

Yorkshire Film Archive

Results of search for 'Mystery Plays' material

Title:	ERIC HALL - FIRST EVER FILM
Catalogue No:	2160
Length:	22.34 mins
Format:	Black & White, Silent, 9.5mm
Dated:	1929-1951

Viewing Notes:

'Random Recordings' is the first title of this film made by Eric Hall, a keen amateur cinematographer from West Yorkshire. This film consists of a variety of brief scenes and images which he took beginning in 1929 and mostly includes footage of his family and friends during their leisure and travel time. Also included in this film is footage from the York Mystery Plays which were performed at the Museum Gardens in 1951.

Scene 6

The next scene is of the York Mystery Plays taken at the Museum Gardens in York (possibly the 1951 revival.) The actors, dressed in full costume, wait back stage for the play to begin. Many of them sit on the grass before they make their way to the stage built at the Abby Ruins. The play begins, and there is footage of the performance as well as shots of the audience. At one of the breaks, an actor can be seen backstage sewing. There are long shots of the tiered seating and the crowds arriving.

Title:	MYSTERY PLAYS
Catalogue No:	3905
Length:	28 mins
Format:	Kodachrome, Combined Magnetic, Standard 8
Dated:	1980

Viewing Notes:

This is a film documenting a performance of the Wakefield Mystery Plays at three locations in Wakefield city centre. It shows the making of the costumes, the construction of the sets and parts of some of the plays and processions, put on by separate groups of actors, including local schools.

Title: 'Performance in the Precinct' The film opens in the town centre of Wakefield with a stall and women handing out leaflets for a new production of the Wakefield Mystery Plays, to be performed in full and through the streets of Wakefield for the first time since medieval times. A group of children watch a Punch and Judy show, followed by women in clogs performing traditional dances. A group of people are in a room discussing the production whilst the narrator explains that the Wakefield Plays consist of 29 plays covering the Bible stories from creation to doomsday. Each play is performed by a separate cast, with 250 actors in all, to be mounted as a single dramatic event. Then it moves on to see two women going through plans for the costumes, and actors trying on several of the costumes.

At Outwood Grange School, there are dress rehearsals outdoors. The film then goes on to show the construction of some of the props like the 'hell mouth'. They are using traditional medieval materials, and drawings of these props are shown. There is then the construction of a set outside Wakefield Cathedral. The narrator explains the kind of acting that is required in this kind of play, exaggerating diction and gesture. As the actors arrive to put on their costumes, in the town centre children play bells, and there are Morris dancers, women clog dancers and other musicians. A boy puts some money into a collecting tin. There is mixed country dancing performed to a fiddle player, the 'Old Pennies'. The actors make their way to the stage where the Bishop of Wakefield opens proceedings.

The film shows parts of the first play enacting the battle between God and Lucifer, and the story of Adam and Eve, in front of an audience in the rain. Then comes the procession for the Cain and Abel play, making its way through the city centre headed by a banner with 'QEGS' (Queen Elizabeth Grammar School), with pantomime horses. This is followed by the procession for Noah's Ark in which children wear animal masks. The next story is of Abraham and Isaac. Rodillion School arrive prior to the performance of Jacob and his two sons. The Exodus from Egypt and Outwood Grange School arrive for the performance of the story of Herod. It then moves on to the birth of Christ, the flight into Egypt, with the Brotherton Players, and to the story of Lazarus, and to finish the first day, the Last Supper.

At the beginning of the second day, the Mayor arrives to watch the enactment of the crucifixion. Then Wakefield College of Art arrive to put on a production of Christ's descent into hell to rescue the prophets trapped in limbo. This is followed by the Resurrection, and the Ascension Play, with the Ackworth Theatre Workshop and the Proscenium Players Leeds. The cycle of plays closes with the Last Judgement, with the Bingley Little Theatre, and the players leave in a procession.

Filmed by V Robinson M V Stewart R G Stewart
Commentary by Jane Oakshott Richard Rastall
Sound recording by R G Stewart M Borrill S Borrill

Title:	MYSTERY PLAYS - FRENCH TRIP - ARCH BISHOP HOLGATE SCHOOL
Catalogue No:	2213
Length:	11min7
Format:	Colour, Silent, 9.5mm
Dated:	1956

Viewing Notes:

This film's opening section documents the involvement of the boys from Arch Bishop Holgate School in the York Festival of 1956.

Title – The exodus. A Mystery Plays wagon is being pulled through the streets of York. There are many actors in costume walking beside the wagon. There are shots of interested passers-by and, city walls, and the nearby grounds which are in bloom with daffodils.

Title: MYSTERY PLAYS - ARCH BISHOP
HOLGATE SCHOOL
Catalogue No: 2211
Length: 8mins40
Format: Colour, Silent, 9.5mm
Dated: 1960

Viewing Notes:

This reel is comprised of three films, the first documenting part of the Mystery Plays play performed in York

Title – York festival 1960. Christ Waggon play. 1960.

The opening shot of this film shows a wagon which has been adapted into a biblical themed set using a white pillared structure. Schoolchildren, dressed in appropriate costume such as head scarves and long cloaks, stand aboard the cart as it is pulled through the streets of York by other performers. Then, with cart in a stationary position outside a row of houses, the filmmaker captures a performance of the play at Dubcombe Place, York, where an impressively large crowd has gathered to watch.

Title: NEWSREEL 1984 (YORK CINE CLUB)
Catalogue No: 1395
Length: 22.40 mins
Format: Colour, Combined Magnetic, Super 8
Dated: 1984

Viewing Notes:

This is a newsreel made by York Cine Club of events in York in 1984.

