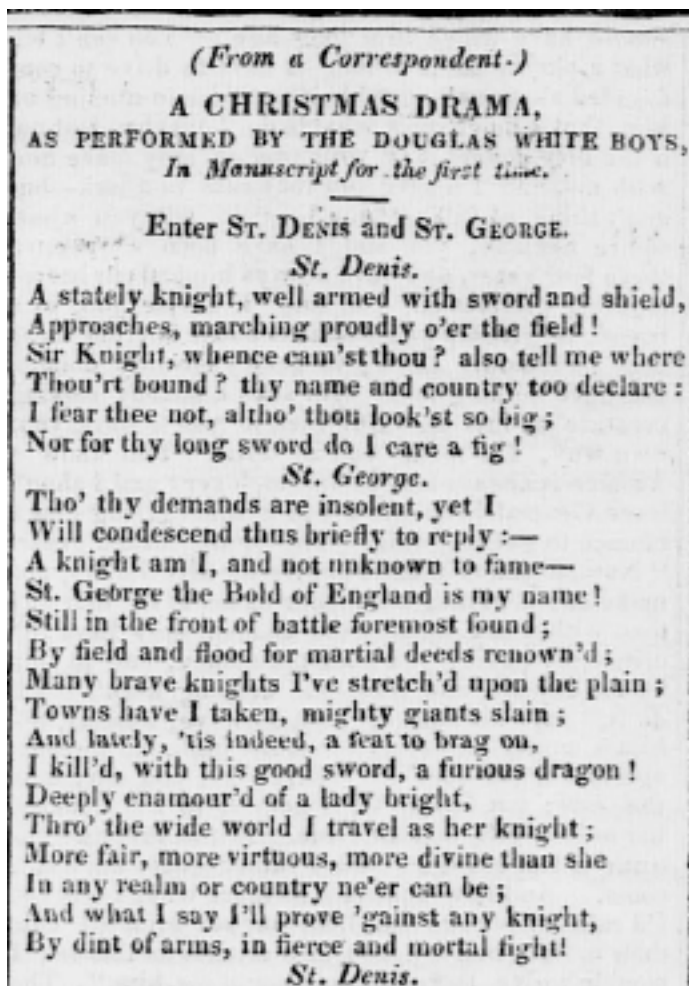


STEPHEN MILLER

“ENTER ST DENIS AND ST GEORGE”

THE WHITE BOYS PLAY TEXTS



“ENTER ST DENIS AND ST GEORGE”

THE WHITE BOYS PLAY TEXTS



1845

The Christmas festival is introduced by young persons perambulating the various towns and villages, in the evenings, fantastically dressed, and armed with swords, calling, as they proceed, “Who wants to see the White Boys act?” When their services are engaged, they, like the Scotch “Guisards” or “Qwhite-boys of Yule” perform a rude drama, in which St George, Prince Valentine, King of Egypt, Sambo, and the Doctor, are the dramatis personæ.

Joseph Train, *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*, 2 vols (Douglas: Mary A. Quiggin, 1845) 127.

1956

I believe Christmas traditions are on the way back, and that Castletown is making the first move in this respect. Some of the locals are interested in revival of the White Boys. What with a Christmas Tree in the Square, a touring Santa Claus in the town on Christmas morning—and now outside a local shop, a posting box for the children’s letters to Santa Claus. Castletown is waking up!

WHITE BOY.
Castletown.

Pseud [signed as “White Boy”]. “[Letter to the Editor] The White Boys.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 December 1956: 8e.

*

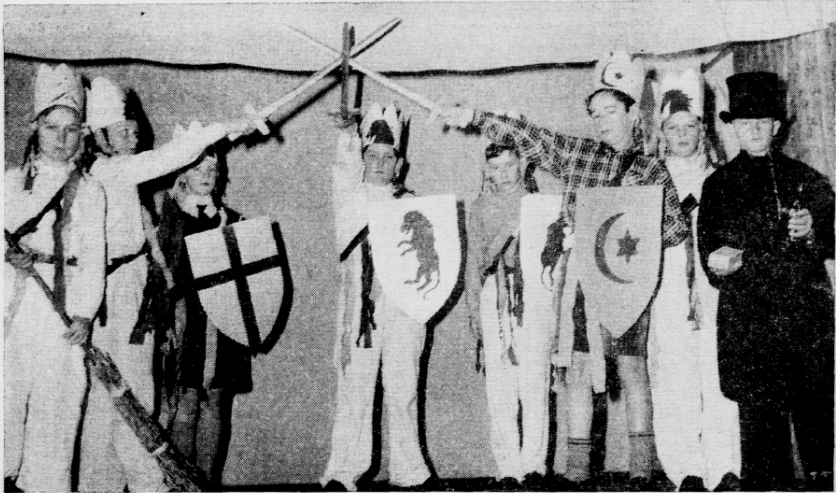
Presented here are the six play texts (not all of which are complete) known at times to have been performed by the White Boys in the Isle of Man. For more on the White Boys themselves, see Stephen Miller, “*Who wants to see the White Boys act?*” *The Mumming Play in the Isle of Man: A Compendium of Sources* (Onchan: Chiollagh Books, 2010). Reproduced here too is a piece on the Castletown White Boys that appeared earlier in 2009.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018



THE WHITE BOYS
AT ONCHAN SCHOOL CONCERT
(1959)

The White Boys—at Onchan School Concert



THE WHITE BOYS—a traditional tableau presented at the Onchan School Christmas Concert.

