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FESTIVAL OF

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BRITAIN 1951

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*Revival of*  
**THE CHESTER MIRACLE PLAYS**  
IN  
**THE CATHEDRAL REFECTORY**

*(by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter)*

PRESENTED ON BEHALF OF

**THE CHESTER CITY COUNCIL**

BY

**The County Drama Committee of the  
Cheshire Rural Community Council**

*General Secretary* - Norman G. Cottam

**Monday, June 18th to Saturday, June 30th, 1951**

*Adapted for Modern Production by  
Betty and Joseph McCulloch*

*Settings by*  
**Michael Trangmar**

*Costumes by*  
**Sheila Jackson**

*Music under the direction of*  
**Dr. J. Roland Middleton**

*Assistant Producer*  
**Mrs. Harold Mitchell**

*Plays Directed by*  
**Christopher Ede**

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**SOUVENIR PROGRAMME - - - - - ONE SHILLING**

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## NOTES ON PRODUCTION.

From the fragments of descriptions of the early productions there is no doubt that these plays were presented with the uttermost Naturalism, requiring considerable ingenuity and stagecraft. The Deluge was a deluge in which players (and some of the audience) were drenched—what other reason could there be for entrusting the play to the water carriers of the Dee?

In transferring the plays from the Pageant cart to a modern stage, we have tried to keep the simple and direct approach, using modern methods of production and lighting which would certainly have been used by our predecessors had they been available.

Two things will be strange to a modern audience. First the humour which is apologised for in the prologue of 1600, and which is governed by a simple rule—any character not mentioned *by name* in the Bible may be a comedy part. Secondly, the foreknowledge that many of the characters express. Noah swears by St. John, his wife by Christ, while Abraham refers to the beast that God will send to sacrifice before he tells Isaac that he is to die.

It is comparatively easy to examine the outward signs of the mediaeval mind, and even with study to appreciate some of the inner workings, but to understand intellectually is not to feel.

We to-day can never recapture the first impact of these plays written for an illiterate audience, who had no access to the Bible in their own tongue, and where worship was conducted in Latin. To us the content is well-known—one is tempted to say too well-known—and we cannot push aside the 600 years that separate us from the author.

The text is full of naïve touches, but it contains more; there is much of beauty, humour and characterisation in the telling of the great Christian drama.

We, who have lived with the plays, believe that they should never again be left on the shelves of libraries, and that they not only reveal an almost unknown period of English Drama, but will also prove in their humanity a new and impressive experience to modern audiences.

C.E.

## NOTES ON DESIGN.

There is little doubt that the costumes in the original productions were contemporary. The Church lent certain vestments for the player-priests, while Eastern characters were based on information brought back from the Crusades. In this revival, the costumes are basically 15th century, while the simple characters often wear the clothes of the previous century. We have preserved certain traditional and symbolic touches, the Chester angels are dressed in red, Herod wears a red beard and yellow is the colour of cunning, while the Virgin wears a light blue cloak at the Nativity, and a dark one for the Passion play.

The setting is based on contemporary illuminated manuscripts to emphasize the mediaeval character of the play, with its conventions of perspective and colouring.

S.J.

THE FIRST PLAY  
**IN THE BEGINNING**

*Taken from the pageants of:—*

The Fall of Lucifer	.....	(The Tanners)
The Creation of the World	.....	(The Drapers)
The Deluge	.....	(The Water Carriers)
Abraham, Melchizadech & Lothe	.....	(The Barbers)

CHARACTERS.

<p style="text-align: center;">DEUS</p> <p>A CITIZEN OF CHESTER          (Any son of Adam).....Peter Brown</p> <p>ADAM .....Tom Trumper</p> <p>CAIN .....Brian Mayhall</p> <p>ABEL .....Peter Johnson</p> <p>NOAH .....Fred Jones</p> <p>SHEM .....William Jones</p> <p>HAM .....Cyril Unsworth</p> <p>JAPHET .....Peter Hopwood</p> <p>AN ANGEL .....James Porter</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE DEVIL</p> <p>(formerly Lucifer).....Felix Heal</p> <p>ABRAHAM .....Maurice Kay</p> <p>ISAAC .....Peter Greenleaves</p> <p>EVE .....Enid Roberts</p> <p>NOAH'S WIFE .....Bertha Shelbourne</p> <p>SHEM'S WIFE .....Morag Reid</p> <p>HAM'S WIFE .....Brenda Bottomley</p> <p>JAPHET'S WIFE .....Mona Hankinson</p> <p>THREE GOSSIPS .....Doris Greenleaves          Margaret Rowe, Violet Shaw.</p>
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CROWD.

