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Nottingham's Owd 'Oss Mummers and their scrapbooks

Introduction

This paper is written from a personal perspective, so I will start *before* the beginning with a bit of relevant personal history.

From 1962 to 1969, I received my secondary education at Hall Park Technical School in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. A new teacher, Roy Dyson, joined the school in my fifth year and became my geology teacher. We already had a school folk club, of which I was a member, and traditional folk music being one of Roy's major interests, he became our mentor. He drove us to folk clubs in his old Landrover and generally encouraged us. Nowadays, Roy is well known in the storytelling world.

Roy got us to put on a Pasche Egging play [*sic*] at a school summer fete in 1967. I remember I played Beelzebub. My costume consisted of a sacking tunic, and I carried a lethal club. This was made out of a length of 3" x 2" timber, spokeshaved to make a handle at one end, and with two six inch nails hammered through the other end at right angles - a prop I would recommend for all school teenage mumming sides!

Somewhat later, again under the influence of Roy Dyson, I started attending the Nottingham Traditional Music Club on Fridays at the News House, Nottingham. This highly successful folk club was the brain child of another Roy – the professional folk singer Roy Harris. He encouraged a number of spin-off activities, notably regular ceilidhs, the Dolphin Morris Men, and the Owd 'Oss Mummers.

I was not a founder member of the mummers, but I joined them during the first Nottingham Festival in 1970. They were due to perform in the Old Market Square (or Slab Square, as we call it locally), and I just turned up to watch. They were, however, all in a tizzy because someone had not arrived. I casually asked someone what play they were doing, and they passed me the script. As it happened, this was the self-same Pasche Egging Play that Roy Dyson had given us at school, and because I pretty much still knew all the words, I was roped in to fill the gap. I think the part I played on this occasion was Betty Askett (Fig.1). Someone went missing every day during the festival, so I found myself working my way through every part in the play. I ended up becoming a full member of the side until I went off to college.



Figure 1: First photograph of the Owd 'Oss Mummers, in the parade at the 1970 Nottingham Festival

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Source of the Pasche Egging Play

The Pasche Egging Play that we performed was compiled by Stuart Lawrence and Bruce Wilson in 1965 from six Cumbrian versions, mostly from the Furness peninsula.

The then leader, Mick Couldry, tells me the script was given to the Owd 'Oss Mummings by Roy Harris, and Roy confirms this, but is not sure where he got it from. Both he and Roy Dyson think that it probably came from a folk magazine – possibly *'English Dance and Song'*. However, I have not been able to find it in *'ED&S'*, so it may have come from another magazine, or possibly a different source altogether, such as a handout from a folk festival workshop.

I have spoken to the surviving compiler, Bruce Wilson, now 87, who is unable to shed any light on how the script might have reached Nottingham.¹ However, Bruce tells a story related to him by his father, who was brought up on a farm about two miles from Ulverston. One Easter, they were visited by five groups of Pace Eggers in one day. When a sixth side was seen to be approaching, the farmer fetched a shotgun and fired it over their heads. For some reason, they did not stay to perform.

The Owd 'Oss Mummings' Scrapbooks

This is good point at which to bring in the Owd 'Oss Mummings' scrapbooks (Fig.2), because The 1970 Nottingham Festival is where they start.



Figure 2: The Owd 'Oss Mummings' scrapbooks and associated materials

There are two parts to this collection, of which I am currently the custodian:

The four scrapbooks proper belong to Sullivan's Sword and were given to me for safe keeping by former member Idwal Jones. They cover the periods 1970-1972, 1974-1975, 1977-1979, and 1980-1981. There is also a plastic folder with a Sullivan's Sword badge on the cover containing scripts, press clippings, photocopies and loose notes, some of which relate to Merrie England Mummings of Eastbourne, East Sussex to which Bob Baron also belonged at one time.

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The rest is Owd 'Oss Mummers material that I own personally, comprising folders containing the sets of repertoire scripts that I was given as a cast member, and material we collected during a special project in 1975, including a tape cassette of field recordings. I also possess a rather grubby Owd 'Oss Mummers branded T-shirt (Fig.3)



Figure 3: An Owd 'Oss Mummers T-shirt, stained from storage

Like any scrapbook, the Owd 'Oss Mummers' scrapbooks contain press cuttings, photographs, tickets and posters from performances, and similar ephemera (Fig.4). In addition, they contain promotional literature, the minutes of the Mummers' annual general meetings, and especially reports of tours and events, plus the occasional letter (Fig.5). The minutes and reports are mostly written into the books by hand. Some were typed or handwritten on loose sheets and then stuck in the books.

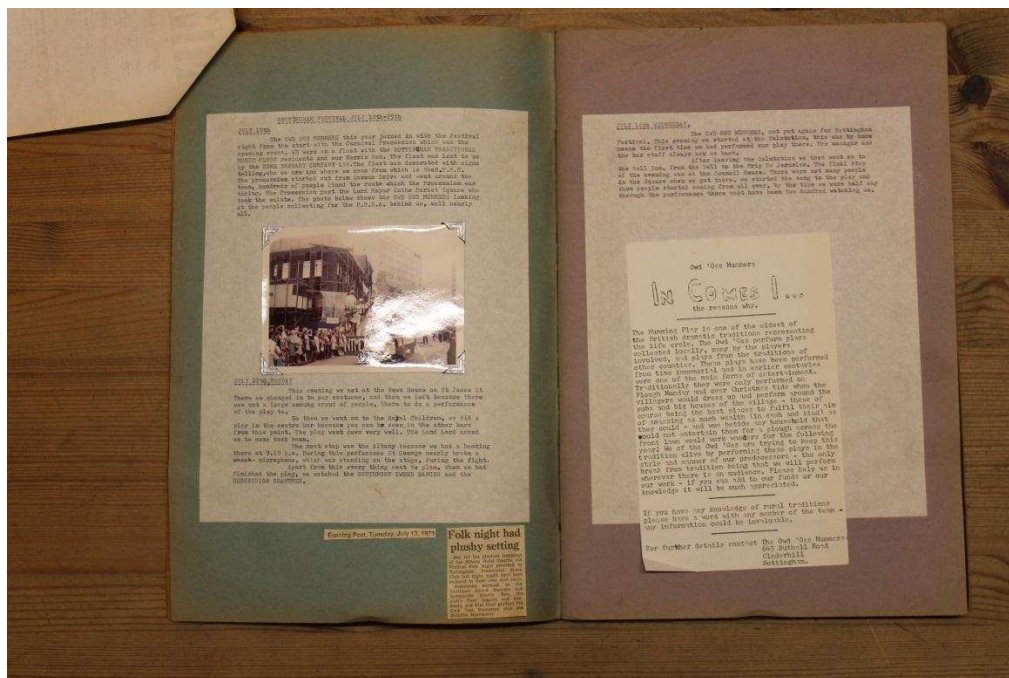


Figure 4: Scrapbook showing the mix of reports, press cuttings, photographs and promotional flier.