From the *Isle of Man Examiner*, 24 December 1959, 7c–f.

*

THE WHITE BOYS PLAY TEXTS

SOURCES

1832

1. “A Christmas Drama,” *Manx Sun*, 10 January 1832, [3]c.

1869

2. William Harrison, *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, Vol. xvi, (Douglas: Manx Society, 1869), 167–71.

1890s?

3. “White Boys,” MNHL, MD 1030, undated. Unknown hand.

c. 1907–10

4. Partial text recollected by Robert Cormode of Ramsey in 1971. MNH, Manx Museum Tapes, No. 81.

1950

5. “THE WHITE BOYS | Taken down by Mr. Charles Watterson, Castletown, from the last living | person who played in this play)”, collected by Charles Watterson, Castletown, 1950. MNHL, MXMUS FLS, wc B, unpagged [1]–[3].

1965

6. Collected by the Manx Museum Folk Life Survey, 1965. [Missing, see Templeton n.d. [1984], 20.]

1983

7. “The White Boys,” collected by Angela Templeton, August 1983, from Jack Watterson. See, Angela Caroline Templeton, *Mumming in the Isle of Man*, BA dissertation, Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies, School of English, University of Leeds, n.d. [1984], Appendix 3, “The Plays,” unpagged [44]–[45].

*

THE WHITE BOYS PLAY TEXTS



(I)

1832

"A Christmas Drama," *Manx Sun*, 10 January 1832, [3]c.

(From a Correspondent)

A CHRISTMAS DRAMA,
AS PERFORMED BY THE DOUGLAS WHITE BOYS,
In Manuscript for the first time.

[Enter St Denis and St George]

ST DENIS

A stately knight, well armed with sword and shield,
Approaches, marching proudly o'er the field
Sir knight, whence cam'st thou? also tell me where
Thou'rt bound? thy name and country do declare:
I fear thee not, altho' thou look'st so big;
Nor for thy long sword do I care a fig!

ST GEORGE

Tho' thy demands are insolent, yet I
Will condescend thus briefly to reply:—
A knight am I, and not unknown to fame—
St George the Bold of England is my name!
Still in the front of battle foremost found;
By field and flood for martial deeds renown'd;
Many brave knights I've stretch'd upon the plain;
Towns have I taken, mighty giants slain;
And lately, 'tis indeed a feat to brag on,
I kill'd, with this good sword, a furious dragon!
Deeply enamour'd of a lady bright,
Thro' the wide world I travel as her knight;
More fair, more virtuous, more divine than she
In any realm or country ne'er can be;
And what I say I'll prove 'gainst any knight,
By dint of arms, in fierce and mortal fight!

ST DENIS

St George, St George! thou talkest like an ass!
Full of conceit, nor will I let thee pass

Till I have 'bang'd thy hide, thou empty boaster,
Spite of thy swaggering airs, and long cheese-toaster.
A knight of France, St Denis famed, am I,
And ere we part, I surely mean to try
Whether I cannot lower thy lofty tones,
And bring thee, caitiff, to thy marrow bones:
Forc'd to confess that on this world so round,
The dames of France are still the fairest found!

ST GEORGE

That head from off thy shoulders soon I'll lop,
And that foul mouth of thine for ever stop;
An English knight, on coming 'o the scratch,
For two of France is always found a match!

[They fight—St George falls]

I die by Frenchman's hand—ah! Fate too cruel!

ST DENIS

I think I've given St George his gruel!

[Enter St Patrick]

ST PATRICK

I am St Patrick Ireland gave me birth—
In dearest Dublin, sweetest place on earth;
Sword or shillalah equally I wield,
To break a head or cut a throat well skill'd.
Fighting and eating—drinking too my trade is,
With some spare time devoted to the ladies!
Saint tho' I'm call'd, and yet I must allow
That now and then I dearly love a row!
The English George you've fairly floor'd, I see
And now, my boy, you'll take a turn with me;
Come on, St Denis, sprung from frogs of France,
And, without fiddle, I will make you dance!

ST DENIS

For this thou well deserv'st a broken head,
Born in a bog, and on potatoes fed!

Nor bog nor murphies shall delight thee more—
This weapon sends thee to the Stygian shore;
I'll put a stopper to thy bulls and brogue,
And rid the world right quickly of a rogue!

[They fight—St Denis falls]

Alas! St Patrick, rather queer I feel,
Run through the body by thy Irish steel;
Prithee, good fellow, for a doctor roar,
Or poor St Denis soon will be no more.

ST PATRICK

Halloo—a doctor, is a doctor near?

DOCTOR

Friend, did you call a doctor—I am here;
Jalap, my name, and for all sorts of ills
I've powders, holus, lotions, pills;
For cholera morbus too—complaint terrific,
I have a ne'er failing and a grand specific!
Skilful man-midwife likewise, necoucheur,
No fee I look for, if I make no cure!

