

The Wheatley Mummers Play.

The Wheatley play was written down by Carpenter in 1930 from mummers who said that they had learnt it about 1880 from older mummers in Wheatley. The original text is now in the Carpenter Collection Cawte Index No.699-703, but it is confused in places. Slight amendments have therefore been made here by referring to a text recorded at Holton in 1870, and another at Cuddeson in 1914. The former are underlined with an unbroken line, the latter with a broken line.

Foreman.

Make room, make room, my gallant boys,
And give me room to rhyme.
For I am come to let you know,
It's Merry Christmas.

Bold French and officers
It is my arts delight,
I've travelled thro' many fields to fight.
I've fought my battels and now come home,
And don't you think I'm very well known.

Come in King George.

King George.

In comes I King George,
A man of courage bold,
With my broad axe and sword
I won nine crowns of gold.

I fought the fiery dragon
And brought him to the slaughter,
And by these means I won
The King of Egypts daughter.

Where is the man dare bid me stand,
I'll cut him down with my courageous hand.

Duke of Cumberland.

In comes I the Duke of Cumberland,
With his broad sword all in hand.
I am the man dare bid thee stand,
Altho' you say you'll cut him down
With your courageous hand.

I'll cut you and hew you
As small as flies,
And send you to the cookshop
To make mince pies.

King George.

Guard your head and guard my blows,
Or else I'll cut off your long nose.
A battle, a battle between you and I,
To see which on the ground shall lie.

(They fight and King George falls).

Foreman. Doctor, doctor, where bist thee,
King George is wounded thro' the knee.
£5 for a noble doctor if he was here.

Doctor. The noble doctor see you here,
I have travelled both far and near.
I do'nt travel the country to kill,
but to cure.

Foreman. Where thee travels then doctor?

Doctor. Through Italy, Titally, France and Spain,
And now I'm back in t'old country again.

Foreman. What canst thee cure doctor?^{1.}

Doctor. The itch, the stitch, the palsy and the gout,
Pains within and pains without.

Bring me an lod woman seven years dead,
Eight years buried, and nine in her grave,
One tooth in her jaw, one hair on her head,
If she takes this pill I maintain
I'm bound to fetch her to life again.

Yur take this pill, try it, me little boy,
And if thee dies believe me no more.
Risè up King George and fight again.

(Gives King George a pill and he jumps up).

(Comment: Although a second fight is called for at Wheatley, in which King George then kills his opponent, it is not enacted, but it is in texts for the neighbouring villages of Cuddeson and Horsepath. Traditionally the Doctor cannot cure the dead victim so the Fool in the play is called in. In Oxon, and Glos. he is called Jack Finney and is questioned in the same way as the Doctor regarding his cures and his travels. The latter however have been forgotten at Wheatley).^{2.}

Foreman. Come in Jack Finney.

Jack Finney.

My name yent Jack Finney.
My name is Mr. Finney,
And Mr. Finney I will be called.

Foreman. What canst thee cure?

Jack Finney. A magpie with the toothache.

Foreman. How dost thee do that then?

Jack Finney.

Cut off his head and throw his body in a ditch.

(Comment: The Wheatley text then has an Old Gentleman coming in and states that he is "dressed like an old ragged man who goes to the Duke."

When the mymmers came to be dressed as the characters they played, Jack Finney often wore a tophat and a frockcoat like the Doctor, but his were worn and shabby. An 1898 text from Kirtlington, Oxon. lists him as "a broken down gentleman." Jack Finney always insists on being addressed with respect, and sometimes says he can do more than the Doctor as in a 1914 text from Waterstock another village near Wheatley. The 1870 text from Holton has an Old Man brought in who queries the Doctor's diagnosis of the second victim several times, and at Wheatley he helps the Doctor with the cure. It would seem that the Old Gentleman is none other than Jack Finney.)

Foreman. Come in Old Gentleman.

Old Gentleman.

Be you the noble Doctor?

(Each character in turn says; No Old Gentleman! and when he comes to the Doctor.)

Old Gentleman.

Be you the noble doctor?

Doctor.

Yes, Old Gentleman, what do you please want?

Old Gentleman.

I be as bad as bad can be,
And my ald dummon's ten times wuss.

Doctor.

Fetch her in let's have a look at her.³

(Old Gentleman brings her in; throws her down on the taproom floor; Doctor examines her.)

