

hint of an earlier existence before the mid-eighteenth century. One of the best examples of these earlier characters is found in a group of plays collected from the villages around Banbury.

In these, to the east of the town, ranging from Eydon in the north, to Garsington (and Wooburn) in the south, the villain of the play is the Duke of Cumberland. To date, twenty plays or fragments of plays from fourteen different villages have been identified with a Duke of Cumberland (or Umberland, Thumberland, Blunderland etc) character. These villages are (from north to south): Eydon, Syresham, Sulgrave and Aynho (all in Northants.); Lower Heyford, Middle Barton, Oddington, Islip, Headington, Holton, Wheatley, Horspath and Garsington; and Wooburn in Bucks.¹

The Duke of Cumberland

The historical character usually identified as the inspiration for the Duke is either Prince George of Denmark (Duke of Cumberland from 1689 to 1708), who was married to James II's daughter Princess (later Queen) Anne, or William Augustus, the Hanoverian Royal Duke from 1726 to 1765, who was the victor at the Battle of Culloden in 1745. Ernest Augustus, fifth son of George III, made Duke in 1799 and who later became King of Hanover in 1837, has also been suggested. The main criteria for suggesting these candidates appear to be that their dates are compatible with the modern theory for the history of Mumming plays.

The problem with all these candidates is that there are no reasons given as to why this particular Duke, rather than say the Duke of Norfolk or Kent; nor why this particular Duke of Cumberland; or even why these particular villages near Banbury, and no others, chose to put a Duke of Cumberland into their Mummies' play. Prince George lived in seclusion before Queen Anne came to the throne in 1702 and died without issue in 1708. As far as we know William Augustus (or any of the others) had no land or interests around here, certainly not in south Northamptonshire, and he probably never visited the area. The fame and achievements of Ernest Augustus seem to have died with him.²

¹ Details and sources for all the plays are to be found in *In Comes I, the Duke of Cumberland*, Kevin Lodge, Traditional Drama Forum, No. 10, April 2004, on line at: http://www.folkplay.info/Forum/TD_Forum_10_Duke.htm ; apart from Aynho and Syresham, for which see *Folklore of Northamptonshire*, Peter Hill, Tempus Press, Stroud, 2005, p.221, ISBN 0 7524 3522 1.

² *HRH The Dukedom of Cumberland and Teviotdale* at <http://hereditarytitles.com/Page34.html>