

Mystery makers

Chester Mystery Plays are as much a part of our city's historic tradition as the Rows, the City Walls, the Roman amphitheatre and the River Dee.

And writer Stephanie Dale has ensured that Chester is right at the heart of her new adaptation, which will be presented in the nave of the cathedral, the spiritual home of the plays, next year.

She said: "I have worked on a lot of community projects and the joy for me is getting to know the community, the place and the people."

Stephanie, director Peter Leslie Wild and composer Matt Baker have held workshops throughout the city, most recently at the Hammond School in Chester.

She said: "The medieval plays were presented by the town's guilds. The students decided that in this day and age the guilds would be different."

"They felt there should be a teachers' guild so I have decided to appoint *The Creation* as The Teacher's Play, and it will be presented as a type of lesson."

There are 26 plays in the Chester cycle, the most complete cycle of

Next week the writer of a modern adaptation of the Chester Mystery Plays will present her ideas for the 2013 production during the Essar Chester Literature Festival. JO HENWOOD talks to Stephanie Dale about the challenges involved in rewriting the iconic Bible stories which were first penned by the monks of the Abbey of St Werburgh (now Chester Cathedral) 700 years ago

mystery plays in the world. One - *Our Lady's Assumption* - is lost and two - *Balak And Balam* and *The Antichrist* - are unique to Chester, the latter of which Stephanie has retained in her 12-play cycle.

She said: "From cover to cover, the original medieval plays include about nine hours of theatre and it has been my job to condense this into about two and a half hours."

The Antichrist play is set on race day in Chester, which Stephanie says she is 'very excited about'.

She said: "During the workshops, race day came up again and again from different people's points of view - from the glory of ladies dressing up for the day to the workers in Chinese restaurants who

have to deal with revellers at the end of the day."

The 2013 version will focus on the plays' history throughout the ages. Stephanie added: "We have incorporated the real biblical time of the plays, the time of the medieval translation and today."

"I have retained some of the medieval language, with its beautiful rhythm and poetry, but there are references to very 21st century things like flip-flops, which came about when I spent a night in Chester with a street pastor."

"I have dispensed with most of the words that are no longer in use although some sound so beautiful I have kept them in."

"In *Noah*, people are asked to

fetch buckets of 'sliche', which means mud. In the context of building the ark, I think that the audience will understand."

Stephanie's next challenge will come following the auditions at the end of this month.

She said: "We could get 50 people turning up, or 500. And whoever wants to be in it, will be in it."

"My skill will then come into its own. I want everyone to have a line and feel that they are making a contribution to the whole piece."

"Accessibility is the big thing with these stories which are very well known. I think that the script I have written will create a coherent evening - one journey for the audience and the cast."



TEAM: Designer Judith Croft shares her ideas for the set of the 2013 Chester Mystery Plays with director Peter Leslie Wild, writer Stephanie Dale and production manager Peter Herbert.

How you can get involved

CHESTER Mystery Plays will be performed in the nave of Chester Cathedral from June 26-July 13, 2013.

■ Workshops and auditions for those wanting to act in the 2013 Chester Mystery Plays will be held on the weekends of October 27/28 and November 3/4.

■ Workshops for singers and musicians will be on October 21. For full details of both acting and musical workshops, including information on how to book an audition time, email Jane Dawson at info@chestermysteryplays.com.

■ Chester Mystery Plays script premiere, Tuesday October 16, 7:30pm, Chester Cathedral Refectory, free as part of the Essar Oil Chester Literature Festival. Visit www.chesterliteraturefestival.co.uk.

■ Chester Literature Festival Debate: Medieval mystery plays have no relevance today - Chester Debating Society, Saturday, October 20, 11am, Chester Town Hall, free. Visit www.chesterliteraturefestival.co.uk.

■ Tony Harrison with Chester Mystery Plays writer Stephanie Dale and director Peter Leslie Wild - *To Our Shape Now I Make Thee*, mystery plays re-imagined for today - Friday, October 26, 7:30pm, Molloy Lecture Theatre, £8. Visit www.chesterliteraturefestival.co.uk.

■ Tickets for the 2013 production of Chester Mystery Plays are on sale at www.chester-mysteryplays.com or by calling 01244 500959.



CREATIVE DUO: Artistic director Peter Leslie Wild with writer Stephanie Dale.