

THE CHRISTMAS CHAMPIONS or THE OLD CHRISTMAS CHAMPIONS

Play performed in the Westerham district. Noted (18.7.53), by Jeff Metcalf, founder member of Ravensbourne Morris Men and former Squire of the Morris Ring, from Mr J. Medhurst at the 'Bat and Ball', Leigh,, near Tonbridge. Mr Medhurst moved to Leigh from Sundridge (3 or 4 miles from Westerham). Aged 72 in 1953. he first took part in the play when he was 'about 16, i.e. 1896-7. It must have carried on into this century, but he was very vague about when it was last performed. It was an adult affair. with no boys teams; Mr Medhurst says he introduced it to Sundridge. There were sometimes two or three teams, and the proper time was just before Christmas. They went round the big houses in the usual manner.

Dress was old clothes with bits of coloured paper or rags sewn on -not too many. All the performers had black faces- other special features of dress are indicated below. Each man remained outside the door until it was his turn to speak: the instructions were to 'say it steady'.

FATHER CHRISTMAS: *(in false beard and wig made from clothes line)*

In comes I. old Father Christmas.
Am I welcome or am I not?
I hope old Father Christmas will never be forgot.
For in this room there shall be shown
The greatest battle that ever was known.
Step in. King George with thy free heart.
To see if thou can't claim peace for thine own heart.

KING GEORGE *(wears a cardboard crown, and carries a wooden sword; tall)*

I am King George. that man of courage bold;
With my broadsword and spear I won ten crowns of gold;
And if any man dare enter this room
I will hack him small as dust,
Afterwards I will send him to the cookery shop
To be made into mince pie crust.

TURKISH KNIGHT: *(small man, carrying wooden sword)*

In comes I, little Turkish Knight.
In Turkish land I learned to fight.
I'll fight King George, that man of courage bold.
And if his blood be hot, I'll quickly make it cold.

KING GEORGE: Ho, Ho, my little fellow, thy talk is very bold;
Just like one of these little Turkish knights that I have been told
Pull out your sword and fight;
Pull out your purse and pay;
For satisfaction I will have before I go away.

TURKISH KNIGHT:

Satisfaction - or no satisfaction;
For my body is lined with steel.,
And therefore I'll fight any man.
With my broadsword and steel.

They fight, and during this the Old Woman (wearing skirt and bonnet) enters and stands behind the Turkish Knight. He (TK) has a small bag of ochre fixed to his chest, and when King George pricks this, the Turkish Knight falls back into the arms of the Old Woman. He does NOT fall to the ground.

OLD WOMAN:

Oh, Oh. King George, what hast thou done?
Thou hast cut and slain my only son.
Is there a doctor can be found
To cure this man lying bleeding in my arms.

ITALIAN DOCTOR: *(top hat and frock coat)*

In comes I. an Italian Doctor
Just lately come from Spain.
I can cure the sick, and raise the dead again.
I have a little bottle in my waistcoat pocket.
It's called the golden frosty drop (produces small bottle)
If I pour a drop on his nose (does so)
And a drop on the roof of his tongue (does so)
And say to him - arise. go home. and tell your country
What an Italian Doctor has done for thee.
(TK recovers and walks away)

JOHNNIE JACK: *(should be the smallest man, and has sewn onto his jacket-back a piece of cardboard about 18" square, with 5 dolls - the biggest in the middle)*

In comes I. little Johnnie Jack,
With my wife and family on my back.
My family's large, but I am small,
But every little helps us all.

ALL:

A jug of brown ale makes us merry and sing;
Money in our pockets is a very fine thing.
Now ladies and gentlemen. just at your case.
You may give us Christmas Champions just what you please.

The performance finished with a little music. Popular tunes of the day played on mouthorgan, tambourine. triangle, etc.