

The Chester Cycle  
of  
Mystery Plays  
1982

CMP/6/9/11

Motif designed by David Dean and  
dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Betty Hassall



# THE CHESHIRE PLAYERS

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HER GRACE ANNE, DUCHESS OF WESTMINSTER

*Artistic Director:* PETER DORNFORD-MAY

*Treasurer:* GRISHILDA WASLEY

## The Chester Cycle of Mystery Plays

*Adapted and Prepared for Modern Production by*  
BETTY AND JOSEPH McCULLOCH

**The Dean's Field, Chester**  
(by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter)

**Tuesday, 22nd June to Saturday, 3rd July, 1982**

*Costumes Designed by*  
DAVID DEAN

*Settings Designed by*  
JOHN BROOKING

*Music Composed by*  
WINSTON BARRACLOUGH

*Lighting Designed by*  
PHILIP McCANDLISH

*The Production Directed by* PETER DORNFORD-MAY

*The Cheshire Players acknowledge with gratitude  
financial assistance from*

CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
THE CHESHIRE AMATEUR THEATRE PANEL  
(WITH FUNDS PROVIDED BY NORTH WEST ARTS)  
CHESTER CITY COUNCIL

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## THE CHESTER CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS

Whilst being an undoubted part of the development of our dramatic heritage, the Mystery Plays have experienced a very spasmodic recognition. Originally intended as a vehicle to teach the masses the Christian faith in the vernacular, they were eventually banned by the Church and became the responsibility of the Guilds. Although they were presented with great artistry and skill, they fell into disuse, and it was not until the Festival of Britain in 1951 that modern audiences were enabled to see the greatness of these plays.

Chester was a very thriving port when the plays were originally presented. The people of Chester, like the rest of Merry England, delighted in spectacles and pageants of every kind. Known as the *Whitson Plaies*, they were performed as part of the Whitsuntide festivities. Beginning as a four-line playlet, they were performed by the priests and monks as a means of instruction to the congregations. The services in the churches of that time were in Latin and the populace did not fully comprehend the meaning until they used the dramatic form of presentation. Having been starved of "entertainment" for so long, the people revelled in these plays; the clergy enjoyed playing them and, although they became popular, the productions were often considered unseemly and outrageous, and they were dismissed from the body of the church to a place outside—usually in front of the West Door. It was here that a form of presentation began to emerge. The platforms were on two levels; the lower part acted as a dressing-room and the upper part was the stage. The scenery and costumes became more ornate with each production.

Eventually, the clergy became too involved with the plays and "high authority" forbade any further participation, so that the plays became the responsibility of the City Guilds. From the French term "*mystere*", meaning "craft guild", comes, of course, their description as "Mystery Plays", to distinguish them from those plays of the miracles associated with the Virgin Mary.

Undoubtedly, the Guilds experienced much competition in their presentations and no expense was spared in the scenic and costume effects used. Although traditionally the members of each Guild were supposed to perform in their craft play, it is known that actors were hired by many of them to ensure the success of the Guild image. Failure by a Guild to present their play could result in that Guild being fined for not performing. The settings of the plays were no longer simple, and every known mechanical aid was used. We have records of people being lowered from heaven to hell by the use of a winch, and the Staff of Moses bursting into bloom. Medieval audiences certainly saw many wonderful scenic effects.

For the citizens, it was a great feast of rejoicing. The plays were given over a period of three days. Three days before the performances, the proclamation was made throughout the City by mounted messengers, informing the citizens of the plays to be given. They were also informed to be of good behaviour and reverent.

This proclamation was read in every street, and the concourse of spectators from all the countryside must have been considerable:-

*"Who so comyth these plays to see  
With good devocon merelye  
Hertely welcome shall he be  
And have right good chere."*

Contracts were signed with the actors, and they had to abide by this contract—which often included strict observance of the rules. In one such contract we find the following:—

*"On the days when the plays are being rehearsed, no-one who is in the play is to go into  
the tavern or to go on drinking until he has completed his part in the script."*

The city trades made much profit from the visitors, and high prices were paid for convenient places to view the performances.

As the popularity of the plays increased, the opposition grew. One Archbishop of York made formidable objection, as did the Mayor of the City of Chester in 1577; from the very quiet beginnings in the Church to the vast populace of the City, and then back to obscurity; from simplicity to magnificent opulence; from the amateur to the professional performers (including the gilding of boys' faces) to the amateurs of today.

