addresses them in turn posing the questions).

VICKI and JEREMY

Example 1 Antrobus

Mary: How camest thou to be a doctor?

Doctor: By my travels sir!

Mary: And where hast thou travelled?

Doctor: Italy, Picaly, France and Spain.

Three times out to the West Indies

And back to old England to cure diseases again.

Mary: And what disease canst thou cure?

Doctor: All sorts.

Mary: And what's all sorts?

Doctor: All sorts; the Hump, the Grump, the Ger, the Gout,

The pains within and the pains without.

In my bag I've got spectacles for blind humblebees,

Crutches for lame mice, plasters for broken backed earwigs.

I've pills and I've powders, for all kinds of aches, including headache, Earache, also cold shakes.

I've lotions and I've motions, also some fine notions

That have carried my fame far wide over five oceans

Mary: And what are thy fees to cure my son?

Doctor: Five pounds, Mary, but you being a decent woman. I'll only charge you ten.

Mary: Well, cure him!

VICKI and JULIAN

Example 2 Sproxtton

Sergeant: You a doctor?
Doctor: Yes, I a Doctor.
Sergeant: How became you to be a doctor?
Doctor: I travelled for it.
Sergeant: Where did you travel?
Doctor: England, France, Ireland and Spain,
And I came back to old England again,
Just below York there I cured an old woman
named Cork,
She fell upstairs, downstairs, over a half empty
teapot full of flour, and grazed her shinbone
above her right elbow, and made her stocking
leg bleed. I set that and made it straight again.
Sergeant: What else can you cure?
Doctor: Ipsy, pipsy, palsy and gout,
Pains within or aches without.
Set a tooth or draw a leg,
And almost raise the dead to life again.

DI.

NOW for the final stage! The diagnosis and ‘cure’:

Within the enactment of the cure, the influences of English slapstick pantomime are clearly marked with the introduction of another of our favourite characters in the mummings’ play, that of JACK FINNEY, sometimes known as John Finney, Tom Pinney or even Jack Viney. He acts as the doctor’s assistant and sometimes as the Dr himself. He cheeks and parodies his master and the repartee that flies backwards and forwards between them is very entertaining.

The pair of them often use a variety of painful looking props to effect the cure. Once again we need to insist, as Jeremy did in Part 1 – that you **DO NOT ATTEMPT ANY OF THESE STUNTS AT HOME!!** These props include clothes tongs to draw a tooth and a variety of delightful medications including a bottle of hocus pocus or epsy doansum pills **AKA table tennis balls**, again depending on the play.

Let’s now see part of a hero/combat play from Longborough in Gloucestershire and meet John Finney/or is it Pinney/or even Viney? Well let’s see!!

At this point in the play Robin Hood, our protagonist, is lying on the ground dead. Molly pretends to cry and wants a tooth drawn.

***Sheila, not sure how to explain Molly’s presence here so could you explain-thanks!
Who did we cast as Molly/ Robin Hood? Did we cast them? How are we staging this?
Sat on chairs as J suggested so the audience can see them?

DOCTOR (read by Jeremy)

Jack Viney ! Fetch my instruments

JACK VINEY (read by Jon)

My name is not Jack Viney
It's Mister Viney, a man of great fame.

DOCTOR Fetch my instruments!

JACK VINEY I shan't

DOCTOR What's that?

JACK VINEY I shan't?

(The Doctor runs after him)

JACK VINEY This it, sir?

(Jack brings in any ridiculous object)

DOCTOR No

JACK VINEY Is this it?

(another ridiculous object)

DOCTOR No you fool!

(Doctor kicks Jack out and returns with a pair of tongs. All four try to pull out Molly's tooth and all fall. Molly shows her breeches under her petticoat.)

DOCTOR

Ladies and Gentlemen all,
See how this poor man has suffered.
In my box I carry a pill,
In my bottle I carry a smell.
In my hand there's no disdain.
Rise up Robin Hood and fight again.

(He gets up)

DI

Finally, let's see the denouement in the Sproxton play.

SERGEANT (read by Vicki):

You must be a very clever doctor; you'd better try your experience on this young man

DOCTOR (read by Julian)

Just wait while I take off my big top hat, kid gloves and corduroy walking stick, and feel this mans pulse.

This man's pulse beats nineteen times to the tick of my watch,

He's in a very low way indeed, couldn't be much lower without digging a hole.

He's been living on green tater tops for three weeks all but a fortnight.

This morning he tried to swallow a young wheelbarrow for his breakfast. Tried to cut his throat with a rolling pin. I'll stop him from all them tricks.

Give him some of my old riff raff down his chiff chaff, that'll make him rise and fight.

Also I'll give him some of my epsy doansum pills. Take one tonight, two in the morning and the box tomorrow dinner time. If the pills don't digest the box will.

If he can't dance, we can sing, **so let's rise up and we will begin.**

So you think its all over.....?

We've seen the boast and the combat and the "death" followed by the cure and resurrection. Surely that's it – lets sing a song and collect the money?

Not quite....