Felix Heal, Peter Johnson, Brian Mayhall, Austin Oates, James Porter, Wesley Powell, Tom Trumper, Raymond Wright, Edna Barritt, Christie Blackie, Doris Bu-lock, Doris Jones, Celia Kay, Nancie Kendrick, Phyllis Lovatt, Alwen London, Jean Mackrill, Joan Porter, Beryl Prescot, Patricia Shaw, Hilary Snooks, Dorothy Tweed.

SCENES.

*Prologue.*

- Scene 1—The Garden of Eden.
- 2—Outside Paradise
- 3—The Building of the Ark
- 4—The Flood

INTERVAL.

- 5—Mount Ararat.
- 6—The Sacrifice of Isaac.

*Epilogue.*

*Sub-Producer*—John H. Bu-lock.

*Stage Manager*—Archie Rainford. *Prompter*—Doris Bu-lock. *Wardrobe Mistress*—Enid Jones.

## NOTES ON HISTORY AND ADAPTATION.

These plays, which were last performed, as far as we know, in the year 1600, form the earliest of the four surviving cycles of Miracle Plays which have come down to us from Mediaeval times.

According to the Banes or Proclamation, read before the 1600 performance the author of the Chester plays was declared to be a certain monk of Chester Abbey named Randall Higgenett (1290-1364), who incidentally, travelled three times to Rome to beg leave of the Pope to play them in the English tongue. Sir John Arnway, Mayor of Chester in 1327 and 1328, was responsible for the original staging of the plays, which were played during the years of his mayoralty, in open pageants by the citizens of Chester in the Whitsun Week. (A pageant was a kind of mounted stage on wheels. It consisted of two storeys, the lower one curtained off as a dressing room, and the top platform serving as a stage).

Up to the end of the 13th century such Miracle Plays as existed were written in Latin, and were performed in the churches by priests, but from the beginning of the 14th century onwards, the plays emerged from the churches into the open streets and market-places, while the Crafts Guilds, took over from the clergy the responsibility for the presentation of the plays. Each Guild had its own pageant, or stage-waggon, and its own play, and there is no doubt that great rivalry existed between the various Guilds in the matter of staging and costuming.

In the adaptation of the Plays for the Festival production this summer, care has been taken to preserve as far as possible the verse-forms and the style of the original text in all their simplicity and charm, while at the same time making the language fully intelligible to modern audiences. The twenty-four plays of the Mediaeval Cycle have been carefully cut and re-fashioned to produce three plays of two hours each. Although each play is complete in itself, the full beauty and power of the work will be wholly understood only by seeing the complete cycle of three.

The First Play of the adapted version, "In the Beginning," reveals a naïve mixture of humour and pathos. It starts with the creation of Adam, and goes on to depict his disobedience and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and the subsequent troubles that beset man through his folly and sin;—the story of Noah and his children and of the universal flood, and finally, Abraham's great act of faith in obedience to God's will.

The story of our Lord's birth, from the Annunciation to the visit of the Shepherds and the Kings, and the flight into Egypt before the wrath of Herod, is told with great beauty and tenderness in the Second play, "The Nativity."

The Third play, "The Passion" is a deeply moving account of the events of the last three days of our Lord's life on earth—the Last Supper and the arrest in the garden, the trial before the Sanhedrin, and before Pilate, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

B.M.

THE SECOND PLAY.  
**THE NATIVITY**

*Taken from the Pageants of*

Balaam and Balaak	---	---	---	---	---	(The Cappers).
The Nativity	---	---	---	---	---	(The Writers).
The Adoration of the Shepherds						(The Painters and Glaziers).
The Adoration of the Magi	---	---	---	---		(The Vintners).
The Magi's Oblation	---	---	---	---		(The Mercers).
The Slaying of the Innocents	---	---	---	---		(The Goldsmiths).
The Purification of the Blessed Virgin	---	---	---	---		(The Blacksmiths).

CHARACTERS:

EZEKIEL	---	---	William Oakes	A MESSENGER	---	Reginald Hatton
JOSEPH	---	---	Arthur Scott	KING HEROD	---	Vincent Bradbury
A TAX-COLLECTOR			Thomas Kenyon	CLERK	---	William Vincent
1st SHEPHERD	---		Matthew Bowyer	SIMEON	---	Robert Andrew
2nd SHEPHERD	---		Reginald Hatton	MARY	---	Jennifer Barlow
3rd SHEPHERD	---		Hector Hemmings	ELIZABETH	---	Evelyn Kenyon
A BOY	---		George Roberts	1st MIDWIFE	---	May Alltree
1st KING	---		Charles Allin	2nd MIDWIFE	---	Kathleen Vincent
2nd KING	---		William Shenton	THE ARCHANGEL		
3rd KING	---		James Molley	GABRIEL	---	Geoffrey Smith

CITIZENS OF BETHLEHEM, SERVANTS, ETC.