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The scrapbooks were kept by an annually elected officer called The Scribe. Most kept the job for a couple of years. Each had their own writing style and way of doing things. Some were more assiduous than others, hence the gaps. I am ashamed to say I was not a good Scribe during the short period I held office.

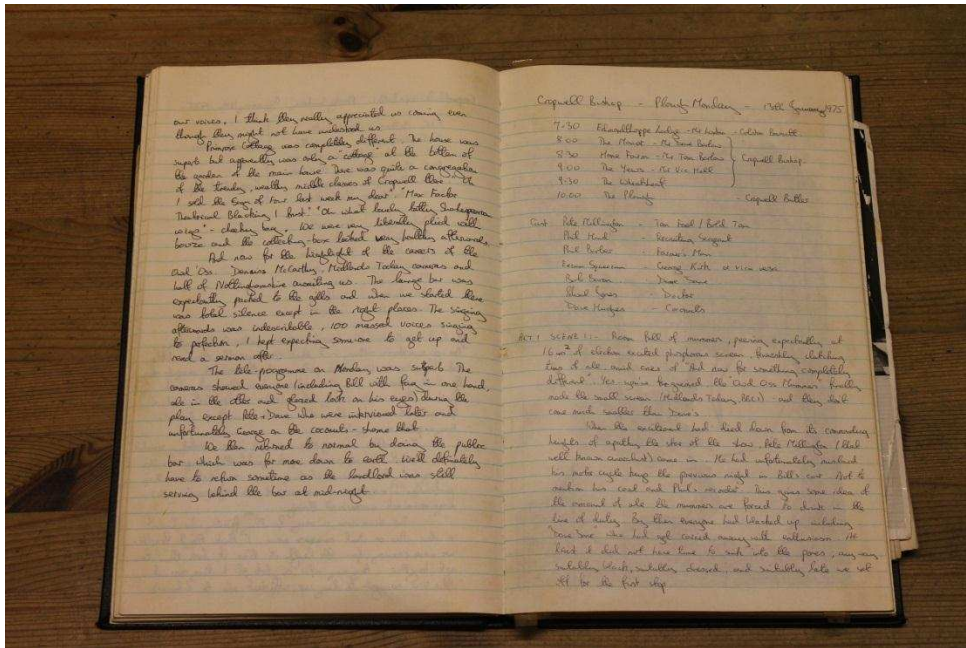


Figure 5: Tour reports

Mentioning elected officers, minutes and reports may make the scrapbooks sound formal and organised, but I can assure that they were anything but. They are full of anecdotes, in jokes, and topical “sagas”. Sometimes the clippings and montages have little or nothing to do with mumming, but happened to take the Scribe’s fancy (Fig.6).

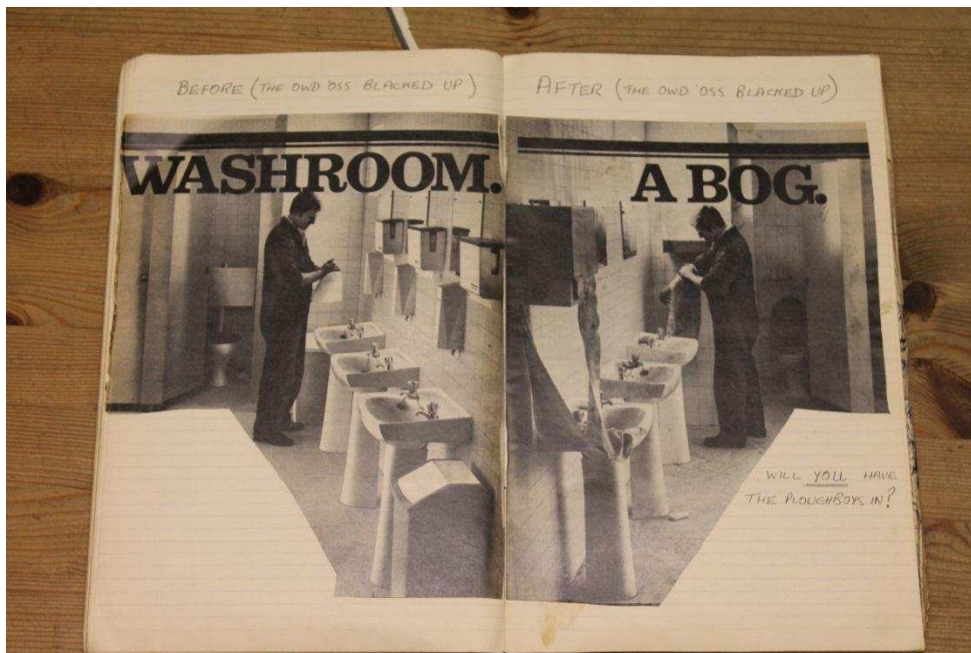


Figure 6: A Scribe's whim (Before and after the Owd 'Oss Mummings blacked up. "Will you have the Ploughboys in?")

I will come back to the non-scrapbook materials later.

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Beginnings of the Owd 'Oss Mummers

As mentioned earlier, the Owd 'Oss Mummers were an offshoot of the Nottingham Traditional Music Club (NTMC). They were started by Roy Harris, although he never took part himself. He persuaded a group of people to do a play and provided them with the scripts, but then he left them to get on with it. The club was founded in 1967, but the foundation date for the mummers is not clear cut. My own recollection was that they had formed shortly before I joined them, possibly in 1969. This is the date that founder member Laurence Platt recalls and fellow founder Mick Couldry agrees that seems about right. Later Owd 'Oss Mummers' handouts gave the date as 1967, but this may have been confused with the foundation of the NTMC.