Before we get to this conclusion, almost all Mummers Plays introduce one or more supernumerary characters – who enter in turn, say their brief lines – and depart. Although they are indeed supernumerary to the main plot, and indeed usually baffling in relation to it, they are an interesting bunch whose strange words often have a "from deep in the roots of folk history" feel about them – as we will see. And supernumerary is in fact a touch derogatory – so lets instead call them the third component of the play – sometimes referred to as the "Quete" or Quest or Search – and these characters do appear to be searching for something – your money – in the last century offerings from the landowners for whom the performances were being made. One possible reason for these characters' introduction is to give the chance for more country lads to take small parts in the play and thus share in the "take".

We've already seen one of these characters who is the most ubiquitous – appearing in the Quete of most hero-combat plays. To make this interactive and to check you are still awake - any guesses?

Beelzebub. This stock character seen in many types of play as well as Mummers – for example the Mystery plays – introduces just a hint of menace into proceedings. But as we have seen (?) Beelzebub – sometimes called Belsey Bob or Belsie Bug, or Helsey Bug or Alzebub – and even possibly Eezum Squeezum – is not a supernumerary in one of the play formats. In the wooing plays, he is usually a key part of the main plot being responsible for the essential "death".

Lets have a look at a couple of the other Quete characters. One of the most common – and one of our favourites is **Big Head:**

Performed by Di

Big Head

In comes I old Big Head.

With me big head and me little wits.

Me head's so big and me wits so small.

So here is a rhyme to please you all.

All sing

*Father died the other night and left me all his riches –
A wooden leg, a feather bed, and a pair of leather breeches,
A coffee pot without a spout, a jug without a handle,
A guinea pig without a wig, and a half a farthing candle.*

Pretty obscure stuff – but fun!

Another common character is **Derry Doubt** – more common in the North than the South – which clearly shows the “give us your money” intent:

To be performed by....whoever is short of parts?

*In comes I, little Derry Doubt
With my shirt tail hanging out
If you don't give me money
I'll sweep you all out.*

Well if you think Big Head and Derry Doubt are a bit obscure – try this one - which we have included in a few of our performances over recent years. Why you may ask – well we just happen to like the weird and wonderful words – another reason for including these characters! – **Wild Horse and Driver**

Performed by Sheila

*In comes Dick and all his men
He's come to see you once again.
He was once alive, but now he's dead,
He's nothing but a poor old horse's head.
Stand around Dick, and show yourself!
Now, ladies and gentlemen, just view around,
See whether you've seen a better horse on any ground.
He's doubled ribbed, sure footed, and a splendid horse in any gears.
And ride him if you can!
He's travelled all through frost and snow,
He's travelled the land of Ikerty Pikkery,
Where there's neither land nor city:
Houses thatched with pankakes,
Walls built with penny loaves,
Pig puddings for bell ropes, and black puddings growing on apple trees:
Little pigs running about with knives and forks in their backs,
Crying out, 'Who'll eat men?'
He's a very fine horse, he's of a very fine mould,
We've got to keep him clothed to save him from the cold.
If you look down this horse's mouth, you'll see holes in his socks.
This horse was bred in Seven Oaks,
The finest horse e'er fed on oats;
He's won the Derby and the Oaks,
And now pulls an old milk float*

And this speech also illustrates another role for our Quest characters – they are usually rather a sad indeed pathetic bunch who hopefully will induce sympathy in the audience – and encourage you to dig deeper into your pockets at the end of the play!

But the Quest characters sometimes have a further role – and one Stony Mummers have often used. It allows us to “write” in a new character – often based on original words from a traditional Quest character – who can give a particular slant to a current topic or local controversy. Thus some years back when the development on the Mill Field was a big local issue, we transformed Beelzebub into **Old Taywood** – but tempus fugit and we won’t go down that road now!

Again in 1995 at the time of the Stony 350 Civil War festival we introduced **Oliver Cromwell**. Not entirely our creativity as this character does appear in a few early mummers plays (correct, Julian/Vicki?)

To be performed by....whoever is short of parts?

*In comes I Oliver Cromwell, as you may suppose
I conquered many nations with my copper nose
I made my foes for to tremble and my enemies for to quake
And beat all my opposers till I made their hearts to ake
And if you don't believe what I say
Enter in Beelzebub and clear the way.*

Finally for this section of the evening on the Quest – a lovely character we introduced for our Christmas 1999 play – a week or two before the new millenium - bowdlerising words from other characters and adding our own last verse – **Anna Domino**

To be performed by either Jonathon or Julian – depending on how parts are panning out overall and who is doing Jack Finney in the play at the end...?

*In comes Anna Domino
The finest old lady this town can show.
I've shaved me chin, an' oiled me boots
An' I've pressed me best black sacking suit.*

*My fourteenth husband, Dicky Dear,
He passed away the other year,
The year the old king died....
King George that is,
That's George the Fourth....
Or was it the Third?*

*I've lived before, I've time to come
My life is a millennium.
Millennium, millennio,
Out goes Anna Domino.*

.....well it is all over now – well almost!

Performance of the play ‘Christmas 2005’