

FROM THE
WANTAGE MUMMERS
ARCHIVE

1998 – 2020

1998



Martin Foster as Doctor Good



Pete Ambidge
as
King Alford

Traditional post-script to Christmas Day



BOXING DAY is still December 26, as far as the Wantage Mummings are concerned and they took their traditional play 'on tour' on the day after Christmas as usual, rather than transfer it to the holiday Monday.

Starting at Faringdon, where a crowd gathered in the Market Place to watch their traditional tale of 'good', represented from the Wantage Players by Kind Alfred, over 'evil' - on this occasion, all things French - the players moved on to the Market Place in Wantage, and then to a venue they were visiting for the first time, outside 'The Hatchet' in Childrey.

Their collection this year was for 'Save the Children'.

THURSDAY, January 13, 2000

Mummings remember member

WANTAGE Mummings have donated £1,000 to charity in memory of one of their members who was killed in a rail accident last October.

The Mummings, who perform their traditional play around the area each Boxing Day, collected £330 last month from audiences in Faringdon, Wantage and Childrey.

The players, most of whom perform on a more regular basis as members of the Icknield Way Morris Men, decided to put the cash to donations already received, in memory of Mr Michael McArdle, 21, who had been one of their members since he was a boy.

Mr McArdle, who had a flat in Wallingford Street, was found on a railway line at Reading while visiting friends in the town, and was believed to have been hit by a train.

The money will be given to Save the Children.

THIS YEARS MUMMERS WERE :-

NICK - JACK VINNEY

PETE A - KING ALFRED

BOB HART - HARRY JACK

PHIL - MOLLY

SEM - BEELZEBUB

MARTIN - DOCTOR GOOD

KEN - BEAU SLASHER

2000



The French never learn ! Beau Slashor (Len) struts his stuff
Prior to coming second best to King Albred (Bob) yet again !

Molly (Martin) & Jack Vinney (Pete A.) whip up a frenzy of Francophobia !





STEVE (Happy Jack) PHIL (Dr Good) Martin (Molly) SEM (Bealzebub) LEO (Beau Slasher) PETERA. (Jack Guinness) ROB (King Albrecht)

Phil, Sem, and Martin have just spotted someone dressed in silly clothes



2001



Dr Good (Nick) Molly (Martin) King Alfred (Bob) Jack Vinny (Pete) Beau Slesker (Lew) Beetzabub (Sem)
Father Christmas (Lew) Happy Jack (Phil)



2002



2003



2004



2005







2006

The Mummers

Boxing Day 2006

Topical gags included a chemical suit for the Doctor and a Geiger counter to measure the polonium activity and the French Officer felling King Alf with a World Cup head butt. £800 was collected for Starlight.





2007

Mummers – Boxing Day 2007





2008

BOXING DAY 2008

THE WANTAGE MUMMERS (who are nothing whatsoever to do with Icknield Way Morris Men)



Old Father Beelzebub

08:00 Get up to find cold but sunny Boxing Day. Have cup of tea and mince pie. Raid wardrobe for something silly to wear. Take the boss a cup of tea. Feed cats, put on make up, last look at doggerel. Did I really write this? No, must be divine intervention. I can't believe I'll remember it.

09:00 Leave to pick up Father Christmas. In Uffington it's colder and brighter. Did he have a nice Christmas? Well' he grumbles "you sit around for a bit, eat your dinner, then sit around for a bit; if that's nice it was." No mention of all the chimneys he had to negotiate.



Old Father Christmas

09:20 Leave for Faringdon. Meet Happy Jack and Jack Vinney in Car Park. Jack looks pretty, could get some unusual offers if he's lucky.



Jack Vinney

Totter off to the Corn Exchange where King Alf and that bloody Frenchman want to rehearse their routine. Oh well, it's not slick but it'll do. Molly has a new rig-out. God, how these women can shop!!



Molly

09:55 The appointed hour cometh. Out we process to the Wassailing tune, troupe carrying much newly acquired equipment including new NHS medical technology, firearms from Afghanistan, and a shoe on a stick for George.

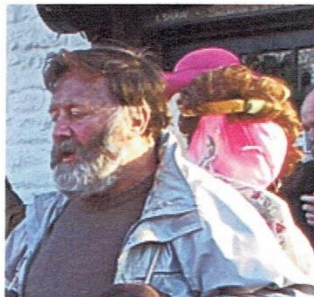
10:00 Many folks await in the cold but sunny Market Place and as we assemble in the spot best tried for acoustic effect they gather round like well drilled children making the circle according to an ISO Standard for audience circles.

10:10 And off we go into the time tested routine with Molly clearing the way. The audience are responsive and the gags are well appreciated, viz: King Alf's bendy gun, Dr Squire's pendulum wrist watch, Private Patient Plan Blood Test Kit AND the crafty allusion to the € being worth more than the £ by reversing a long running gag. Some even got the Dashing John Sergeant reference when Molly eventually remembered it. (I thought women were good at multi tasking?).



The Noble Dr Good

So Happy Jack came on and did his bit to a calypso rhythm for a change and then the bags were filled whilst I opened my mouth and the words surprisingly came out in the right order and people laughed in the right places (must be something wrong).



Happy Jack

We danced an encore (The Happy Man, Adderbury) which was not entirely dissimilar from the way Icknield Way Morris Men (who are nothing whatsoever to do with The Wantage Mummers) do it.

10:45 Process back to the Corn Exchange and a quick post mortem. Alf and Slasher need to get it a bit more precise; Jack Vinney needs to speed up slightly; otherwise not a bad effort. We get a drink on the house and off to Wantage.