Another founder member Simon Furey remembers that the first meeting took place at the home of Laurence Platt, and thinks their first play was the Pasche Egging play that Roy provided.² However, according to Laurence, this was a precursor of the side, and the first play was a Plough Play from Farnsfield, Notts., that Roy Harris had collected from a Mr. Emmons. In any case, Laurence did not stay with the mummers.³

The name "Owd 'Oss" or "Owd Hoss" was not given to the group until sometime later. I would like to be able to report that the name derived from the relatively local Old Horse Play tradition found in north Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire. However, it was actually inspired by the Hobby Horses of Padstow, Cornwall, whose Mayday perambulations were regularly attended by brothers Mick and Norman Couldry, and Dave Hughes.⁴

The first performance was for an interval spot at an NTMC ceilidh held at the Sir Julian Cahn Pavilion on West Park, West Bridgford. This became a regular annual event. As time passed, the ceilidh spots needed some variety, so the mummers wrote plays of their own. I do not know if any of the scripts have survived. I recall that in one such play I took the part of Bold Snot, the Nottinghamian king. As I am sure everyone knows, Snot was the local hero who founded what was originally called Snottingham. I cannot think why the initial "S" was dropped.

The Mummers do not appear to have really taken off until 1970/71, which may be why the scrapbook was started then. The Nottingham Festival has already been mentioned, and this became a regular official booking – not that it stopped the police from trying to cart them away in a Black Maria on one occasion. They performed for local schools and societies, and on local radio. Their first major booking at a folk festival was in 1971 – the Keele Folk Festival, held at Loughborough University (Fig.7).

At this time, they also established contact with the EFDSS Midlands Organiser, Sibyl Clark, or Dame Sibyl as we called her. The Mummers got bookings via her for events throughout the region during much of the 1970s. These included a regular annual gig at the National Town and Country Show, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, when on at least one occasion the Mummers appeared on the same bill as the Coventry Mummers. (Unfortunately, I never attended one of these gigs myself, because the National Show clashed with Moorgreen Show, with which my family had a long standing connection.)

The Mummers benefited, at least as regards props, from a couple of members – Mick and Norman "Titch" Couldry - joining the Sealed Knot re-enactment society. Simon Furey says:

"I still remember the concert we did at Sutton Bonnington just about the time that the Couldrys joined the infant Sealed Knot. They were spending their spare time beating ploughshares into swords, and on the aforementioned occasion at SB, Tich [sic] came on with a double-bladed steel battleaxe which he waved around and then threw at the floor so that he could draw his wooden sword for the fight. The battleaxe hit the floor (parquet, fortunately) and stuck in, quivering, much to the mixed fright and relief of Jeannie Robertson (I think it was, ...) who, sitting no more than a couple of yards away, would otherwise have been done some serious injury."

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Figure 7: The Owd Oss Mummers on the bill for the 1971 Keele Folk Festival, Loughborough, plus loose photographs.

I too recall this battle axe. We were performing in Wollaton Park during one of the Nottingham Festivals. Titch threw it down, expecting it to stick in the grass, but as the ground was baked as hard as stone, it ricocheted off into the crowd, narrowly missing a woman's ankle.

I think it may have been the same festival where we were being barracked incessantly by a particularly obnoxious drunk. During the sword fight, one of the wooden swords broke. The blade flew into the audience and smashed this guy's glass tankard, leaving him holding just the handle. He kept quiet after that.

As you may gather, health and safety was always one of the Owd 'Oss Mummers' strong points!

Forays into Research

My career with the Owd 'Oss Mummers was put on pause about this time, because in September 1970, I went off to study at Plymouth Polytechnic. On the night of Halloween 1970, I hitchhiked up to the EFDSS's country retreat at Hallsway Manor, Somerset for a weekend folk event. It was in the Kennedy-Grant Library there that I first encountered the book *'English Ritual Drama'* and discovered the rich tradition of Nottinghamshire folk drama.⁵ It was this discovery that launched my first forays into folk play research, initially in Plymouth Central Library.

For personal reasons, I decided to change courses and was accepted for a place at Leeds Polytechnic. I could not take it up until September 1971. I therefore took a "gap year", which I spent in the exotic location of Mansfield. It was here that I developed my research interests in the folk drama of Nottinghamshire. I also re-established sporadic contact with the NTMC. The NTMC had at this time a research group that met at the home of the late Anne Cockburn in Ravenshead. This encouraged several of us to dig about in libraries and go out collecting folk plays. We were pleasantly surprised to discover that the tradition was not dead in western Nottinghamshire, but then still very much alive, under the names of Guysering and Bullguisering.

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This boosted my own interest in folk play research, and I continued to delve when I moved up to Leeds. While there, I inveigled my way into the nearby Institute of Dialect and Folklife Studies, University of Leeds, who materially nurtured my interests, especially Tony Green. It was probably through him that my name became known to Paul and Georgina Smith (now Boyes) of the Survey of Language and Folklore, University of Sheffield (later CECTAL, and later still NATCECT). They also gave me much practical encouragement. I am all the more grateful to them when you consider that I was not a student at either University.

Owd 'Oss Mummings in the mid-1970s

I inevitably all but lost touch with the Owd 'Oss Mummings during my time at college, but I rejoined them after I graduated in 1974, and moved back down to Nottingham to work. The Owd 'Oss Mummings I returned to had altered during my absence, with an almost complete change of personnel.

This is a good point to talk about how the Owd 'Oss Mummings were organised. I believe we followed the example of the Coventry Mummings in having officers based on the model of Morris Ring sides, with a couple of variations. These were in 1977:

- Squire - The head man
- Bagman - In charge of the money
- Scribe - Keeper of the scrapbooks
- Squirrel - Keeper of the costumes
- Groom - Keeper of the horse

In theory these officers were elected at the AGM, but in reality their appointment depended more on the balance of abstentions (i.e. there was normally only one candidate and they got the job if no one objected).

