

Characters

- Messenger (M/F)** - Introduces the play; can double as a main character.
- Robin Hood (M/F)** - A bold good fellow.
- Arthur Abland (M/F)** - A bold tanner by trade.
- Little John (M/F)** - Of the merry men.
- Doctor (M/F)** - Full of hocus pocus.
- Tom Pinney (M/F)** - Full of nonsense.

Scene 1 - Introduction

(Optional intro to audience)

V/O: The Mummers play we're going to perform comes from Kempford in Gloucestershire, and collected in 1868. Two small extracts from a Nottinghamshire Christmas Play published in 1902 are added, along with some liberties!

Mummers Plays, like wassailing, were part of the entertainment at festive occasions, which included Easter, All Souls Day, and Christmas, and there are plays to fit each. Mummers Plays performed around Plough Sunday are called Plough Plays. The play-actors were called mummers or geysers; but there were many local names, such as pace-egggers, tipteerers and galoshins.

At one time most villages had their own Mummers group, or side, and many villages had their own play. They visited the big houses, and three nights of Mumming could raise as much as a month's wage for the agricultural labourers, who mostly made up the groups. If the ploughboys didn't get their rewards of coins, figgy pudding or ale, they might play a trick on the landowner, such as ploughing up their churchyard or garden! The modern custom of 'Trick or Treat' at Halloween is thought to originate from mumming.

After WW1 the plays mostly died out, although in some cases continued until after WW2. Resurrected by folk revivalists around the middle of the 20th century, they continue as an art form in streets and public houses.

In Mummers plays there are stock characters and stock situations, with themes of duality and resurrection, good and evil.

(Music extract from Robin Hood theme tune)

Scene 2

(Perform in a very lively and outgoing manner. SFX. Knocking at door. Messenger enters with a sweeping bow)

Messenger: **(addresses audience)** By leave you gentlemen all,
Your pardon I do crave,
For making bold to come,
To see what sport you'll have.

There's more in company,
They're following close behind;
They've sent us on before,
Admittance for to find

These blades they are but young;
Never acted here before;
They'll do the best they can,
And the best can do no more.

(Messenger moves aside, or gets changed if doubling. Arthur Abland enters with broom or besom & sweeps an acting space for players to perform in.)

© Scripts for Stage

This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from www.scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/mummers-performance/

Arthur: **(Flourishes broom)** A room, a room, brave gallants all
Please give me room to rhyme
This merry merry Christmas time. **(Change season if necessary!)**
Activity of youth, activity of age,
Such life was never known, or played upon the stage.

I am a bold Tanner, from *[Northamptonshire]* I came,
Long time I wrote my name bold Arthur Abland!
With a long pike staff on my shoulder, **(use broom)**
So well I clear my way.
Let them be, one two or three, I make them flee,
They dare no longer stay.

As I was walking one summer's morning,
Through the forest merry greenwood
To view the red deer
That run here and there,
Then I saw bold Robin Hood.

(Robin Hood enters boldly with wooden staff; slap thigh.)

Arthur: As soon as Robin Hood did me spy

Some sport he thought for to make.
He bid me fan, he bid me stand,
And he bid me thus for to spake

Robin: **(To Arthur challengingly)** Who art thou bold fellow
Who begin so bold high here?
Stroth to be brief thou lookst a thief
Come to steal the King's deer!

I'm the keeper of this forest,
And the King put me in trust
To mind the red deer
That run here and there,
So stop thee good fellow I must!

Arthur: **(Bold repost)** If thou beist Keeper over this forest,
And hast any great command,
I don't care a peg for thee looking so big,
So mend theeself where thee can!

Robin: Let us measure staves bold fellow,
Before we begin our play,
I won't have my staff half a foot longer than thine,
Else that will come to foul play.

(Robin measures his staff against his own height, and mentally adds a bit. Arthur puts his broom on floor, and measures it out with his feet, walking beside it.)

Robin: **(Boldly)** My staff is eight foot and a half,
And growed straight on a tree;
An eight foot staff will knock down a calf,
And I'm sure it will knock down thee.

(Robin & Arthur fight, clashing stick & broom. Robin holds up hand and halts - fight. Invites Arthur to join his band of merry men.)

Robin: Oh hold our hands, oh hold our hands,
And let our quarrels fall,
We shall beat our bones all to a meat,
And get no quaintance at all!

