



# CHESTER MYSTERY PLAYS

1962

Chester City Council in collaboration with the Cheshire Community Council

present

# THE CHESTER MYSTERY PLAYS

adapted for modern production by  
John Lawlor and Rosemary Anne Sisson

ON

## THE CATHEDRAL GREEN

by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter

27th June to 7th July

Plays directed by

CHRISTOPHER EDE

assisted by

KAY MACLAREN

WILLIAM SCOTT

PETER DORNFORD-MAY

Setting and Costumes designed by SHEILA JACKSON

## Notes on History and Adaptation

The Elizabethan Prologue to the Chester Plays suggest that they were devised by Randall Higden, a monk of Chester Abbey, and first presented by Sir John Arneway, a famous Mayor of the City from 1268 to 1277; but it seems likely, in fact, that the original plays were written by Henry Francis, Monk of Chester Abbey, and they were perhaps first performed in 1375. What had begun as a dramatisation, in Latin and within the Church, of the main events of the Christian story was now, though still under the patronage and order of the Church, being performed in English in the open, different episodes being undertaken by the different Guilds or crafts of the City. The French word for "craft" was "*mystère*", hence the name "Mystery Plays". By 1540, there were twenty-six plays in the Cycle.

With the Reformation, the plays were viewed with some suspicion by the authorities. They were played in 1572, and, in abbreviated form in 1575 (though not without some trouble for players and sponsors) and, possibly, in 1600. The rest is silence, until their revival in 1951.

In the present version, our first aim has been to achieve a text which would be readily understood by a modern audience, without losing the medieval flavour of the original. Here and there we have kept an archaic word or phrase rather than destroy an intricate and varied rhyme-scheme; but we believe that the ear will soon become attuned to a language whose directness and simplicity no modernizing could better.

Secondly, we have tried to make clear the dramatic pattern of the story—the way in which the events and prophecies of the Old Testament prefigure the coming of Christ, and the Resurrection snatches triumph and joy out of the apparent disaster of the Crucifixion. So, in *THE PROMISE*, the story of Balaam and his Ass, here played for the first time since the sixteenth century, is not only delightful in its own right, but foretells the coming of the Messiah. So, too, Lucifer, who in *THE PROMISE* destroys the happiness of Adam and Eve, in *THE REDEMPTION* is himself defeated in his temptation of Jesus.

This sense of the unity of the whole has led us to divide the plays not into Old Testament and New, but to end the first play with Simeon's recognition at the Temple, and in the second play to tell the whole enthralling story of Christ's ministry, betrayal and death, and the moving and dramatic surprise of the Resurrection. In true medieval fashion, the story ends with the Devils claiming the wicked for Hell, while Christ leads his faithful into eternal joy.

Rosemary Anne Sisson

John Lawlor



## Notes on Production

In transferring the plays from the pageant cart to a multiple stage, we have been able to enjoy a new freedom of action and to emphasize the continuity of the whole Cycle.

In this, the fourth twentieth century revival, the Cycle which mediaevally consisted of twenty-four episodes, is presented in two plays of modern lengths. The text of the original Cycle was never unalterably fixed, some scenes being dropped one year and others added. So we have felt free to curtail some scenes in order that others may be included. Thus, Balaam and Balaac; The Woman Taken in Adultery; The Raising of Lazarus; The Road to Emmaus, and The Last Judgement are seen for the first time since 1600.

Two things will be strange to a modern audience. First the humour, which is apologised for in the prologue of 1600 and 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 whose 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.

It is the policy of the Chester City Council to present the Cycle every five years, which is an important step in preventing the plays returning to library shelves, on which they lay from 1600 to 1951.

We, who have had the privilege of working on the plays, believe that, apart from the revelation of an almost unknown period of English drama, they will again prove a moving experience to modern audiences by their humanity and dramatic insight, which truly binds the centuries.

C.E.