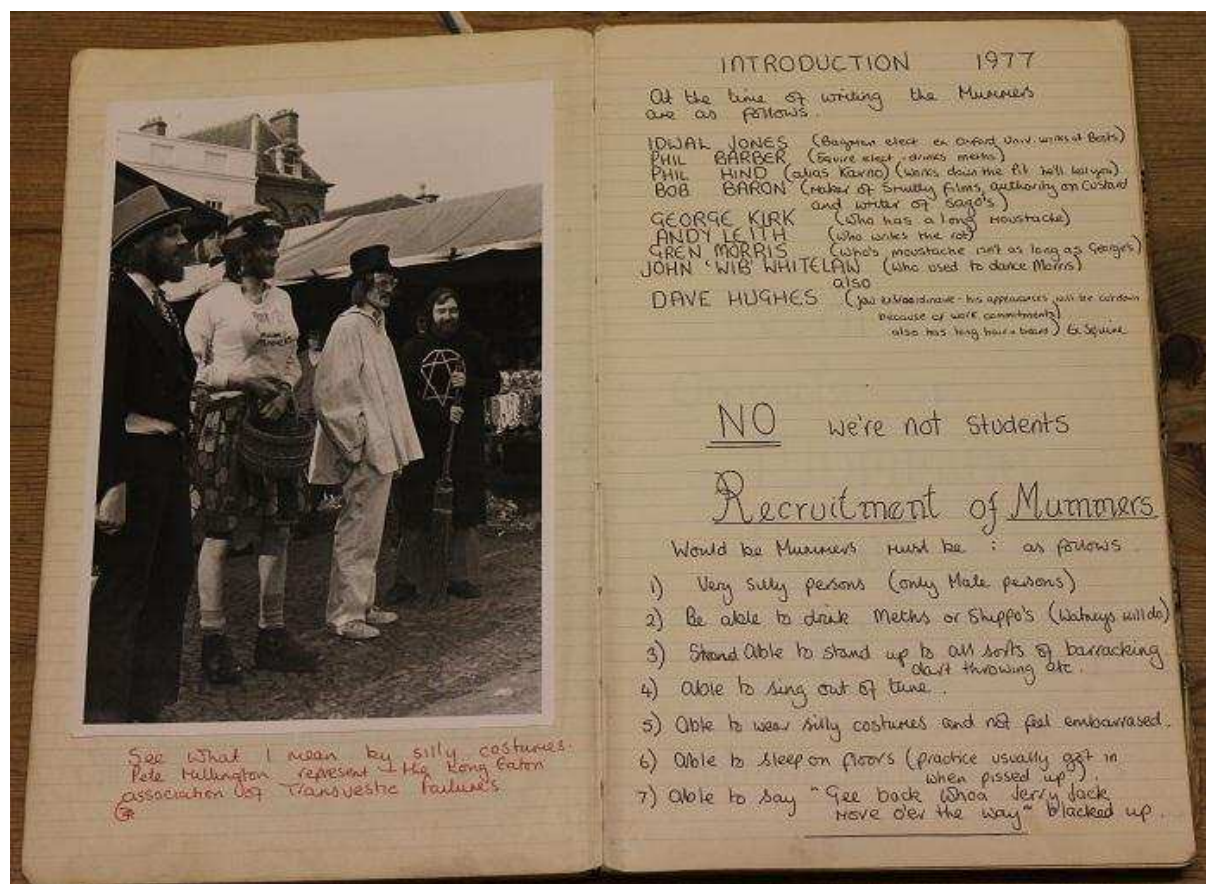


Figure 8: Beginning of the Owd 'Oss Mummings' scrapbook for 1977

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New recruits mostly came from members of the NTMC and later Bendigo's Folk Club, Arnold, but occasionally we were joined by someone's mate or a volunteer from elsewhere. The scrapbook for 1977 (Fig.8) records that would be Mummers must be:

- Very silly persons (only Male persons)
- Be able to drink Meths or Shippo's⁶ (Watney's will do)
- Stand Able to stand up to all sorts of barracking, dart throwing, etc
- Able to sing out of tune
- Able to wear silly costumes and not feel embarrassed [sic]
- Able to sleep on floors (practice usually got in when pissed up)
- Able to say "Gee back whoa Jerry Jack Hove o'er the way" blacked up

I think this accurately reflects the seriousness and sobriety with which they pursued their business.

The mention of dart throwing alludes to an incident when we played at the Clifton Bridge Inn, Silverdale (locally known as the "Ponderosa"). A pub's clientele normally stopped whatever they were doing to watch the play, but on this occasion some darts players carried on with their game, which got in our way. By way of a heavy hint, whoever it was got killed lay down on the floor between the oche and the board. However, the players just carried on throwing darts over the body, and I think one even bounced back off the board!

Modus Operandi

We met pretty much every week either for a tour or a practice. Practices took place in the upstairs or back rooms of various pubs. I remember the Gladstone in Carrington, the Peacock on Mansfield Road, and above all the Red Lion off Canning Circus. This was an Irish pub, with an Irish landlord, and usually with a Irish jam session going on in the bar downstairs (although the musicians were all English). This was an odd place. The landlord kept budgies that were allowed to fly free in the upstairs practice room, imparting it with a memorable aroma. Slasher, Beelzebub, and the Black Prince of Paradise were also very careful about where they fell when they were killed.

One evening, we were unable to use this room because the landlord was decorating and it was full of furniture. "That's OK", he said. "I'll seal off the lounge downstairs and you can use that." We tramped downstairs and waited for him to close off the lounge. He came through with a hammer and a four inch nail which he then proceeded to nail through the door and the jamb! Conversely, we once had to get a claw hammer to get in to practice.

Performances during the mid to late 1970s were very frequent indeed throughout the year. Apart from the set piece events we attended, we normally did a pub tour at least every fortnight somewhere in or around Nottingham. These normally comprised three pubs, which had been reconnoitred a week or two before by a couple of the officers. The usual routine was to perform and stop for a drink before moving on to the next pub. At the end of our performances, the squire, Phil Barber, shouted out "Ladies and Gentlemen, you have just been watching an ancient fertility ritual, and if you put some money in our hat it will guarantee you fertility for the rest of the evening." (You have to remember that these were the days before Viagra™.)

There were a couple of further annual events in addition to the regular bookings already mentioned. We had an annual feast, partly funded by profits from the bag, to which former members were invited, and also an annual weekend outing to a seaside resort such as Skegness. Very little planning went into these outings apart from setting the date and booking a minibus. I remember going on one such outing to Scarborough, where we lost half the day trying to find a campsite that could take us.

Repertoire

We needed a varied repertoire so as not to bore either our regular audiences, or the Mummers themselves. This gradually built up to the following collection of scripts:

Peter Millington, *Nottingham's Owd 'Oss Mummers and their scrapbooks, Mummers Unconvention, Bath, 2012.*

- a. Farnsfield Plough Play (collected by Roy Harris)
- b. Pasche Egging Play (compiled by Stuart Lawrence & Bruce Wilson)
- c. "Sorrelsykes" – a play taken from a book of the same title by Harold Armitage (1913). This is essentially a "Peace Egg" chapbook version
- d. A Robin Hood play, Kempford, Gloucestershire (from Tiddy, "Mummers' Play"⁷ – Fig.9)
- e. Wheeler End (evidently from Harman, 1934)⁸
- f. A Christmas Mummers Play called "The Dragon Play" by the Owd 'Oss, from a published Christmas anthology I have not yet been able to identify.
- g. The reconstructed Cropwell Plough Play (described later)
- h. Stoneleigh Mummers Play⁹
- i. A plough play from East Bridgford, Notts¹⁰