Since the revival of the plays in 1951, there has been a developing criticism of their value, and much eminent scholarship now questions the theology inherent in the plays. Whatever the outcome of these continuing debates, there will always be a place in theatrical history for their preservation.

In this new presentation, I have endeavoured to find a way of creating the staging so that there is a greater rapport between the performer and the observer. In the first part, which I have titled *The Prophecy*, a small company presents the plays and play all the parts. In this presentation there is much symbolism in the movement images. In *The Fulfilment*, I have endeavoured to use the visual effects as in medieval times.

As they were originally presented by the citizens for the citizens, the company is composed entirely of amateur actors. I am greatly indebted to them all for their devotion and loyalty to the presentation. I know they will all give of their utmost. Certainly, they will bring to life part of our dramatic heritage. If, in addition, they communicate a greater understanding and comprehension of why we are on earth, then all the pains and joys of producing them will be doubly worthwhile.

PETER DORNFORD-MAY

*PART ONE*

**THE PROPHECY**

*Prologue spoken by  
Andrew Jones*

*The Players*

Betty Atkinson  
David Bowgett  
Duncan Bradon  
Josephine Catchpole  
Margaret Davies  
Hilary Egan  
Mark Gairusso  
Patrick Gee  
Robin Goddard  
Jennifer Hindmarch  
David Holton  
Jean Jackson  
Janette King  
Geoffrey Longman  
Sarah McAdam  
Alison McLellan  
Christopher Owen  
Patrick Parslow  
John Perrin  
Hilary Roberts  
Leslie Rogerson  
David Simcoe  
Derek Smith  
Lorna Spenser  
Anna Stewart-Forshaw  
Madeline Stonehouse  
Nicholas Tappin  
Alan Vallance  
Stella Wilkinson

*PART TWO*

**THE  
FULFILMENT**

*The Players*

DEUS	Derek Smith
JESUS CHRIST	Robin Goddard
PETER	William Smith
JOHN (and GABRIEL)	John Perrin
ANDREW	Stephen Sorfleet
JAMES THE ELDER	Leslie Rogerson
JAMES THE LESSER	David Simcoe
MATTHIAS	Ged McDonnell
THOMAS	Christopher Owen
JUDAS (and LUCIFER)	David Bowgett
PHILIP	Nicholas Tappin
BARTHOLOMEW	Simon McLinden
SIMON	John Spenser
THADDEUS	David Phillips
FIRST JEW	Mark Gairusso
SECOND JEW	Peter Whitby
THIRD JEW	Geoffery Longman
WOMAN (Taken in Adultery)	Jennifer Hindmarch
SIMON THE LEPER	Alan Vallance
MARY	Madeline Stonehouse
MARTHA	Jean Jackson
LAZARUS	Simon Edge
MARY MAGDALENE	Josephine Catchpole
JANITOR	Michael Curtis
FIRST MERCHANT	Ian Rogers

## *The Players*

SECOND MERCHANT	<b>Stella Wilkinson</b>
SERVANT OF THE HOUSE	<b>Jean Nimbley</b>
MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE	<b>Susan Brownbill</b>
ANNAS	<b>Bryan Lambert</b>
CAIAPHAS	<b>Patrick Gee</b>
SERVANT GIRL	<b>Lorna Spenser</b>
PONTIUS PILATE	<b>Leslie Parker-Davies</b>
NICODEMUS	<b>Andrew Fletcher</b>
SIMON OF CYRENE	<b>Simon Edge</b>
CENTURION	<b>Duncan Bradon</b>
FIRST SOLDIER	<b>Barrie Cooper</b>
SECOND SOLDIER	<b>Jonathan Wilkins</b>
THIRD SOLDIER	<b>Rhodri Thomas</b>
FOURTH SOLDIER	<b>David Holton</b>
MARY MOTHER	<b>Hilary Roberts</b>
MARY CLEOPHAS	<b>Anna Stewart-Forshaw</b>
SALOME	<b>Hilary Egan</b>
FIRST THIEF	<b>Simon Poole</b>
SECOND THIEF	<b>Patrick Parslow</b>
JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA	<b>John Wilkins</b>
ANGEL AT THE TOMB	<b>Sarah McAdam</b>
ANGEL AT THE TOMB	<b>Janette King</b>