## The Plays

### Part I THE PROMISE

#### ACT I

PROLOGUE (From production 4th June, 1600)

Scene	From the Pageants of:—
1. The Fall of Lucifer .. ..	The Tanners
2. The Creation and Fall .. ..	The Drapers
3. Cain and Abel .. ..	The Drapers
4. Noah .. ..	The Water-Carriers of the Dee
5. Abraham and Isaac .. ..	The Barbers
6. Balaam and Balaak .. ..	The Cappers

#### INTERVAL

(10 minutes)

#### ACT II

Scene	From the Pageants of:—
1. The Annunciation .. ..	The Wrights
2. The Nativity .. ..	The Wrights
3. The Shepherds .. ..	The Painters and Glaziers
4. The Kings .. ..	The Vintners and Mercers
5. The Slaying of the Innocents..	The Goldsmiths
6. The Purification .. ..	The Blacksmiths

#### CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE ..	Noel Barnes	JAPHETH'S WIFE	Rene Stalker
GOD .. ..	David Andrew	GOSSIPS .. ..	Doris Greenleaves
LUCIFER .. ..	John Cole		Celia Kay
LIGHTBORN ..	Stanley Mason		Phyllis Bell
ADAM .. ..	Peter Johnson	ABRAHAM .. ..	Norman Lofthouse
EVE .. ..	Margaret George	ISAAC .. ..	Nicholas Jones
ARCHANGEL ..	Jeffery Whitworth	ANGEL .. ..	Jeffery Whitworth
CAIN .. ..	Eric Stevens	BALAAK .. ..	Leslie Davies
ABEL .. ..	Kenneth Smith	SOLDIER .. ..	Stanley Mason
NOAH .. ..	David Pruen	BALAAM .. ..	John Owen
SHEM .. ..	Alfred Gaskin	ASS .. ..	Alfred Gaskin
HAM .. ..	John Owen	GABRIEL .. ..	Jeffery Whitworth
JAPHETH .. ..	Peter Greenleaves	MARY .. ..	Patricia Cain
NOAH'S WIFE ..	Bertha Shelbourne	ELIZABETH ..	Eileen Hewitson
SHEM'S WIFE ..	Doreen Luke	JOSEPH .. ..	Noel Barnes
HAM'S WIFE ..	Netta Hankinson	TEBELL .. ..	Joan Lyster

## CHARACTERS

SALOME .. ..	Phyllis Aspinwall	MESSENGER ..	Peter Johnson
HANKIN .. ..	Eric Spencer	HEROD .. ..	David Andrew
SYM .. ..	Hector Hemmings	1st SOLDIER ..	Peter Reid
TUD .. ..	John Lewis	2nd SOLDIER ..	William Dandy
3 SHEPHERD BOYS	John Thomas	3rd SOLDIER ..	Eric Stevens
	John Durrant	1st WOMAN ..	Jean Powell-Edwards
	Michael Barnes	2nd WOMAN ..	Lillias Edwards
MELCHIOR ..	Fred Warhurst	3rd WOMAN ..	Dorothy Rough
JASPER .. ..	Ralph Jacobs	SIMEON .. ..	Theodore Trezise
BALTHASAR ..	Ghebre-Medhim		
	Tesemma		

### CITIZENS

Christine Bell, Irene Coleman, Jose Colley, Phyllis Cranage, Margaret Davies, Susan Ferguson, Diana Hitchen, Iris Jensen, Roberta Marshall, Patricia Nickson, Gwen Price, Ann Roberts, Clive Salisbury, Delia Stevens, Dora Taylor, Terry Vernon, Joyce Webb, Carole Willett, Dilys Yeo.

### ANGELS

Sally Antcliffe, Kathryn Ball, Christine Burns, Clive Casey, Jennifer Lear, Elizabeth Heath, Susan Hibbert, Elizabeth Holliday, Gaynor Rhys Jones, Christine Kelly, Jennice Lear, Susan Leese, Helen Lipsham, Vivienne Priestley, Ian Richardson, Patricia Short, Hilary Smith, Peter Southall, Patricia Valley, Charles White, Norma Young.

### VOICES

Muriel Craine, Alix Joseph, Joan Keay, Dorothy Stacey, Jackie Thomas, Freda Williams, Kenneth Antcliffe, Brendan Cox, Peter Dornford-May, John Ellaby, Donald Hughes, Frederick Ives, Maurice Kay, Erik Lewis, Anthony Seys Llewellyn, Frank McNamara, William Smith, Fred Williams.