ST PATRICK

I prithee, doctor, cease thy bothering cant,
A midwife in this case we do not want;
Thy aid obstetric for some female friend,
If there be need, I'll Jalap recommend;
These wounded knights straightway demand thy care
—Run thro' the guts in mortal fight they were!

DOCTOR

Stabb'd thro' the guts is sure a sad disaster.
But, even for that I've a surprising plaster—
Plaster that soon their vigour shall restore,
And make them sound and active as before.

[The Doctor operates—the wounded knights jump up perfectly recovered]

ST PATRICK

After this squabble, thus our hands let's join
In friendship, and together let us dine;
Hungry I am, and well prepared for prog,
With no objections to a glass of grog.

ST DENIS

To a good dinner I am nothing loath;

ST GEORGE

And I've a twist that will surprise you both.

[The knights standing in a circle, sing the following]

SONG.—Tune, "Christmas Carol."

Then here's success to all brave boys
Of stout and gallant heart,
In battle field or at banquet board,
Prepared to play a part
We handle well a knife and fork
Likewise the sword and spear,
And we wish you a merry Christmas,
And a happy New Year.
With hostile bands confronted,
To fight we are not slack,
On roast beef and plum pudding
We can make a stout attack.
We handle well a knife and fork,
Likewise a sword and spear,
And we wish you a merry Christmas,
And a happy New Year!

ST PATRICK

Now, lets to dinner,

DOCTOR

Stop! I wish to know
Who's to come down my fee before you go!

ST PATRICK

This morn I had a tenpenny, my dear,
But on the road I spent it all in beer!
St Patrick's seldom bothered with such riches,
And now I've not a copper in my breeches.
St George, fork out, and satisfy the chap:

ST GEORGE

I'm short of rime too—I've not a rap.

ST DENIS

Nor I, good Doctor, but I'll try to borrow

[Exeunt knights]

DOCTOR

I'm fairly diddl'd! Birds of the same feather
Are all the three, and humbugs altogether!
No cash, and call to-morrow!—all a bubble!
The Doctor's billed, just is his time and trouble.
(To the audience)
Good folks, I hope you'll pity my mishap,
And kindly drop a tester in my cap,
So may a merry Christmas,—good New Year
Attend you all, with plenty of good cheer.

[Exeunt Omnes]

*

(2)

[1845]

William Harrison, *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, Vol. xvi, (Douglas: Manx Society, 1869), 167–71.

[Enter Sambo]

SAMBO

It is here by your leave, Ladies and Gentlemen,
We will act a sporting play;
We will show you fine diversion
Before we go away.
It is room, room, brave gallant boys!
Give us room to rhyme,
We will show you fine diversion
In this Christmas time.
It is room, room, give us room to sport,
This is the place we wish to resort—
To resort and repeat our pretty rhymes.
Remember, good folks, it is the Christmas times.
This Christmas time as we now appear,
We wish to act our merry Christmas here;
We are the merry actors that travel the street,
We are the merry actors who show pleasant play;
Enter in the King of Egypt—clear the way!

[Enter the King of Egypt]

KING OF EGYPT

I am the King of Egypt, and so boldly do appear,
And St George, he is my son, my only son and heir!
Step forth my son St George! And act thy part with ease,
Show forth to all the living company thy praise.

[Enter St George]

ST GEORGE

I am thy son St George, and from England have I sprung,
Many are the noble deeds and wonders I have done.

Full fourteen years in prison I was kept,
And out of that into a cave I leapt,
From thence I went into a rock of stone;
'Twas there I made my sad and grievous moan.
Many were the lions that I did subdue,
I ran the fiery dragon through and through;
With a golden trumpet in my mouth
I sounded at the gates divine, the truth.
It is here to England, right from Egypt's station,
It's here to draw my bloody weapon.
Show me the man who dare before me stand;
I'll cut him down with my courageous hand!
Or who dare challenge me to fight, and I so great?
I who have fought Lords, Dukes, and made the whole earth to quake!

[Enter Prince Valentine]

ST GEORGE

Who art thou? Poor silly fellow!

VALENTINE

I am a Turkish champion. From Turkish land I came,
I came to fight that valiant knight, St George they call his name;
For it is hereby my name is written, Prince Valentine.
Descended from a hardy race and of a noble line.
And soon St George I'll make thy lofty laurels flee,
It shall not be said by all that I did yield to thee!
We'll fight it out most manfully. Draw!

[They fight]

ST GEORGE

The point of my sword is broke.
It happens so indeed! This night
St George is beat, he dare not fight!

ST GEORGE

Beat by thee! Thou poor silly rook!

VALENTINE

Fall in, Prince Actor.

[They fight. St George falls on one knee]

KING OF EGYPT

O mortal stars! And skies of heaven above!
What a thing it is for a man to lose his love!
To strike that val'rous champion from the helm,
And cursed be he, that did him overwhelm.
O Sambo! Sambo! Help me now in speed,
For never was I in a greater need.

