

To be struck out of seven senses into four-score,
The like was never seen in Old England before.

All

Oh Hark! We hear the silver trumpet sound,
That summons us from this bloody ground.
{*Pointing downwards.*}
Down yonder lies the way.
Farewell, St. George, we can no longer stay.

All sing

Oh Sentry, all Sentry, all stand in a row,
We wish you no manner of harm,
We wish all you sweethearts a brighter new jacket,
So, ladies, we bid you farewell. {*bis*}



Bill Chapman and Margaret Chambers

The Words of the Rapon Sword Dance



A new chapbook style pamphlet originally prepared
for 2005 and further revised in 2010

Preface

The Ripon Sword Dancers' old style of street performances came to an end around the early 1990's when Tony Chambers, his wife Margaret and Bill Chapman ceased to go out. During these latter years when they struggled to put out a team they invited Paul Freeman to join them. Paul is a relative of Margaret Chambers who is, in turn, a descendant of the Hardcastle family. The Hardcastles were the carriers and custodians of the play in earlier years. Margaret's father and Paul's mother are cousins. When Tony and Margaret finally gave up, they encouraged Paul to carry on the tradition, which he did with the help of friends from Wakeman Mummers and Ripon City Morris Dancers.

Initially reference was made to a printed version of the text from the 1920s found in the Ripon library. This version of the play follows the standard type of chapbook play text with the addition of the songs at the start and end of the play. Later the decision was taken to try to emphasise the more local features of the play and reference was made to various records of previous performances. Some personal memories of the text have also been included. The costume of knee-length white coats with tags of coloured cloth and appliqued patches have been reintroduced. The play text now includes more from the oral tradition with less dependency on standard chapbook texts. This document is not to be taken as the definitive words of the Ripon Sword Dancers. Indeed traditional performances have no fixed definitive form.

This modern chapbook style pamphlet has been produced to record the basis of this revised version. The intention is that this will provide a starting point for the modern players and that the play can subsequently revert to oral tradition again.

Fool

What's all sorts?

Doctor

The itch, the stitch, the gallop and the gout,
The plague within and the plague without,
And the plague that flies all round about.
I can cure the young, the old
The hot, the cold
The lovesick, dying and dead.
If a man gets nineteen devils in his skull,
I'll cast twenty of them out.

St. George

Out with them!

Doctor

I have in my pockets, crutches for lame ducks,
Spectacles for blind bumblebees,
Packsaddles and panniers for grasshoppers,
And plasters for broken-backed mice.
I cured Sir Harry of a nag-nail almost fifty yards long.
I can cure this man.
I have in my pocket a little bottle of jollup and plain.
Here Jack, take a little out of my bottle,
Let it run down thy throttle.
If thou be not quite slain,
Rise, Jack, and fight again.

{Slasher rises}

Slasher

Oh my back.

Fool

What's the matter with thy back?

Slasher

My back is wounded and my heart is confounded,
With a horrible, terrible stroke,

Fool

Are you a doctor?

Doctor

Yes, that you may plainly see,
By my art and activity.

Fool

Well, what's your fee to cure this man?

Doctor

Ten pounds is my fee,
But Jack, if thou be an honest man, I'll only take five off thee.

Fool

{Aside}
You'll be wondrous cunning if you get anything from me.

Well how far have you travelled in doctorship?

Doctor

I've been to Italy, Titaly, High Germany, France and Spain,
All round the world and journeyed back again.

Fool

So far and no further?

Doctor

Oh yes, a great deal further.

Fool

How far?

Doctor

From the fireside and the cupboard, upstairs and into bed.

Fool

What diseases can you cure?

Doctor

All sorts?

Dramatis Personae

Beelzebub
Little Wit
Fool
St. George
Slasher
Doctor

The Play

All sing

Make me a room for I am a-coming,
All for to let you understand,
That Kersamas time has long been approaching,
Since we left yon foreign land. *{bis}*

Oh! The first that comes is General Warrington,
Who comes he on yonder plains,
He goes a-marching and gains the victory,
On the plains of Waterloo. *{bis}*

Oh! The next that comes is the Hieland Laddie,
Who's got sheep on yonder hill,
A-romping and a-roving among the bonnie lassies,
Now he's gone and spent it all. *{bis}*

Oh! The next that comes is Tom the Tinker,
Who comes he your kettles for to mend,
For lassies if you dare not, Tom will venture,
Tom will stand to be your friend. *{bis}*

Belzeebub

In comes Old Beelzebub,
And over his shoulder he carries a club,
And in his hand a warming pan,
And calls himself a jolly old man.

Little Wit

In comes I that never came yet,
With my big head and little wit,
Though my head be big and my wit be small,
I'll do my best to please you all.

Fool

Room, room, a gallant room, give us room to sport,
For in this room we wish for to resort,
Resort, and to repeat to you our merry rhyme,
For remember, good sirs, it is Christmas time.
The time to cut up goose pies now doth appear,
So we are come to act our merry Christmas here,
At the sound of the trumpet, and beat of the drum,
Make room, brave gentlemen, and let our actors come.
For

All

We are the merry actors that traverse the street,
We are the merry actors that fight for our meat,
We are the merry actors that show pleasant play,

Fool

So, step in, St. George thou champion, and clear the way.

St. George

I am St. George, who from old England sprung,
My famous name throughout the world hath rung,
Many bloody deeds and wonders have I made known,
And made the tyrants tremble on their throne.
I followed a fair lady to a giant's gate,
Confined in dungeon deep to meet her fate,
There I resolved with true knight-errantry,
To burst the door and set the prisoner free,
When a giant almost struck me dead,
But by my valour I cut off his head.
I've searched the world all round and round,
But a man to equal me I never found.

Slasher

I am a valiant soldier and Slasher is my name,
With sword and buckle by my side I hope to win the game.
And for to fight with me I see thou art not able,
So with my trusty broad sword I soon will thee disable.

St. George

Disable! Disable! It lies not in thy power,
For with my glittering sword and spear I soon will thee devour.
Stand off, Slasher! Let no more be said,
For if I draw my sword I'm sure to break thy head?

Slasher

{Slasher and St. George clash swords in time with the following lines, in a ritualised sword fight}

How canst thou break my head?
My head is made of iron,
My body's made of steel,
My hand and feet are knuckle bone,
I challenge thee to field.

{Slasher is wounded – he merely bows his head}

Fool

Alas! Alas! My chieftain son is slain,
What must I do to raise him up again?
Here he lies in the presence of you all,
I'll lovingly for a doctor call.
{Aloud}
A doctor! A doctor! Five pounds for a doctor, ten pounds,
twenty
I'll go and fetch a doctor.

Doctor

Here I am.