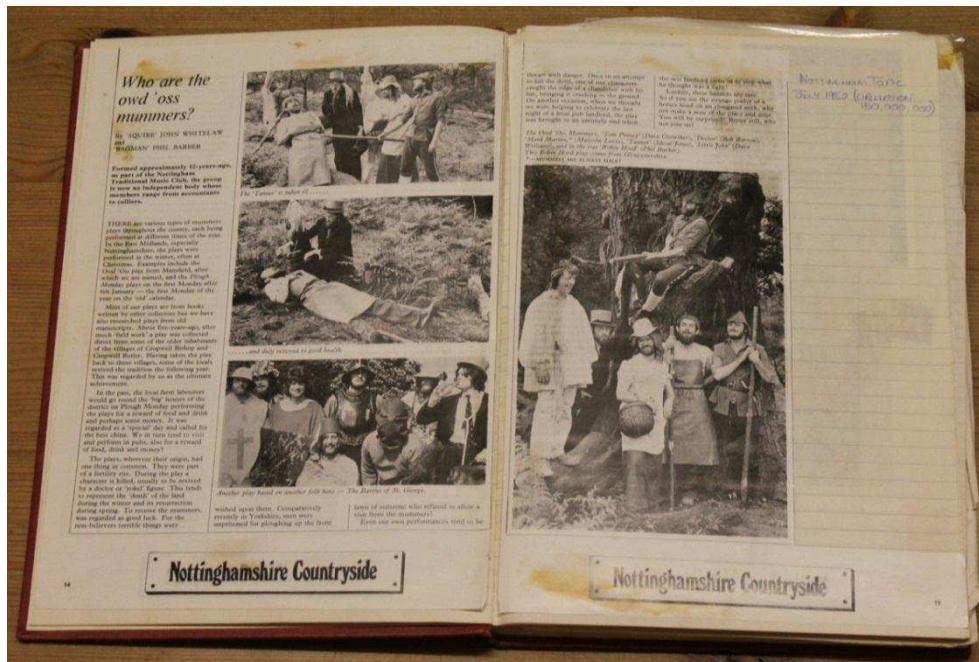


Figure 9: The Robin Hood Play, photographed for the 'Nottingham Topic' in Sherwood Forest

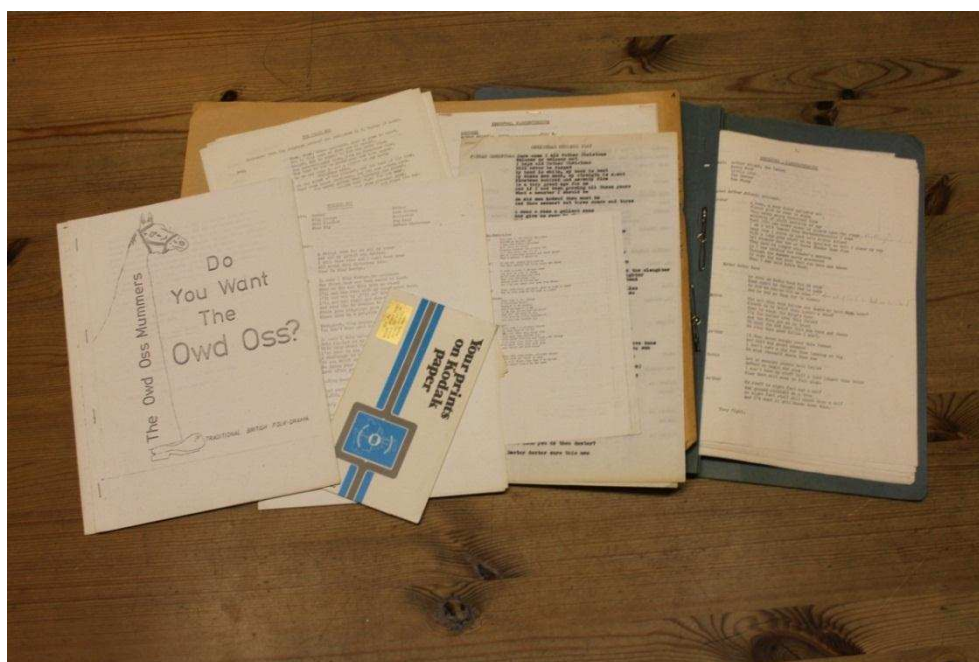


Figure 10: The Owd 'Oss Mummers' scripts

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An attempt to introduce a Scottish “Galations” play did not take root.

The scripts were typed up and photocopied for cast members (Fig.10). When the masters could not be found, copies were made from the copies, and so on with reducing quality until the text started disappearing off the edge of the page. They then had to be retyped, usually incorporating any additions and modifications that had accrued in the meantime. On at least two occasions folders of scripts were assembled for cast members, although they tended to fall into disuse.

The Cropwell project

From my personal point of view, the Owd 'Oss Mummers' high point came in 1975, when we decided to research and reconstruct a Nottinghamshire Plough Monday play. I drew up a short list of the villages for which most archival information was available, and where old performers might still be alive. We chose the Cropwells – two neighbouring villages – Cropwell Bishop and Cropwell Butler.

Over a period of a month or two, we descended on the villages at weekends and split up to seek out the old performers and collect as much information as we could – not just the words of the play and the songs, but contextual details such as the places they went to perform (Fig.11).