SAMBO

O yea, my master, I soon will thee obey,
With sword in hand I hope to gain the day.
Art thou the knave that singly standest there
That slew my master's only son and heir?

VALENTINE

He challenged me to fight, and why should I deny?
He cut my coat so full of rents and made my buttons fly,
And if the rascal had had the honour to obtain,
Why, sir! he would have served you the same.

SAMBO

I'll try if thou art born of noble race;
I'll make thy blood come trickling down thy face;
And if thou dost another word against my master say,
Right through thy yellow body I'll make an open way.
They fight and Valentine falls.

KING OF EGYPT

O guards, come take this dismal corpse away,
For in my sight it shall no longer stay.
O Doctor! Doctor! Is there a doctor to be found,
Can cure St George of his deep and deadly wound?

[Enter Doctor]

DOCTOR

Oh, yes! master, yes, there is a doctor to be found,
Can cure St George, thy son, of a deep and deadly wound.

KING OF EGYPT

From whence come ye?

DOCTOR

From France, from Spain, from Rome I came,
I've travelled all parts of Christendom.

SAMBO

Well spoken, Doctor!

KING OF EGYPT

What can you cure?

DOCTOR

All sorts of diseases,
Whatever you pleases.
All pains within, all pains without,
The plague, the palsy and the gout.
The itch, stitch, and molly-grubs.
I can cure all these deeds.
All big-bellied maids,
And such like jades.
Likewise, I will pledge my life,
I can cure a scolding wife;
Let them be curst or ever so stout,
If the devil's in, I'll blow him out.

KING OF EGYPT

What is your fee?

DOCTOR

Twenty pounds down is my fee,
But half of that I'll take from thee.
If it is St George's life I save,
That sum this night from you I crave.

KING OF EGYPT

What medicine do you carry, Doctor?

DOCTOR

I carry a little bottle in my pocket of rixum-raxum,
prixum-praxum, with I-cock-o'lori—a little of this to his nostrils.
Rise up, St George! And fight again!

[The Doctor performs his cure, and St George rises.]

ST GEORGE

Oh, horrible! terrible! the like was never seen,
A man drove out of seven senses into seventeen,
And out of seventeen into seven-score.
Oh, horrible! terrible! the like was ne'er before.
It was neither by a bull, nor yet by a bear,
But by a little devil of a rabbit there.

[The Doctor performs his cure on Valentine who rises.]

VALENTINE

It is a kind of rough tough, coming up like a fly,
Up the seven stairs, and down the lofty sky.
My head is made of iron, my body made of steel,
My legs are made of pipe-shanks, I'll cause you all to yield.

[Valentine and Sambo fight, when the King of Egypt interposes.]

KING OF EGYPT

Oh! Oh! We are all brothers,
Why should we be all through others?
Put up your swords and fight no more,
No longer in this house adore.

DOCTOR

My box it is dumb and cannot speak,
Please give us something for Christmas sake.

*

(3)

1890s?

“White Boys,” MNHL, MD 1030, undated.

DOCTOR

Here by your leave, Ladies and Gentlemen,
We act a Christmas Play,
To give you all diversion
Before we go away!

KING GEORGE

It is room, room, brave gallants!
Give us room to rhyme—
To show you some diversion
This Merry Christmas time!

PRINCE VALENTINE

It is room, room! Give us room to sport
For all that here may resort
Remember it is Christmas time
We come to weave our rhyme

MAC MAN

'Tis Christmas time! And we appear
To act our Christmas Merily here.
And bid you health to eat good cheer
And wish you health for the coming Year

We are the merry actors, that travel through the street
We are the merry actors that come you all to greet.
We are the merry actors that show you pleasant play
Enter the King of Denmark—Clear the way.

KING OF DENMARK

I am the King of Denmark and boldly do declare
That George is King of England, who is my son and heir!!
Stand forth King George, thy sword in hand, to act a gallant part
And show to all this company a specimen of art!

KING GEORGE

I am King George of England, my father's gallant son,
And many are the deeds of arms that nobly I have done
In many a rugged region and far and foreign shore
And Here I come to show myself at Christmas time once more!

Show me the foe that dares to stand
And he shall fall by the right hand
I challenge dukes and lords to fight
And put the best of them to flight

PRINCE VALENTINE

Ho! ho! Ha ha—what empty boast!
I'll serve you sardines to your toast!

KING GEORGE

What art thou—bird or animal?!
Then clip thy claws I certainly shall!

PRINCE VALENTINE

I am a Turkish Champion: from Turkeyland I came
I came to fight that valiant Knight, King George they call his name
For I am named Prince Valentine
Heir of the Sultan's noble line!

Room—till I make thy laurels fall
For fighting heroes is my task
Either now yield to me
Or wield thy Yosopous man fully

[They fight—pause]

GIRL

Wine for the Champions

BOTH

What have you?

GIRL

Port—Burgundy—Claret
Hock—Moselle
And water from the well.

KING GEORGE

Fall Sir Valentine!

PRINCE VALENTINE

Fall down—the victory is mine!!

KING GEORGE

The point of my sword is broke
How can I ght?