## **EPILOGUE** spoken each evening by one of the following:

Betty Atkinson	Patsy Holding	Virginia Seddon
Chris Bushell	Andrew Jones	Lorna Spenser

## **ANIMALS IN ARK**

*represented by the following pupils of*

*Westlea County Primary School (Head Teacher: Mrs. D. C. Nall):*

Stephen Bithell	Susan Kenny	Nathan Scrivens
Karina Clench	Diana Lowe	Catrin Smith
Gareth Cummings	Stephen Mann	Laura Smith
Sian Cummings	Glen Oldfield	Paula Spearman
Anne Marie Gardner	Lynette Parrish	Koré Sykes
Maria Hall	Sarah Pearson	Sarah Taylor
Stephen Hall	Sarah Potts	Carolyn Travers
Lynn Jackson	Andrew Savill	Nia Williams

## *Citizens*

## *Soldiers*

## *Saved Souls*

## *Damned Souls*

Betty Atkinson
Lucy Bailey
Lynne Barnes
Chris Bushell
Anthony Cowle
Felicity Curtiss
Margaret Davies
Susan Devonside
Margaret Dolton
Stephen Farrell
Alison Geddes
Patsy Holding
Rhoswen Jones
Rachel Knight
Vivien Lee
Thea Lett
Anne Maines
Sarah Mottershaw
Muriel Murta
Graham Nimbley
Lo Olle
Nicole Price
Margaret Randall
Margery Roberts
Melissa Roberts
Sylvia Salisbury
Virginia Seddon
Jayne Sorfleet
Ann Sumner
Amanda Templeton
Julia Wendt
Prudence Wendt
Pamela Williams

# THE MUSIC

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MAURICE S. HENNIS, ESQ., A.R.C.M.  
(Late Band Master of the Queen's Own Hussars)

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MRS. MARY WHITEHEAD AND MRS. PAT STEVENSON  
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*The Director wishes to express his appreciation to:—*

Mr. Mark Dornford-May for his assistance with the production  
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Major Peter Moore, Cheshire County Council Countryside and Recreation  
The Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral  
The Hammond School (Headmistress Mrs. S. Elliott)  
P. and A. Davies Limited for kindly providing the bread  
Ruthin Castle  
Mr. Peter Tilston

## THE STAGING

<i>Stage Directors</i>	William James John Roberts	<i>Make-up Created and Supervised by</i>	Lilian Akhurst
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Sarah Dornford-May	<i>Associate Supervisor</i>	Betty James
<i>Wardrobe Supervisor</i>	Mary Robson	<i>Make-up Assistants</i>	Maureen Barraclough Penelope Bailey Enid Broom Beryl Chapman Helen Crawford Patricia Dornford-May Alison Holding Sheila Jones Shirley O'Donnell Yvonne O'Donnell Janine Price Edwina Shepherd Paula Smith Christina Veal Joan Young
<i>Staging Constructed by</i>	Erik Cleeves      John Keay George              Adam Longman Farrington      Steven Martin Philip Gilmour    Steven Rawlinson Jim Hughes        John Roberts William James    Reginald Sumner		
<i>Property Mistress</i>	Mary Rigby-Jones  <i>assisted by</i>  Jane Bland Howard Teece Jimi Burns	<i>Prompters</i>	Elizabeth Whitby Joan Wren
<i>Part One Costumes made by</i>	Linda Bromley    Betty Hewitt Rose Burns        Pat Higham Sheila Carr        Joan Johnson Barbara Cooper   Hilda Sharp Sylvia Finney     Sybil Thompson Margaret Hassall	<i>Booking Manager</i>	Grishilda Wasley
	<i>under the supervision of</i>  Anne Maines	<i>Front of House Manager</i>	Robert Crawford
<i>The King's Costumes made by</i>	Charlotte Power	<i>Senior Stewards</i>	John Lewis John Kirkland
<i>Costume Assistants</i>	Sue Brownbill    Julia Williams Ann Hamlyn       Bluecoat Drama Stella Wilkinson   Group	<i>Programmes</i>	Agnes Crawford
		<i>Press Officer</i>	David Norbury
<i>Lighting Operated by</i>	Stuart Dornford-May	<i>Bar</i>	Anne Tilston
		<i>Refreshments</i>	Marjorie Kirkland