If thee will leave thy tanning trade,
And bide in greenwood with me,
My name's Robin Hood and I swear by the wood,
I will give thee both gold, and fee.

Arthur: Pray tell me where is Little John!
In queen so plain I heard his loud voice.
By his mother's side he is our kinsman dear.

(Little John enters with staff.)

Little John: **(To Robin, concerned.)** What is the matter master I pray you tell?
You stand with your staff all in your hand,
I'm 'fraid all things arn't well!

Robin: **(Explains)** The man that bid me stand
Is the Tanner by my side.
He's a bonny blade,
And a master by trade,
And he swears he'll tan my hide!

© Scripts for Stage

This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from www.scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/mummers-performance/

Little John: **(Challenges Arthur)** Thee be recommended
If the feat thee can do!
If thee be so big and stout,
Thee and I'll have a bout,
And thee shall tan my hide too!

(Arthur & Little John: (Fight with broom and staff. Arthur is 'killed'. Arthur makes a business of dying.)

Robin: **(Shakes his purse. Entreats.)** A thousand pounds I'll give,
Arthur Abland's life to save!

(SFX. Clip clopping of horse from one direction (two coconut shells are effective!) All actors including Arthur look in direction of clip clopping. SFX. Sounds recede.

Robin: **(Repeats words & holds aloft purse)** A thousand pounds I'll give,
Arthur Abland's life to save!

Arthur: **(Loudly)** – I could be dead!

Robin: Shhhh!

(All actors still looking way horse shoes were clip clopping from, when Doctor approaches from other direction. Doctor enters slowly on hobby horse)

Doctor: Come on Lightning – not much further. Lift your hooves up. Hold my horse Jack!

(Tom Pinny enters, & comes forward to hold hobby horse)

Tom: Yes Sir, I've got him fast by the tail.

Little John: **(To Doctor)** We thought we heard you coming from over there? **(Points)**

Doctor: No, that was my brother's horse Dobbin: this is my poor old horse, Lightning.
(Shakes head sadly at his Poor Old Horse.)

(All actors gather round hobby horse & sing 'Poor Old Horse' to tune of Wild Rover. Arthur might well join in singing from the floor. The lyrics fit if a few specific words are sung a little faster. Actors weep into hankies at refrain Poor Old Horse! Harmonize on Poor Old Horse.)

Sing: This is my old horse, that has carried me for miles,
Over hedges and ditches, o'er high-barred gate and stiles;
But now he's grown old, and his nature decays,
He has to snap, at short grass, that grows on the ways;
Poor old horse! Poor old horse!

His coat it was once of, the linsey-woolsey fine,
His mane grew at length, and his body it did shine,
His pretty little shoulders, that were plump and round,
They're worn out and aged; I'm afraid he's not sound;
Poor old horse! Poor old horse!

His keep it was once of, the best corn and hay,
That ever grew in cornfields, or in meadows gay;
But now to the open fields, he is obliged to go,
To stand in all weathers, either rain frost or snow;
Poor old horse! Poor old horse!

His hide to the tanner, I will freely give;
His body to the dogs; I'd him rather die than live:
So we'll hand him whip him strip him, and a-hunting let him go;
He's neither fit to ride on, or in the team to draw;
Poor old horse! Poor old horse!

(All actors explosion of weeping and wailing at end of song.)

Doctor: **(Pats hobby horse kindly)** Oh – rack him up with a faggot and fuzz,
And give him a bucket of ashes to drink.

Tom: I'll do as I be minded. **(Takes hobby horse and exits with it.)**

Doctor: **(Removes large pill box from pocket. Walks around rattling it.)**
See Sirs, here comes this noble doctor
Both stout and good,
And with my hand I'll stop his blood.

Robin: What country dost thee come from?

Doctor: From France, from Spain, from Rome I come,
The furthest part of Christendom.

(Arthur, after lying on floor for a while, becomes bored and wanders around, getting in the way of the actors, sitting in the audience, so other characters are forced to say things like – ‘We shan’t give you the star part next time if you can’t behave’/ ‘Oh Arthur go and park your body somewhere else can’t you’, etc. Occasionally they order him back to the floor to lie down.)

Robin: (Enquires) What can’t thee cure?

Doctor: (Boasts) All sorts of diseases,
Just what my pill pleases!
The heart corn and the smart corn,
The itch, the stitch.
Pains within and pains without,
Both the palsy and the gout.