PRINCE VALENTINE

Ho ho—I've heard that little joke
Before to night

[King George falls]

CHORUS

Guards take this Turkish foe away
And hold him from the light of day!

KING OF DENMARK

A doctor—is there a doctor anywhere
To cure the wounds of this my heir?

KING OF DENMARK

Whence come you doctor?

DOCTOR

From France from Spain from Italy and Rome
I've travelled seven part of Christendom

ALL

Well spoken Doctor

KING OF DENMARK

What can you cure!

Doctor

Whatever it pleases
To call diseases
When I take pains
No trouble remains
I can cure a scolding wife
For that's the sorest ill in life!

ALL

Well spoken Doctor!

DOCTOR

Ho-ho... ho-ho no deadly wound
The Gallant George has only swooned.

KING OF DENMARK

What medicine Doctor

DOCTOR

A little bottle of rixum roxum
trixum traxum
Hi cock-o-lori!
Ho ho ha ha no deadly wound
The Gallant George has only swooned
Rise up King George and ght again!!

KING OF DENMARK

What is your fee?!

DOCTOR

Twenty pounds my usual fee
But half of that I'll take from thee!

ALL

Well spoken Doctor

KING OF DENMARK

O mortal stars and skies of blue
I never was in such a stew
O skies of blue—and mortal stars
Bring out from prison old Mac Man!!

ALL

He is the breed in hour of need
A champion to avenge this deed.
O shame to lock him in a cell
That always fought for you so well

KING OF DENMARK

His liberty he now shall gain
If he will only ght again

MAC MAN

Ho ho sir King What is your need?
I am your man to do the deed!

MAC MAN

You see the Knave that is standing
That fought my noble son and heir?!

PRINCE VALENTINE

He challenged me to ght and why should I deny?
He cut my coat to ribbons and made the buttons y[?ield]

MAC MAN

To try the metal of thy race
I'll cut a splinter from thy face

[Fight—Valentine falls]

PRINCE VALENTINE

O horrible—o horrible the way I feel
My head made of iron my body made of steel
But legs that seem like pipe shanks so to snap
And that's the way of giving way that caused me this mishap!

KING GEORGE

It's only for that doctor
That I have been out my seven senses unto seventeen

ALL

Only seventeen?!

PRINCE VALENTINE

And up the seven stairs and down the lofty sky
And a rough and tumble sort of time had I.

KING GEORGE

He yields himself a prisoner: and

KING OF DENMARK

And now to taste your Christmas store
Put up your swords and ght no more
Within this hospitable hall
For we are brothers all!

SAMBO¹

My box is here and not a squeak
But now it has its turn to speak
How silent was before the battle
But now it wants to rattle!

*

¹ The cast of characters at the start of the manuscript does not include Sambo. This must be taken from another performance of the play.

(4)

c. 1907–10

Partial text recollected by Robert Cormode of Ramsey in 1971. MNH, Manx Museum Tapes, No. 81.

DOCTOR

I open the door and I enter in,
I make my fate to fortune win,
Whether I rise or whether I fall,
I do my duty to please you all.
Room room give us room,
A room to let us in,
We are not of the ragged set,
But of the royal brin.
Fill up these fires and give us light,
For in this house you'll see a fight,
If you don't believe me what I say,
Step in King George and clear away.

KING GEORGE

I am the King of England,
And from England have I sprung,
Many are the noble deeds and wonders that I've done,
For fourteen years in prison I was kept,
And then into a cave I leapt,
[It] was there I met my serious wound,
And if you don't believe me what I say,
Step in St George and clear away.

ST GEORGE

[...]
Dear sorry fellow dare challenge me to fight,
I so great I have fought Lords and Dukes,
And I made the earth to quake.

[They fight and St George is wounded]

KING GEORGE

Oh doctor, is there a doctor to be found,
That can cure my son St. George,
Of his dead and deeply wound.

DOCTOR

Oh yeah, my master, yeah,
There is a doctor to be found,
Who can cure St George of his dead and deeply wound.

KING GEORGE

What can you cure Doctor?

DOCTOR

All pains within, all pains without,
The brig, the palsy and the gout,
I can pledge my life,
To cure a scolding wife.

KING GEORGE

And what medicine do you carry Doctor?

DOCTOR

A bottle of the highcockalicious,
A little of this and he'll fight again.

[St George is cured and arises. Then all four fight until one character calls a halt]

THE DOCTOR

I'm little Doctor Phoney,
I'm the man that carries the money,
Two little leather bags down to me knees,
Put a few shillings in will you if you please.

*

(5)

1950

“THE WHITE BOYS | Taken down by Mr. Charles Watterson, Castletown, from the last living | person who played in this play)”, collected by Charles Watterson, Castletown, 1950. MNHL, MXMUS FLS, wc B, unpagged [1]–[3].

TURK

Here comes I that never came yet
With my big head and little wit.
Although my wit it is so small,
I'll do my best to please you all.
Room, room, ladies and gentlemen,
Give us room to rhyme!
For this is Christmas time.
Christmas time and former days
When young men act upon the stage.
To Castletown I do belong,
I didn't come here to sing a song,
But to act and play
And to show you, ladies and gentlemen,
Some fine varities.
For now 'tis Christmas time, before we go away,
And if you don't believe me in what I say,
Enter in the King of Egypt
And he'll soon clear the way!