11:00 Leave for King Alfred's home patch. Father Christmas moans in the car about the fortunes of Coventry City FC and a conversation ensues along the lines of "I bet my team is crappier than yours" sort of thing.

11:20 Park in Wantage Centre and off to The Bell for a drink. Molly spent the whole time soliciting chaps at the bar, Slasher repaired his make up, Happy Jack rested his titanium knee cap, and general merriment quickly took us to the next appointment at 12:00.

12:00 Processed from The Bell to The Bear forecourt where an enormous crowd of 150-200 folks assembled. We created our space; did a few introductory things (how much money we made last year, etc.); and into the routine.

Everything went much as Faringdon until we came to Alf & Slasher's routine. Just as Alf was about to leap over Slasher the bloody Frenchman did a dastardly thing and poor Alf went arseoverhead. Well, these unscripted events always add a bit of extra jollity and fortunately Alf was still able to slay the CHEESE EATING SURRENDER MONKEY.



Beau Slasher

On with the show and again all the words came out in the right order. It's quite surprising the number of people who seem to think this waffle is the primary reason for being there. And every year there is an expectation.....

12:45 The Boss turns up and takes Father Christmas, me and assorted offspring to Childrey. Another large crowd of 150+ awaits. The landlord has had sense to put up some barrels outside and it eases congestion in the pub. However the barrel we ask for runs out and we are delayed starting. (But of course **that** is in the best interests of show biz tradition!)



King Alfred

13:15 Off we go and everything goes pretty much to plan with Alf pursuing Slasher all over the road to give folks on the other side a glimpse of what they are missing. All the new gags are well appreciated and this is by far the most responsive audience even laughing in the unintended places. (What the hell's funny about the cholera deaths in Zimbabwe?)



Another encore, landlord's mince pies, mulled wine and a few minutes to recover. Many people accost us with the traditional "it was the best ever" line.

14:00 We gather at the time honoured corner of the pool table and play some introductory music before launching into the customary sing-song in which the rafters did verily ring. All the old favourites rolled out and we are aided in our endeavours by friends, family and regular attendees of long standing. Hugh's "Sweet Chariot" is as much a part of Boxing Day as Molly's balloons.

Things petered out around 16:00 but still the chattering classes wouldn't leave. I was called to the usual Christmas meeting with Beelzebub I's daughter and was greatly surprised by being presented with his accordion only a few months new when he joined the great band of eternal mummer's in the sky. It was 10 years since that happened and the poor old instrument had been silent all that time. So we breathed life back into it and it is now available for anyone to borrow even if they are a member of Icknield Way Morris Men (who are nothing whatsoever to do with The Wantage Mummings).

17:00 I think the Boss drove me home. Can't remember much more. I expect it'll come back to me next year when the muse comes upon me.

Beelzebub II

2009

**Mummers Play
Boxing Day 2009**

**PRESS RELEASE
MEDICAL UPDATE 24 Dec**

Beelzebub – confined to bed under doctor’s orders – unlikely starter
Happy Jack – lost voice – hopes to recover
Molly – lost voice – hopes to recover
Further bulletins will be issued

With only two days to go there was a certain air of panic among the Mummers (who you will recall are not IWMM) and our raft of alternative plans had got as far as Plan D. However, on the day the old troupers managed to drag themselves out and speak loudly enough - so it was Plan A after all.

Weather was again kind and after our usual warm up to a select audience in Faringdon the crowds at Wantage and Childrey were as big as they ever have been. The only damp around seemed to have got into the cartridges as twice Father Christmas had to substitute a bellowed “BANG – BANG” following a technical failure with the props.

Once again the audience was generous and we collected £1000 for Cancer Research.





2010

The Wantage Mummings

Boxing (St Stephens) Day 2010

The day provided bright sunshine, but also ice and snow and temperatures below -10C. This led to un-English complaining about the cold ground from bold (?) King Alfred during his death scene. The French Officer also had a moan but nobody took any notice. Despite the freeze, audience support was as good as ever and so with a knowledgeable crowd watching even the Anglo-French Military Alliance gag worked well. (Newcomers were doubtless bemused)



Off we go again....heavens its cold out here



Hugging not fighting?



There's never a doctor when you need one



Oh yes there is



Mind my toes with that big battery



Sorry, curing the French is more than my job's worth



So it's up to a Spanish ragman to get Frenchy moving



The most important characters of all – the audience

Thanks to a big turnout and unstinting generosity the Boxing Day performances collected a record £1127. To this was added the collection from the earlier Chastleton House performance and £300 donated by IWMM. As a result £500 was given to Help for Heroes and £1000 to Oxford Air Ambulance.

2011



2012



2013



2014



2015



2016

In comes I!



Forty Years
of the
Wantage
Mummers



I'm turning into my father-in-law 😞

2017



2018



Special business led to "Bob" getting a walk-on





2019



2020

The Plague Year



For over forty years the Wantage Mummings have strode into the street on Boxing Day to delight hundreds of people and raise thousands of pounds for charity. This year will be different – COVID 19 has driven the Mummings into cyberspace. By flying back through the cloud King Alfred, Beau Slasher and the rest of the cast have put together an on-line “COVID 19 Edition” of the play.

To access this performance go onto the Mummings website (wantageummings.org.uk) and follow the links. The recording will be available from 10am Boxing Day until Twelfth Night and the site will have a facility to make donations to this year’s charity. Given the circumstances the Mummings have chosen to support **NHS Charities Together** – please give generously.

So, between Boxing Day and Twelfth Night put on a silly hat, get a drink in your hand, sit in front of your festive laptop/tablet/phone, tune into the Wantage Mummings Play and enjoy an uplifting COVID antidote.