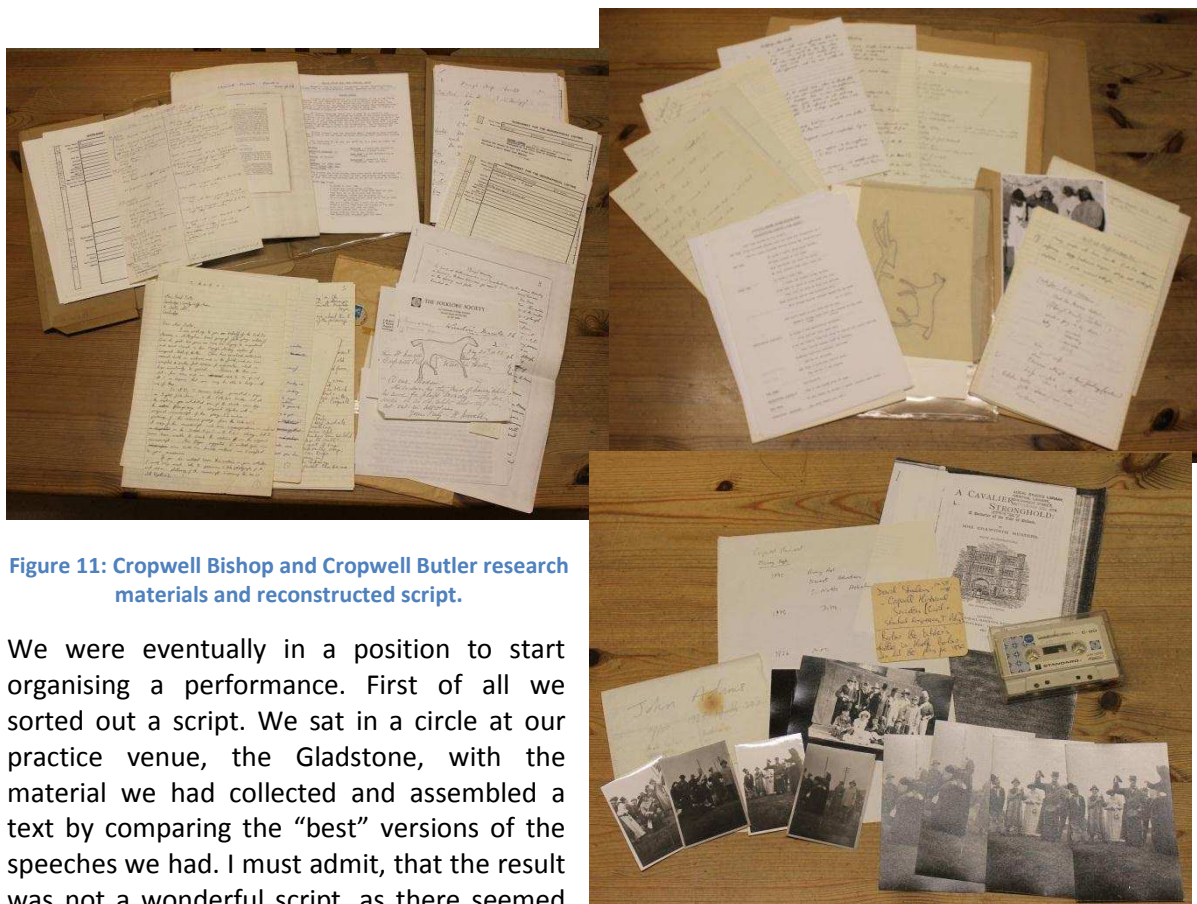


Figure 11: Cropwell Bishop and Cropwell Butler research materials and reconstructed script.

We were eventually in a position to start organising a performance. First of all we sorted out a script. We sat in a circle at our practice venue, the Gladstone, with the material we had collected and assembled a text by comparing the “best” versions of the speeches we had. I must admit, that the result was not a wonderful script, as there seemed to be gaps, but it was performable.

Regarding costumes: we had photographs from when the play was revived in the 1930s, coached by a former performer Harry Knight, in which they dressed in part. We also had a detailed description of appliqué costumes that was published along with the text by the local squire's wife Lavinia Chaworth Musters in 1890.¹¹ Furthermore, I was aware that correspondence in the Ordish Collection at the Folk-lore Society included a template used for the horses that decorated the costumes. Ordish also mentioned a shirt that Mrs Chaworth Musters had donated to the Society, but we were not able to track this down in the time available to us. I obtained a photocopy of the template, and we

Peter Millington, *Nottingham's Owd 'Oss Mummers and their scrapbooks*, Mummers Unconvention, Bath, 2012.

decided to reconstruct this style of costume. The costumes also called for blacking up, for which we bought theatrical make up.

Two years later, in 1977, I helped Arnold Rattenbury track down Chaworth Musters' costume at the Cambridge and County Folk Museum for his exhibition on clowning at Nottingham Castle Museum.¹² I think we did a reasonable job of replicating the costumes in 1977, given the circumstances (Fig.12).



Figure 12: Cropwell Costumes - 1890 and 1975

Back in the Cropwells, we managed to arrange a tour that visited most of the big houses and farms that our informants had mentioned, over two nights. We then set to publicising the event with Press Releases, and had a visit from the local press photographers at our final full dress rehearsal. We were also contacted by the BBC for local radio and the regional television news, who came to film us on the first night of our tour.

As well as the press coverage, the project generated a lot of local interest. The farmers we visited had invited parties of friends and family round to watch our performances, and laid on generous spreads of food and drink for us.

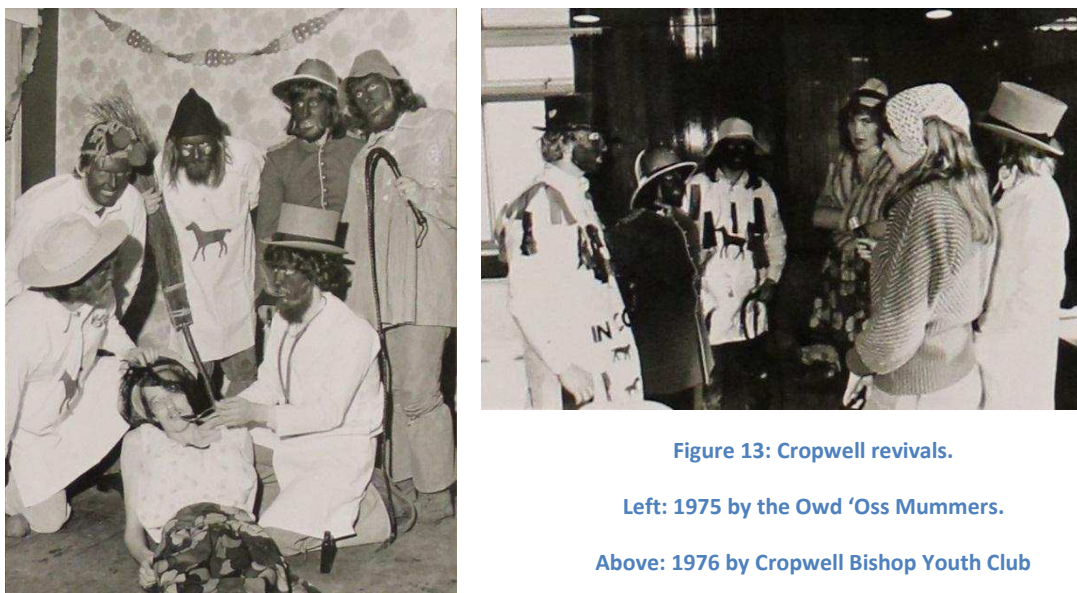


Figure 13: Cropwell revivals.

Left: 1975 by the Owd 'Oss Mummers.