## Part II THE REDEMPTION

### ACT I

Scene	From the Pageants of:—
1. The Temptation .. ..	The Butchers
2. The Woman Taken in Adultery .. ..	The Butchers
3. The Raising of Lazarus .. ..	The Glovers
4. The Last Supper and Betrayal .. ..	The Bakers
5. The Trial .. ..	The Bowyers, Fletchers, & Ironmongers
6. The Passion .. ..	The Bowyers, Fletchers, & Ironmongers

### INTERVAL

(10 minutes)

### ACT II

Scene	From the Pageants of:—
1. The Resurrection .. ..	The Skinners
2. The Road to Emmaus .. ..	The Sadlers
3. The Ascension .. ..	The Tailors
4. The Last Judgement .. ..	The Websters

## CHARACTERS

LUCIFER .. ..	John Cole	1st CITIZEN ..	Sydney Broxton
JESUS .. ..	Brian Mayhall	2nd CITIZEN ..	John Mills
1st JEW .. ..	John Lewis	1st BOY .. ..	John Durrant
2nd JEW .. ..	William Dandy	2nd BOY .. ..	Michael Barnes
WOMAN .. ..	Madge Bedale	1st MERCHANT ..	Raymond Hankinson
MARY OF BETHANY ..	Mary Cooper	2nd MERCHANT ..	Fred Warhurst
MARTHA .. ..	Grishelda Wasley	JUDAS ISCARIOT	Derek Jones
PETER .. ..	Alfred Gaskin	CAIPHAS .. ..	John Owen
JOHN .. ..	William Smith	ANNAS .. ..	Norman Lofthouse
THOMAS .. ..	David Pruen	ANDREW .. ..	Stanley Meredith
LAZARUS .. ..	Hector Hemmings	JAMES .. ..	Stuart Lovatt
GATE KEEPER ..	Theodore Trezise	MALCHUS .. ..	William Dandy

## DISCIPLES

William Cooper, William Little, Stanley Mason, Raymond Plant, John Sant, William Sluman.

PILATE .. ..	Herbert Ballard	NICODEMUS ..	Jeffrey Whitworth
HEROD .. ..	David Andrew	1st ANGEL .. ..	John Thomas
3rd JEW .. ..	Sydney Broxton	2nd ANGEL .. ..	John Durrant
4th JEW .. ..	John Mills	MARY SALOME ..	Cynthia Jenkins
MAID .. ..	Kay Whittle	LUKE .. ..	Noel Barnes
SIMON OF CYRENE ..	John Meredith	CLEOPAS .. ..	Ralph Rogerson
1st WOMAN ..	Marjorie Wickham	ANGEL .. ..	Jeffrey Whitworth
2nd WOMAN ..	Mary Garnett	GOD .. ..	David Andrew
1st SOLDIER ..	Eric Stevens	DAMNED POPE ..	Norman Lofthouse
2nd SOLDIER ..	Peter Reid	DAMNED EMPEROR ..	Leslie Davies
3rd SOLDIER ..	Leslie Davies	DAMNED KING ..	Alfred Gaskin
MARY .. ..	Dorothy Temple	DAMNED QUEEN ..	Dora Taylor
MARY MAGDALENE ..	Jean Dugdale	DAMNED JUSTICE ..	John Lewis
1st THIEF .. ..	Erik Lewis	DAMNED MERCHANT ..	Raymond Hankinson
2nd THIEF .. ..	Hector Hemmings	LIGHTBORN .. ..	Stanley Mason
CENTURION ..	Stanley Mason	SAVED POPE .. ..	Hector Hemmings
JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA ..	Theodore Trezise	SAVED EMPEROR ..	Fred Warhurst

## CITIZENS

Hilarie Adams, Jennifer Barnes, Glen Bellis, Ruth Boffey, Margaret Brookes, Mary Cleeves, Beryl Griffiths, Yvette Halliday, Susan Hankinson, Audrey Hislop, Beryl Hood, David Howells, Edith Jones, Celia Kay, Olwen Lockley, Yvonne Marshall, Cynthia Plant, Jean Roberts, Clive Salisbury, Evelyn Sellars, Audrey Spencer, Terry Vernon, Stella Wilkinson, Josephine Woodhall, Joan Wren.