KING OF EGYPT

I am the King of Egypt,
And so boldly do I appear
With my brave son and heir.
Step in Saint George and act and play
And show some fine varities before we go away!

ST GEORGE

I am Saint George, and from England I have sprung
And many are the noble deeds that I have fought and won.
I am Saint George in shining armour bright,
I am a famous champion and I'm clad for war this night!
I freed the lady from the stake
Which man nor mortal would dare undertake,

And with a golden trumpet at my mouth
I sounded at the gate most vile.
By faith, a fiery dragon I espied.
He flew at me most viciously!
One blow from him would have struck me dead,
But I was valiant, I cut off his head.
I fought him flying,
Bringing him to the house of slaughter.
After that, I won the King of Egypt's daughter.
for what men, for what man
That would dare come under my hand,
I'll cut and hack at any proud turk from Turkey land.
Show me the man that would dare before me stand,
I'll cut him down with my most gracious hand!

TURK

Here is the man thou dost challenge,
The Lord Duke of allan and Aquae!

ST GEORGE

Who art thou, pray, silly boy?

TURK

I am a Turkish champion from Turkey land.
I came, I came to fight this English knight
Saint George they call by name.
But if Saint George they call thee,
Let thy courage be stout or bold,
If thy heart's blood is hot,
I'll soon make it cold!

ST GEORGE

Slasho, slasho, don't speak so hot,
For little thou knowest the man thou hast got!
I am Saint George, both brave and bold,
And with a broad sword in my hand,
I won ten thousand pounds in gold!

TURK

Stir up the fire and give us a light,
For I and Saint George are going to fight.
Draw

ST GEORGE

The point of my sword is broken...

TURK

How happen so?

ST GEORGE

By means, by right, by cowardly words,
Thou darst not strike—
Strike again, thou dirty dog!

KING OF EGYPT

Oh, cruel Turk, oh, cruel Turk, what is this
Thou hast done,
Thou hast slain Saint George,
My only son!

TURK

Oh, why sir, oh, why sir, he challenged me.
And why should I deny,
He tore my coat and eyelet holes,
He made my buttons fly!
Oh, why, sir, oh why, sir, your honour to obtain,
If the rascal had been able,
He'd have served me just the same.

KING OF EGYPT

Step in, my page, and act my part
And smite this villain to the heart.

PAGE

Oh, yes, sir, oh, yes, sir, thy words I shall obey
With this broad sword in my hand
I hope to gain the day.
My body is made of brass,
My arms are made of steel,

And of iron shanks my legs are made
And I'll soon make him yield.
And if he dares one word against what my master says
clean through his yellow body
I'll make an open way.

TURK

Oh, worthy page, oh, worthy page, upon my knee
I crave, never will I fight an English knight
With sword in hand again.

PAGE

Dost thou think thy life I'll spare
Seeing what thou hast already done!
alas, alas, what shall become of me
Have I not this battle won.

TURK

Take my sword.

PAGE

Take back my sword and fight no more,
And leave it at Saint George's door.

KING

Oh, is there a doctor, a doctor to be found
Who can cure St George of his deep and mortal wound?

DOCTOR

Oh, yes, sir, oh, yes, sir, there is a doctor to be found
That can cure Saint George of his deep and mortal wound.

KING OF EGYPT

Whence come doctor?

DOCTOR

From France, from Spain, from Rome I came,
I've travelled the whole of Christendom.

KING OF EGYPT

What canst thou cure, doctor?

DOCTOR

I can cure all pains within and out
Likewise the plague, the palsy, and the gout,
Hipstitches, belly grumps, broken-hearted maids and confounded jades,
Those are the easiest things I can cure.
Give me a man that has a wife
That makes him weary of his life,
And by the garlan starlan, I will set him free.
It takes my pills to cure all ills,
It takes my pills to make thee well.

KING OF EGYPT

What is thy fee, doctor?

DOCTOR

Half a guinea is my fee
But ten and sixpence I'll take from thee.

KING OF EGYPT

Try thy skill, doctor.

DOCTOR

Not quite dead, but badly wounded,
Third rib badly injured,
Fifth rib badly fractured;
I have a little bottle in my pocket
Which goes by the name of the
Ricksdom, dicksom, hi-cock-a-lorum
Jigle-om-jig, Rasbo-Rasbo.
One drop of this astic put to his fantastic
Flies to his brain, turns him to life again,
Rise up, Saint George, and fight again!

SAINT GEORGE

Oh, horrible, oh, terrible, the like was never seen
A man rose from seven senses into seventeen,
Out of seventeen into seven score—
Oh, horrible, oh, terrible, by biff, by bear,
By a tiny bit of rabbit-skin that hangs up there.

*

(7)

1983

“The White Boys,” collected by Angela Templeton, August 1983, from Jack Watterson. See, Angela Caroline Templeton, *Mumming in the Isle of Man*, BA dissertation, Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies, School of English, University of Leeds, n.d. [but 1984], Appendix 3, “The Plays,” unpaginated [44]–[45].