Robert Andrew, John Chesters, Reginald Hatton, Bryan Hollowood, William Oakes, David Pailey, Joseph Roberts, Cyril Taylor, May Alltree, Marjorie Ball, Mary Chester, Dorothy Dimelow, Muriel Hyland, Anne Marsden, Sara Parker, Gladys Parker, Doris Samways, Dorothy Stretch, Kathleen Vincent, Phyllis Wynne.

SCENES.

*Prologue.*

- Scene 1—The Annunciation.  
 2—The Visitation  
 3—The House of Joseph  
 4—Bethlehem.  
 5—A Hillside  
 6—The Shepherds at the Stable.

INTERVAL.

- 7—The Coming of the Kings  
 8—Herod's Palace  
 9—The Stable

*Epilogue.*

Sub-Producer—Tom Chester.

*Stage Manager*—Robert Wilson. *Prompter*—Ann Shenton. *Wardrobe Mistress*—Ivy Ball.

## MUSIC NOTES.

The music for the fourteenth century is a closed book to most of us, and the choice of suitable music for these plays has been a far from easy task. Major and minor tonality was unknown and the intricate polyphonic music of the 15th and 16th centuries had not been devised.

If instrumental music was employed in 14th century drama, it is possible that recorders (known as "Fistula Anglica" at that time) were used. The range of 'colour' in this beautiful family of wind instruments is wide, and various combinations of them are here employed with a view to enhancing the mood of the drama.

The vocal contributions (male-voice) have been selected from early folk and church music, and presented in the simplest of settings available to us.

J.R.M.

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*Recorders*—George Dodgson, Jolyon Dodgson.

*Singers*:—W. Brocklehurst, C. Hodgkinson, N. Swinnerton, J. C. Cox, D. M. Lyons, K. S. Lysons, A. T. Owen, D. H. Barker, J. Boyne, M. S. Hinley, D. A. Miller, C. Nicholls, R. E. J. Rose, P. H. Thornton, J. M. Tomlinson.

GENERAL STAGE DIRECTION    —    —    —    —    JOHN GEDEN.  
GENERAL STAGE MANAGER —    —    —    —    ROBERT CRAWFORD.

*Scenery Built and Painted by Stage Decor Ltd. ; Lighting Equipment by Strand Electric.*  
*Wigs by Bert.*

THE THIRD PLAY.  
**THE PASSION**

*Geo Dodgson*  
*R. J. D. Dodgson.*

Taken from the Pageants of:—

- The Temptation — — — — (The Butchers)
- Christ's Betrayal — — — — (The Bakers)
- The Passion of Jesus Christ — — — — (The Bowyers, Fletchers and Ironmongers)
- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ — — — — (The Skinners)
- Christ, the Adulteress, Chelidonium — — — — (The Glovers)

*James R. Kelly*  
*Director*  
*John V. Ballance*

CHARACTERS.

JESUS OF NAZARETH	Donald Hughes	THE DEVIL	Felix Heal
PETER	Harold Elston	1st SOLDIER	Kenneth Reid
JOHN	David Rowley	2nd SOLDIER	William Cooper
JAMES	Peter Gerrard	3rd SOLDIER	William Tomkin
PHILIP	William Tomkin	4th SOLDIER	Gordon Dickenson
THOMAS	Trevor Graham	1st THIEF	Kenneth Reid
JUDAS	Edward Crewe	2nd THIEF	Derek Burgess
ANNAS	John Ballance	MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS	Dorothy Stacey
CAIAPHAS	Victor Cosgrove	MARY	Muriel Craine
NICODEMUS	Thomas Hatfield	MAGDALENE	Kathleen Joseph
JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA	Noel Barnes	MARY CLEOPHAS	Margaret Pritchard
PILATE	William Jones	SALOME	Alix Joseph
A HOUSEHOLDER	Thomas Hatfield	1st WOMAN	Marjorie Wickham
A SERVANT	John Nixon	2nd WOMAN	Phyllis Aspinwall
SIMON OF CYRENE	William Smith	SERVING GIRL	Ann Vernon
CENTURION	David Pope	TWO ANGELS	Charles Jones
1st JEW	Robin Wood		William Watmough
2nd JEW	Ernest Jennings		
3rd JEW	Bruce Pennell		