Above: 1976 by Cropwell Bishop Youth Club

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The play entered our repertoire, but we did not go back to perform it again in the Cropwells. Instead, I went back the next year to teach it to members of the youth club in Cropwell Bishop. They performed it in 1976, using our costumes (Fig.13). They were equally successful and had a great time doing it. However, I do not know if they continued to perform after that.

Metamorphosis

I resigned from the side at the 1977 AGM, for reasons that will become apparent. By this time the Mummers were starting to change into something else.

The seeds of change had been sown by a residential weekend booking we did for Sybil Clark at Brant Broughton, Lincolnshire for Christmas 1976. This included a longsword dancing workshop, in which we participated and took a fancy to. As it happened, I had a lock of seven wooden longswords hanging on the wall at home as an ornament. I took them along to one of our practices, and it developed from there. One of our members, Gren Morris, was a blacksmith, so the wooden swords were soon replaced with steel.

Sword Dancing was added to the repertoire, and by 1977 the dancers had been given a separate name, Sullivan's Sword, after the landlord of the Red Lion, Joe O'Sullivan. Soon the Mummers and dancers, many of whom were also Bendigo's Folk Club regulars, were taking bookings for "The Equestrian Road Show" - an evening of folk drama, sword dancing and folk song. The Road Show's grand premier was at the Lacock and Chippenham Folk Festival in May 1978.

During this period, the group also performed versions of the Derby Tup and the Owd 'Oss, particularly in the Equestrian Road Show, but also occasionally at sword gatherings.¹³

The last entry in the scrapbooks is for an Equestrian Road Show booking at the NTMC on the 20th march 1981.

Eventually, the mumming fell by the wayside, leaving Sullivan's Sword, who continue to perform very successfully today. They have not forgotten their mumming roots though. They still perform a plough play at the annual Plough Sunday event they organise for local dance sides at Morton, Notts (Fig.14). Idwal Jones has written in more detail about the genesis of Sullivan's Sword.¹⁴



Figure 13: Sullivan's Sword performing their play at Morton, Nottinghamshire

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The Owd 'Oss Mummers also had a revival of sorts on a different track in the 1990s. Roy Harris decided to start a new folk club at Tiger Inn, Long Eaton, where I live. This was known at Traditions at the Tiger (or TATT), but continues today at a different pub. One Christmas, Roy announced in the club's newsletter that we were going to do a mummers' play this year. "Anyone interested speak to Peter Millington." That was the first I had heard about it! Anyway, I did my duty, and the Tiger's Guysers were born. We had a different repertoire, but one or two of the original Owd 'Oss Mummers took part, and we also used some of their costumes, which we obtained from Sullivan's Sword (Fig.15).



Figure 14: The Tiger's Guysers, Long Eaton, 1994. Ex Owd 'Ossers include Bob Baron, Andy Leith and me.

Conservation Issues

Coming back to the scrapbooks; they are showing the ravages of time. Many of the pages are yellowing, faded and frayed at the edges.

Perhaps surprisingly, the volume that is best preserved is the oldest, the one that was purpose made for press clippings and the like. Here everything has been fairly carefully laid out, and nearly all the items are still intact and attached to the pages.

The other volumes are large ruled office notebooks. One of these is positively falling apart, and the cover bears mug stains. They all have wedges of material inserted between various pages – usually photographs, but also ephemera associated with performances. One reason for this is that many of the items that were originally Sellotaped to the pages have come loose. Evidently they fell out of the book at some point and were just shovelled back in to any old place.

The dropping out of the photographs turns out to be a mixed blessing. Sellotaping photographs is never a good idea, because the tape tends to discolour and spoil the look of the pictures. Also, should they ever need to be removed for copying, say; it is difficult to remove the tape without damaging the photograph. In this case, the adhesive has completely degraded, more or less, and the tape itself has often become brittle, so it just lifts off without causing any damage. Conversely, pages that have been pasted in are still in place.

One particular problem with the loose photographs is trying to work out where in the book they were originally placed, so that they can be re-associated with their captions and tour reports. Many

Peter Millington, *Nottingham's Owd 'Oss Mummers and their scrapbooks*, Mummers Unconvention, Bath, 2012.

could be reinstated by matching the remnants of Sellotape attached to the photographs with the marks left by the tape on the page (Fig.16). This is rather like doing a jigsaw puzzle. Some, however, have no clear location, unless personal recollection can be brought into play. The situation is not helped by there being several duplicates of some photographs.

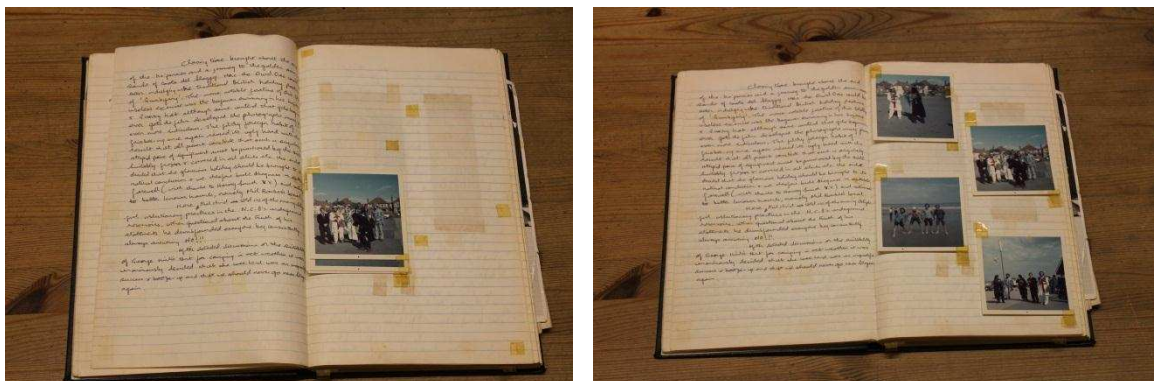


Figure 15: Before and after pictures of loose photographs re-placed by matching Sellotape scars.

Whether fixed or loose, there is a big problem with trying to date the photographs and name the people in them, especially as they are often placed chronologically out of sequence and uncaptioned.

What do we need to do to conserve the scrapbooks? Here are my thoughts:

- Photograph or scan everything exactly where it is now.
- Try to place the loose items back where they came from
- Photograph everything again
- With the help of ex-members, identify the people in the photographs, and if possible the places, dates and the photographers.

This is only a start. We really need to seek the advice of a professional archivist, and this might ultimately mean depositing the collection in a proper archive.

My leaving saga

It must be said that I was a very nervous performer during my Owd 'Oss Mummers days. As far as I was concerned, mumming was the best substitute for *Ex-lax*™ I know. That was one of the reasons I decided to leave.