SAMSON

Room, room, Ladies and Gentlemen, give us room to rhyme,
We'll show you a little diversion along this Christmas Time,
Now Christmas Times are drawing near
And we'll act our Merry Christmas here.
To Drumgold Street we do belong
And just came here to sing a song
And act all those victorious parts
Which are written up in the Book of Hearts.
Stir up that fire and give us light,
For in this house we'll have a fight.
If you don't believe in what I say
The bold King of Egypt will enter
And he will clear the way.

KING OF EGYPT

Here I am the bold King of Egypt
And so nobly do I appear
With my son St Geroge, my only son and heir.
Step forth St George and act thy part
And show this company thy gallant heart.

ST GEORGE

Here I am St George out of Old England have I come.
Many are the noble deeds and wonders I've made known.
I've made a tyrant tremble on his throne.
Full fourteen years in prison I was kept,
Out of that into a cave I lept.
Out of that onto a rock of stone,
where I made many a sad and piteous moan.
I followed a fair maid to a Giant's Cave,
Almost the giant struck me dead,
But by my sword I cut off his head

And brought him to the slaughter.
Therefore I won the King of Egypt's daughter.
Show me the man who dares before me stand.

TURK

Here am I the man who dares before thee stands.

ST GEORGE

And who art thou, poor silly rook?

TURK

I am a Turkish champion from Turkeyland I come.
I've come to fight this English Knight
St George they do him call, and if his blood runs
Hot—I soon will make it cold—I draw.

ST GEORGE

Draw on thou dirty dog.

[After sword fight St George falls]

KING OF EGYPT

Oh, is there a doctor, a doctor to be found
Who can cure St George of his deep and deadly wound?

DOCTOR

Oh, yes sir, oh, yes sir, there's a doctor to be found
Who can cure St George of his deep and deadly wound.

KING OF EGYPT

Whence came doctor?

DOCTOR

Oh from France and Spain
From Pulrose I've came
I've travelled all parts of Christendom.

KING OF EGYPT

What is your fee, Doctor?

DOCTOR

Well ten shillings is my fee
But fifty pence I'll take from thee.
And if St George's life I save
That money, from thee this night I crave.

[Doctor proceeds to examine patient]

DOCTOR

He is not dead but has a compund fracture of the fifth rib
I have in my bag a little bottle (oz) which goes
By the name of Hicksome, Sticksome, High Cock-a-Lorum,
Ign-Viti, Dogshu-iti and little drops of Curiosity.
A little drop to his nose, a little drop to his brain,
He'll soon revive and fight again.

DOCTOR

Another little drop to his nose, another little drop
to his brain—rise up St George and fight again.

TURK & ST GEORGE

[with crossed swords together, say—]

Rough, tough, Billy Buff,
Feather like a fly,
Knocked seven stars into a lofty sky.
Never be a buff,
Never be a bear,
Never be a rabbit skin that hands up there.

BELGIUM BUM

Here I come from a Belgium Bum
On my head I carry a drum,
In my hand a frying pan,
Don't I look a silly old man?
Money I want, money I crave,
If you don't give me money I will sweep
You all to the grave.

[Said dashing about with a sweeping brush]



REPRODUCTIONS OF THE PLAY TEXTS

1832

1. “A Christmas Drama,” *Manx Sun* 10 January 1832, [3] c.

Reproduced: (1) Stephen Miller, “The Earliest Text of a Mumming Play (1832) from the Isle of Man,” *Roomer* 5.4 (1985), 32–36, see 33–36. **Note:** Transcript (undated) in the hand of P.W. Caine (1887–1956), deposited as MNHL, MS 85 B (accessed in 1938).

1869

2. William Harrison, *Mona Miscellany: A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, Vol. xvi (Douglas: Manx Society, 1869) 167–71.

Reproduced: (1) A.W. Moore, *The Folk-lore of the Isle of Man* (Douglas & London: David and Son & David Nutt, 1891) 128–31; (2) Stuart Piggott, “Mummer’s Plays from Berkshire, Derbyshire, Cumberland, and Isle of Man,” *Folk-Lore* xl (1929), 262–77, see 273–77 (play text only, introduction omitted, and source unacknowledged); (3) “White Boys’ Dialogue Re-printed,” 11b–e in “White Boys Once Again,” *Isle of Man Daily Times* 14 January 1939, 11a–e; (4) Cyril I. Paton, “Manx Calendar Customs: The Calendar, The Fourth Quarter, ii,” *Folk-Lore* lii.2 (1941), 120–35, see 122–26; (5) Cyril I. Paton, *Manx Calendar Customs*, Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, vol. cx (London: Folk-Lore Society, 1942) 96–100 (= reproduction of Paton (1941)); (6) *The White Boy* [sic] (Douglas: A. Lewthwaite, n.d. [late 19th cent.]). In pseudo-chapbook format.

1950

- 5 “The White Boys,” collected by Charles Watterson, Castletown, 1950, MNHL, MXMUS FLS, WC B, [1]–[3].