*Edward Crewe*  
*John V. Ballance*  
*Noel Barnes*  
*William Jones*  
*Thomas Hatfield*  
*John Nixon*  
*William Smith*  
*David Pope*  
*Robin Wood*  
*Ernest Jennings*  
*Bruce Pennell*

*Kenneth Reid*  
*William Cooper*  
*William Tomkin*  
*Gordon Dickenson*  
*Kenneth Reid*  
*Derek Burgess*  
*Dorothy Stacey*  
*Muriel Craine*  
*Kathleen Joseph*  
*Margaret Pritchard*  
*Alix Joseph*  
*Marjorie Wickham*  
*Phyllis Aspinwall*  
*Ann Vernon*  
*Charles Jones*  
*William Watmough*

OTHER DISCIPLES, SERVANTS, CROWD, ETC.

Noel Barnes, Annabella Barnett, Derek Burgess, Robert Crawford, Gordon Dickenson, Charles Jones, Mary Jones, Kathleen Joseph, Emmie Lunt, Pamela Manning, Peter McElkinney, Bessie McLellan, Patricia Moran, Thomas Myddelton, Jean Roberts, Eileen Rowley, William Smith, Mary Thomas, Ann Vernon, William Watmough.

SCENES.

Prologue.

- Scene 1—The Last Supper.
- 2—The Garden of Gethsemane.
- 3—A Courtyard of the Temple
- 4—Before Pilate

INTERVAL.

- 5—Calvary
- 6—The Sepulchre.

Epilogue.

Sub-Producer—William I. D. Scott.

Stage Manager—John Whittle. Prompter—Constance Loadman. Wardrobe Mistress—Mary Thomas

*Adrianne*  
*Ellie & Joseph.*  
*Pamela K. Manning*  
*Bessie McLellan*  
*May Joseph.*  
*Mary Jones*

*E. Lunt.*  
*7 Conie.*  
*"M. M. M. M."*  
*Patricia Moran*

# 1951 FESTIVAL IN CHESTER

## Miracle Plays

### Details of Performances

#### Evenings at 7-30 p.m.

Monday, 18th June	—	In the Beginning	Monday, 25th June	—	In the Beginning
Tuesday, 19th June	—	The Nativity	Tuesday, 26th June	—	The Nativity
Wednesday, 20th June	—	The Passion	Wednesday, 27th June	—	The Passion
Thursday, 21st June	—	In the Beginning	Thursday, 28th June	—	In the Beginning
Friday, 22nd June	—	The Nativity	Friday, 29th June	—	The Nativity
Saturday, 23rd June	—	The Passion	Saturday, 30th June	—	The Passion

#### Matinees at 2-30 p.m.

Tuesday, 19th June	—	In the Beginning	Tuesday, 26th June	—	In the Beginning
Wednesday, 20th June	—	The Nativity	Wednesday, 27th June	—	The Nativity
Saturday, 23rd June	—	The Passion	Saturday, 30th June	—	The Passion

### DIARY OF REMAINING EVENTS.

June 22nd—30th	MODERN BUILDING EXHIBITION	—	Little Roodee
July 7th—September 1st	THE EVIDENCE OF BYGONE CHESTER		Town Hall
	An Exhibition of the City Plate, Old Maps, Paintings, Corporation and Guild Records.		
July 28th, at 5-30 p.m. (Saturday)	CHORAL EVENSONG.	—	Cathedral.
	Combined Choirs (700 voices) Royal School of Church Music, North West Region.		
Aug. 3rd, at 7-30 p.m. (Friday)	ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA		Cathedral
	<i>Conductor</i> —SIR THOMAS BEECHAM, Bt.		
	Admission by Programme, Price 5/6. Available at Rushworth & Dreaper Ltd., Chester, from July 2nd		
Aug. 6th (Bank Holiday)	CHESTER AUTUMN SPORTS AND CARNIVAL		The Roodee
Aug 10th, at 7-30 p.m. (Friday)	HALLE' ORCHESTRA		Cathedral
	<i>Conductor</i> —SIR JOHN BARBIROLI.		
	Admission by Programme, Price 5/6 Available at Rushworth & Dreaper Ltd., Chester, from July 2nd.		
Oct. 28th, at 2-30 p.m. (Sunday)	LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA		Gaumont Theatre
Oct. 29th—Nov. 3rd	THE RAMBERT BALLE'T		Gaumont Theatre
	Box Office opens at Rushworth & Dreaper Ltd., Chester, on Monday, October 8th.		

For further information concerning the above events, please ask the attendant or write to the Town Clerk, Chester, for a Free Souvenir Programme of Festival Events.