(Comment: The text has a space in the Doctor's lines here filled with dashes, so the Holton text has been inserted until it picks up the Wheatley text.)

Doctor.

I thinks she got the blue rousles.

Old Man.

I think you makes a grand mistake there doctor.
Will you have another look at her please?

Doctor.

Well I thinks she got the flavour alurk.

Old Man.

Flavour alurk, what's that doctor?

Doctor.

Two stomachs to eat and nere one to work.

Old Man.

I thinks you makes a grand mistake there doctor.
Will yer 'ave another look at 'er please?

Doctor.

She's got the toothache.

Old Gentleman.

Well now she may have the toothache.
Last night I ram jammed this knobby stick⁴
down her throat three and a half yards,
an she ett three pecks an a half 6 murriny
tatters ---
Maunt she be an old hot, jest like the women.

(They pull old woman's tooth, she hollers.)

(Beelzebub comes in after Jack Finney.)

In comes I as aint been hit,
With my great head and little wit,
Me 'eads so big, and my wit's so small,
I've brought my fiddle to please you all.

Jack's gone to Ireland, Jim's gone to France,
We'll all jump up and have a merry dance.

(Comment: These lines in most mummers plays belong to the Fool who often plays a comic instrument with the musician for the concluding dance. They are spoken by Jack Finney in all the other surrounding villages of Wheatley. Beelzebub is the last to come in (his usual lines are as follows as in an 1870 text from Horsepath).)

Beelzebub.

In comes I Old Beelzebub,
On me shoulder I carries me club,
In me hand a drippin pan.
Don't you think I'm a merry old man.

(Comment: All join in a concluding dance while Beelzebub collects money in his pan and threatens those slow to pay with his club, after which they follow the Fool out).

Notes.

1. The Wheatley text gives the magpie with the toothache cure to the Doctor here, but in most Oxon. and Glos, plays it belongs to Jack Finney.
2. Traditionally Jack Finney gave a long paradoxical account of his strange travels to a magical land where the sick were made whole. His long account so difficult to learn varies in length in the plays, but is best remembered in those from Glos. where his journey takes him to a land of plenty. The latter seems to be the climax of the play, and often came to take the form of Christmas fare in many plays elsewhere. Jack Finney's travels have been forgotten at Wheatley, but there is a comparatively long account of them in the 1870 Holton text as follows:-

Last Monday noight

I asked King Georges wife to weigh me out
Nine pounds of butter an she wud'ent.
She was up an old holly bush weighing out
Nine pounds of steel to pay her rent.

She drops her gert butter dragger on my head,
And knocks me right from bottom to top.
I took to my heels thro' wide/narrow fields,
And met a pig up a tree eating acorns just for a spree.

I runs down a long/short lane a little bit more,
And met a live lion stuffed with straw.
I met old Father Nick-me-na,
I kowed him, you knowed him,
Only nobody knowed him at all.

I goes down a little bit further and out comes
a black blue bark and 'e dogged at me.
I pulled my pocket out o' my knfe,
And cut a hedge out o'a stake,
And gave him a head o'er the rattlereee.

I goes down a bit further and comes to the duke's house,
I knocks at the ~~maid~~ and out comes the door such a roush.
She asks if I'll have a bite o beer an a glass o bread an cheese,
I says yes thankyou an no if you please.

I goes down a bit further and I sees
three dead men a fighting,
Three blind men looking on to see fair play,
And three dumb men hollerin' hip 'orray.

Although these lines have been given to the Doctor in the 1870 Holton text they get the response 'Be you Jack Finney?'. A similar but shorter account of his travels in a later Holton text has been given to the Duke of Cumberland.

3. It is possible that the Doctor's previous lines "Bring me an old woman" have been taken literally, and she has become the second victim instead of the Duke of Cumberland. It is interesting that in the later Holton play where ^{the} Doctor does not ask for an old woman to be brought she does not come in, but against this it does not have any second victim at all. An Old Woman as the second victim seems to be an ~~innovation~~ of the Wheatley play as at Cuddeson and Waterstock this is not the case despite the Doctor calling for one.
4. It is also possible that the Old Gentleman with his reference to his knobbly stick is Beelzebub with his club. Against this ~~is~~ an 1970 text from Horsepath has the Old Man bringing in his Old Woman to be cured, and Beelzebub comes in after with his usual concluding lines. Neither can it be said that where Beelzebub does not come in he has been replaced by the Old Man.