

## Appendix

The argument goes that cultural historians have been systematically searching for lines, plots or characters from the Mummers' plays in drama records from before Chaucer onwards, and have found nothing until the antiquarian writings of the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Because of this systematic search, the total absence of earlier records of the plays is taken to indicate that Mumming Plays did not exist before this time. This argument is set out in the books of Ronald Hutton.<sup>16</sup>

The counter argument is that when the antiquarians collected the plays, Mumming was an oral, largely domestic, working class custom, that would not of itself generate written records. Nor, in their round of working class homes and pubs, would they be likely to impinge often on other, official, record keepers such as the Church or the courts. It was not until the antiquarians of the eighteenth century started to take an interest in working class culture, and actively sought out customs such as Mumming, that descriptions and scripts of the Mummers plays are found in the records. It may be significant that the Rev. Henry Bourne, the first antiquary to publish a survey of "vulgar antiquities" in 1725, was possibly the first from the working class. He started work as a glazier's apprentice before being taken up by a charity in Newcastle upon Tyne and educated for the Church.

In this counter argument, the history of Mumming in England can be traced back to the court of Richard II.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter this was an elaborate, masked, court entertainment, usually during the Christmas season, and usually done by amateurs – courtiers or even the King. Every monarch from Richard II to Elizabeth I (except during the Wars of the Roses) enjoyed Mumming, whilst Henry VIII actually wrote for performances.

Thereafter it fell from fashion, moved down the social scale and largely out of the official records. There are odd notes of Mummers' existence, though not of what they were doing, in churchwardens' accounts, in letters, poems, account books etc, right from this period and up to the early eighteenth century. They even continued to perform during the Interregnum, where a group of Mummers appear in the court records as witnesses to the prosecution of an unlicensed alehouse! It was this tradition of Mumming that the eighteenth century antiquarians became interested in and so recorded for the first time what the Mummers were actually doing.

Opposite: *A modern-day Duke of Cumberland appears again in Eydon's Mumming Play* (photo: Sue Lodge).

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<sup>16</sup> *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700*, Ronald Hutton, OUP, 1994, ISBN 0-19-285447-X; *Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*, Ronald Hutton, OUP, 1997, ISBN 0-19-285448-8.

<sup>17</sup> *A Short History of Pre-Chapbook Mumming*, Kevin Lodge, to be published.