Reproduced: Lady Eva Wilson, ed., *The “Town Clark’s” Castletown*, Castletown Heritage, Occasional Papers, No. 2 (Castletown: Castletown Heritage, 2009), 53–58. **Notes:** (1) “Thank you very much for sending us this copy of the White Boys. I enclose your original notes and a copy as promised.” Copy letter from MXMUS FLS to Charles Watterson, 23 February 1950. MNHL, MXMUS FLS, Correspondence folder. (2) Likely to have been recorded from Edward (“Teddy”) Blackburn, a White Boy in Castletown in the 1930s.

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“HERE COMES I THAT NEVER CAME YET”
THE CASTLETOWN WHITE BOYS *



Charles Watterson is one of those unofficial witnesses to what Ranajit Guha has called “the small voice of history.” These individuals are moved to record their communities, to recount what they find of interest or note. Often, it is just a simple *memoire*, a number of handwritten pages to stand as a record, preserved to be read at some later date. Occasionally, they were written to be shared with an audience as a lecture or talk and survive as notes, legible or otherwise, or hopefully as a typescript. Small though that voice may be, they provide material not recorded in official sources which of course is their value to us today and for the future.

For the folklorist, Watterson gives us an insight into Christmas festivities in Castletown—one of his remarkable achievements is the noting down of the complete text of a mumming play as performed by “The White Boys.” They were once familiar all over the Island, town and country alike. In the period running up to Christmas dressed all in white (hence the name) save but for the character of the Doctor, who was dressed in black, the White Boys would go from house to house to perform what is called a mumming play. Often they would be disguised and the audience would try and guess as to the true identity who each of the performers was in their community.

The mumming play is recorded from all over the British Isles. The central action of the play—the death of one of the characters in a mock-fight and his miraculous resurrection by the contents of the Doctor’s bottle and the ending of the contest—led earlier scholars to posit ancient roots to the play, influenced as they were by ideas of the pagan origins of folklore thereby seeing such plays as the remnants of former beliefs with a particular obsession with fertility customs. We now know such plays are of more recent origin, in fact it is in the 19th century when references to them first appear. For example, the first reference to the White Boys is in the *Manx Sun* for 1832 when a complete play text first appears.

What is of interest to us now about the play is not speculation about its historical origin as such but how it functioned and what it meant both to those taking part and those watching the play. “Who wants to see the White Boys act?” is the first line recited from one of the plays noted down. This is an invitation from them to enter into a space, whether a private residence or a public house, and there to act and perform their play. Here we can see one of the many functions of the play in the

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Here comes I that never came yet.’ The Castletown White Boys,” *The “Town Clark’s” Castletown*, ed. Lady Eva Wilson, Castletown Heritage: Occasional Papers, No. 2 (Castletown: Castletown Heritage, 2009) 95–97.

community—the reminder to offer hospitality to strangers. With the principal action of the play, namely the mock-fight and the miraculous resurrection of the dead we can see the White Boys petitioning us to the giving up of strife between individuals with the reminder that the Doctor’s resurrection of the dead character in the play is well and truly absurd and will not happen in the real world, the reality of which has been suspended to allow for the play to take place. Then there is the reward of money collected for a performance well-delivered and that those rich and successful members of the community who have accepted the White Boys offer to act in their own houses be reminded of the wider community where they live and to which they belong. Given that the timing of the performances offered by the White Boys are linked to the calendar, there is the sense of celebration of the passage of the year, that the festivities of Christmas and a New Year are to come when the White Boys make their appearance. But above all, it is both fun and exciting to play in or to watch.

To date, we have seven texts of mumming plays performed by the White Boys. The first is from 1832, recorded in Douglas and reproduced in the *Manx Sun*. The second was taken down in German by the antiquarian William Harrison from a group of White Boys who literally turned up in 1845 on his doorstep at his residence of “Rock Mount.” The third is in manuscript and may date from the 1890s, and was recorded possibly in Lonan. From then on, we now rely upon oral accounts. A Ramsey White Boy was interviewed in 1971 and he recounted a (partial) text that can be dated to around 1904 and this is the fourth text to hand. The next text, the fifth, is that recorded by Charles Watterson himself and reproduced here. Besides the virtue of being yet another play text, it is the first one recorded from the south of the Island. The sixth text returns us to the north of the Island, again Ramsey, noted down in 1965. The seventh and final text comes from Port Erin, taken down in 1983 by Angela Templeton. So we have a good coverage of the Island with these seven texts.

While the plot of the play remains stable, the names of the characters vary widely. The play text recorded by Watterson has five characters, the Doctor (a character in all plays given his central role), the King of Egypt, a Page, St George, and finally the Turk. Printed references to the White Boys contain the names of other characters not recorded in the play texts we have to date and this should remind us of the often fluid nature of folk customs. Unfortunately, we have no information as to when and from who Watterson noted down the play text.

What we do know thanks to Lady Eva Wilson is that there is still yet alive a White Boy, Mr George Freestone of Castletown who played Prince Valentine in the 1930s, and who I had the opportunity of interviewing in 2009. These memories of the Island’s past are still there to be collected, these small voices of history which yet speak so loud.