I don’t go about like these half re-rafty sham Doctors
Pay there kill nor cure.
I’d sooner kill than cure.
Bring me an old woman that’s been 70 years dead
And 70 years
And 70 years laid in her grave!
If she will rise up and crack one of my silver pills (**Take silver pill from pill bottle, or tennis ball wrapped in silver foil, and show it.**) I’ll be bound to maintain her life to save.

© **Scripts for Stage**

This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from www.scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/mummers-performance/

I cured old John Juggler’s wife.
Her had the rheumatiz in all four of her elbows!
Her died, and I cured her afterwards.
And I’ll cure this man if he ain’t too far gone!

(All actors look around for Arthur)

Little John: (Looks around audience for the ‘dead’ Arthur) Where has he gone?

(Little John fetches Arthur from wherever he is. Arthur lays on floor ‘dead’. Makes himself comfy. Doctor pretends to give Arthur a silver pill. Arthur, still ‘dead’)

Robin: What else can’t thee cure?

Doctor: Horses, cows, sheep and pigs,
And so walk in Master Cleverlegs!

Tom: (Offstage) What’s the matter with my legs more than thee own?

Doctor: Walk in Tom Pinny

Tom: (Enters) Tom Pinny's not my name

Doctor: What is't thee name?

Tom: Master Tom Pinny, a man of great fame.
Doesn't know my name?
Here comes I as can't be hit
With my great head and little wit.
My head's so big, my wit's so small
I've come to endeavour to please you all. (Bows)

Robin: What can'st *thee* cure?

Tom: A magpie with the tooth ache.

Robin: How d'ye do that?

Tom: (Answers cleverly) Cut off's head and throw his body into the ditch!

Robin: Ah – what country dost thee come from?

Tom: (Spouts cheerful nonsense) I comes from the country where they knits horse shoes,
And spins steel iron bars,
And thatches pigsties with pancakes.
Have you got any?

(Sings following 3 lines) Christmas comes but once a year,
Then I have a very good share,
Beef plum pudding and strong beer.

(Speaks in lively fashion) Last Xmas day I turned the spit,
I burnt my fingers and felt it hit-
The spark jumped over the table,
And the frying pan beat the ladle,

Aye, aye says the gridiron,
What can't you two agree.
Bring 'em to me, I'm the Justice of Peace
And I'll make 'em agree.

Old Mother Harding killed a fat hog,
Made black puddings enough to choke her dog –
Hung 'em up high upon the pin,
The fat ran out and the maggots crawled in,
Hee-haw! Pudding and string.

Doctor: Bellows if you please, Missus.

(Doctor examines Arthur. Opens his bag and rolls up sleeves. As Doctor is rolling up sleeves and preparing for the ‘operation’, Arthur removes balloon pump from Doctor’s bag and messes about with it, maybe blows up a real balloon. Robin stops him after a while, and hands Doctor the pump. Doctor pumps air up Arthur’s sleeve. Arthur’s feet begin to jiggle; his legs leap in air; he pretends to inflate bodily; chest goes up, cheeks blow out, then sits up.)

Doctor: **(Commands)** Rise up bold Arthur Abland
And give the Ladies and Gentlemen a dance before you go away.

(Arthur stands up slowly, then dances around in a lively fashion to a jig to music. Robin bows and presents purse of gold chocolate coins to Doctor)

Tom: So here I am a rub a dub a dub,
On my shoulder I carries my club,
In my hand an empty can.
Don’t you think I’m a jolly old man?

Green sleeves and yellow leaves,
Now my boys we’ll dance apace,
Hump back and hairy wig,
Now my boys – we’ll dance a jig!

© Scripts for Stage

This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from www.scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/mummers-performance/

(Cast all dance a jig to jolly music --- ‘Pizzicato Polka’ by Strauss is good; then line up for bow, then quickly begin singing a traditional seasonal song. ‘We Wish you a Merry Christmas’ is appropriate to end show at Christmas-time! Doctor can possibly throw his reward of gold chocolate coins to children in the audience. A useful free resource for old seasonal songs with lyrics, is Gutenberg.org files ‘Ancient Poems, Ballads & Songs of the Peasantry’. Amongst the many choices is ‘The Barley Mow Song’; ‘Gloucestershire Wassailers Song’ & ‘Hitchin May-Day Song’.)

END