There was a tradition of people writing humorous poems or “sagas” for our annual feasts, usually alluding to events that had occurred during the foregoing year. The occasion of my retirement was the subject of one of these odes, and to show that I bear no ill feeling, I conclude by reproducing it here:

“Lord Millingtons Lamentation”¹⁵

Being an ode to one who fell by the wayside

This 'ere is the tale of an ex 'Owd Oss Mummer
Who's name it was Millington Pete
As Beelzebub he appeared quite alarming
And in't dames costumes looked very sweet

Now Millington he had just one problem
Which were three less than t'rest of the crew
'Cos without fail before each performance
He'd a calling to visit the loo

Peter Millington, *Nottingham's Owd 'Oss Mummies and their scrapbooks*, Mummies Unconvention, Bath, 2012.

Now everything else'd be ready
Words learn't and most of costumes found
When't squire he would suddenly realise
That Peter were nowhere to be found

A search party then would be sent out
And around 't pub they would jog
One each to't lounge, smoke and public bar
And the rest in a gang to the bog

In't bog they would take up position
One each by traps one, two and three
He were allus to be found in the sitdowns
Cos he never stood up for a pee

They were allways late startin't performance
Cos Pete's were an integral part
In fact at one time they never got to't first line
Cos pub shut before they could start

As for't reason for Pete's queer affliction
His doctors had got not one clue
So Maggie she had to be sent for
To see if there were ow't she could do

Now Maggie soon weighed up the problem
"It's a question of nerves" she did say
"Just t'thought of performing in public
It opens his bowels straight away"

On hearing this sad diagnosis
T'were decided that Pete must retire
And so he got wed to our Maggie
And at night they sit at home by the fire

But Maggie she's taken precautions
Just in case his afflictions come back
She's installed a loo in't kitchen and bedroom too
And buys in bog rolls by the stack

Now Pete he is happy and contented
Sitting drawing distribution maps
But Maggie still fondly remembers
T'days when Pete were attacked by the craps!

Now the Owd 'Oss still carry on without him
But we've memories we all have to admit
For on tour we still shout "Why's Pete not about"
And a ghost answers "HE'S GONE FOR A SHIT!!"

Peter Millington, *Nottingham's Owd 'Oss Mummers and their scrapbooks*, Mummers Unconvention, Bath, 2012.

Acknowledgements

While this paper is written from a personal perspective, I have endeavoured to check facts with my fellow ex-performers and people who influenced the Owd 'Oss Mummers. I would naturally like to have consulted more, but have been constrained by symposium and publication deadlines.

I wish to thank Roy Dyson and Roy Harris, particularly for helping me in my quest for their source of the Pasche Egging script. Mick Couldry, Simon Furey and Laurence Platt helped with information on the earliest days of the Mummers, before I joined, and commented helpfully on drafts of this paper. Bob Baron and Idwal Jones also saw the drafts, Idwal providing particularly useful information on the Mummers after I left, and their metamorphosis into Sullivan's Sword.

Finally, I wish to thank Roy Harris again, for getting us all into this.

¹ I spoke to Bruce Wilson on the phone on the 8th November 2012. Although he was involved in the collecting, it was his colleague Stuart Lawrence who assembled the compiled version. Both Lawrence and Wilson were members of Furness Morris, who performed widely around the country and even overseas. Bruce says that they performed the Pasche Egging Play at Morris Ring meetings, including one in the Birmingham area, so maybe one of these meetings could have been involved in the transmission.

Lawrence was an area coordinator for the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and was booked to perform at folk festivals around the country. It seems likely that if anyone did anything to make the script more widely available, it would have been him. It seems possible that he ran some kind of mumming workshop at a festival where the script was handed out. This idea is supported by the fact that he published an article on 'Producing a Mumming Play in School' in *'English Dance & Song'*, Autumn 1968, Vol.30, No.3, pp.78-80.

² Simon Furey (Personal communication, 31st Oct.2012)

³ Laurence Platt (Personal communication, 23rd Jan.2013)

⁴ Mick Couldry (Personal communication, 5th Feb.2013)

⁵ Cawte, E.C., A.Helm & N.Peacock (1967) 'English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index', London: Folk-lore Society, 1967

⁶ Shipstone's Ales – a notorious local Nottingham brew

⁷ Tiddy, R. J. E. (1923) 'The Mummers' Play', Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923

⁸ Harman, H. (1934) 'Sketches of the Bucks Countryside', London: Blandford Press, 1934, pp.36-50, 148,186-91

⁹ Idwal Jones (personal communication, 6th Feb.2013) says:

"In the later years we also did the Stoneleigh play, that we got from the reference in Cawte, Helm and Peacock. We performed it a few times at the Town and Country Festival at Stoneleigh, which we thought was very appropriate but which the Coventry Mummers thought was sacriligious as they performed the play in the town themselves!"

The source for this play is:

Harris, Mary Dormer (1925) 'Christmas Mummers of Stoneleigh', *Notes and Queries*, 17th Jan.1925, Vol.CXLVIII, pp.42-3

¹⁰ Idwal Jones (Personal communication, 6th Feb.2013). The Owd 'Oss Mummers performed their East Bridgford play in the early 1970s, but later dropped it in favour of the more interesting Farnsfield and more relevant Cropwell plays.

¹¹ Chaworth-Musters, Mrs. (1890) 'A Cavalier Stronghold: A Romance of the Vale of Belvoir', London, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd., 1890, pp.272-277,387-392

¹² Rattenbury, Arnold (1977) 'Clowning: June 11 to September 4 1977: An Exhibition designed and catalogued for Nottingham Festival 1977 by Arnold Rattenbury', Nottingham: City of Nottingham Leisure Services, 1977f

¹³ Idwal Jones (Personal communication, 6th Feb.2013)

¹⁴ Jones, Idwal (1987) 'The Gospel According to Sullivan's Sword', *Rattle Up, My Boys*, 1987, Series 1, No.4.

A version of this article is available at: <http://sullivanssword.webs.com/aboutsullivanssword.htm>, Accessed 6th Feb.2013

¹⁵ Notes appended to "*Lord Millingtons Lamentation*"

"The above was found written on a pair of underpants which were dug up from Sutton on Sea beach and kindly sent to us by Messrs J.Bodell and J.Astle in February 1978. The underpants bore a name tag with the following inscription

"P.HIND – MINER (FAILED)"

The lettering was white on a mottled brown background and the underpants are now in the Sullivan collection of artifacts and dirty underwear housed in the dustbin of the Red Lion at Canning Circus, Nottingham

P.Barber (METHS DRINKER - PASSED)"