The film includes people visiting the Museum Gardens for York Festival, with Simon Ward playing Jesus in the Mystery Plays. He is shown riding a donkey along with some other scenes from the Mystery Plays. There is a performance by Nunthorpe Grammar School of Jocundus, the merry monk; followed by students of the Medieval Department of York University putting on a Wagon Play of the 'Confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins', outside St Williams College. There is a medieval spectacular at the Minster on Saturday 16th June, with a wagon play presented by Archbishop Holgate School.

Title: SITES AND THEATRE
IN YORK
Catalogue No: 2817
Length: 5 1/2 min
Format: Kodachrome, Silent, 16mm
Dated: 1963

Viewing Notes:

This film features many different key sites around the city of York as well as part of the Mystery Plays and other theatrical events.

The final section of the film moves to the theatre. At High Petergate, a crowd has gathered to watch an outdoor play, most likely part of the Mystery Plays. The actors and stage, which is on the back of a buggy, are pulled through the streets after the dramatic play's end.

Title: THE ETERNAL CITY
YORK 1959
Catalogue No: 4391
Length: 18.53 mins
Format: Kodachrome, Silent, 16mm
Dated: 1959

Viewing Notes:

This film shows different places and events in the city of York. Many of York's historic landmarks are included as well as scenes of the Mystery Plays,

Intertitle: "Street performance of religious play". Crowds gather at the side of the street. A man on a white horse with a cape and crown makes his way through. Policemen stand in front. Next there is a horse drawn cart with actors standing on top. This acts as a stage and is the traditional way in which the Mystery Plays are presented.

Title: THE QUEEN OF ENGLISH
CITIES
Catalogue No: 1931
Length: 18m 45s
Format: Colour, Combined Optical,
16mm
Dated: 1970

Viewing Notes:

Made in 1970, this is a documentary presenting the sites and monuments of York. Included is footage of the Mystery Plays, the historic city walls and bars, market stalls, and scenes in and around the city centre. The film is accompanied by a commentary explaining the historical importance of the sites included in the documentary.

An extract from one of the Mystery Plays: The players arrive by boat and dock at the outskirts of the Museum Gardens. A crowd has gathered around to watch the actors perform here at the end of Marygate. A traditional Mystery Plays waggon has been set up in the Minster Yard, and the main plays will take place at the Abbey Ruins in the Museum Gardens.

Title: YORK MYSTERY PLAY
INTERVIEWS
Catalogue No: 592
Length: 5 mins
Format: Colour, Yes, 16mm
Dated: 1969

Viewing Notes:

This is a film documenting the production of the 1969 York Mystery Plays in York. The film features interviews with the three actors portraying Jesus as well as the producer.

The film begins showing a rehearsal of Jesus being forced to pick up and carry the cross. The cross is then taken off of Jesus by the Roman soldiers, and the second Jesus is 'nailed' to it before the cross is stood erect. This is interspersed with close-ups of, presumably, a sorrowful Mary Magdalene. The interviewer then talks to the third actor playing Jesus about the role of Jesus, and is then joined by the other two actors. After this the producer is interviewed on the difficulties of the production.

Title:	YORK MYSTERY PLAYS 1973
Catalogue No:	2041
Length:	1 hr 20 mins
Format:	Colour, Magnetic Stripe, Super 8
Dated:	1973

Viewing Notes:

This widescreen film documents the work and organisation involved in staging the York Mystery Plays of 1973. The film is a great homage to the widescreen road-show presentations of the 50s, 60s and 70s with introductory music, prologue and intermission.

Titles: 'The York Mystery Plays 1973' 'an Anglo-Danish production' ' a film by Patrick Olsen' 'written and spoken by Mike Gill' [Note that titles are in lower case]

The first part of the film presents a history of the plays through the narration, with medieval drawings and paintings. The narrator states that there are 48 religious plays in all, dating back to 1340 when they were performed by ancient craft guilds. They were performed on waggons [note that this is the original spelling] in the streets of York on Trinity Thursday every year. York has the most complete cycle of the four that still exist. The plays were revived in 1951 and have been put on every three years ever since. The film highlights the 1969 production, for the first time entirely amateur, which had sets designed, modelled and painted by Patrick Olsen.

Intertitles: 'York Mystery Plays 1973' 'plays produced by Edward Taylor' 'new translation by Howard Davies' Next there is a spoof version of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer introduction, with the title: 'Neslo Films Present'. There follows a list of full credits on Super 8, and the opening text, 'this film is a record of the months of work and preparation which go into the York Mystery Plays'.

It opens with Edward Taylor, the director, sitting in a chair working on the script. Next are auditions and various people, actors, etc. working on the play. People arrive at Mansion House, where, inside there is a publicity event. Those attending, including the national press, local dignitaries and actors, drink wine, eat nibbles and talk with each other. Some are seen leaving later on.

As the film shows the Museum Gardens, the commentary gives a history of the Abbey where the plays are staged. It focuses on the North Walls of the ruined abbey which provide the background. Next, Edward Taylor arrives at St. William's College where there is another press call. Again those attending are drinking wine and chatting. A consort of musicians is playing early music and dressed in medieval costumes. Edward Taylor is seen leaving.

At the old Observer Corps building off Lendal, work starts in the wardrobe department for the forthcoming production. A group of elderly women are looking at patterns, making dresses and fitting the actors. Among them is Olave Dench, mother of Judi Dench who performed in the 1957 production as the Virgin Mary.

Next, in another building, the stage director studies the stage plan and has a model of the set. The actors take part in early rehearsals. At the Museum Gardens the audience grandstand is being built, and scaffolding is erected by local builders. The narrator notes that it can seat 2100 people and has lighting and royal boxes.

The Duchess of Kent visits the wardrobe department to see costumes being made and meet the staff. The Lord Mayor, Alderman Jack Wood, is with her. They go on to see a rehearsal at the Guild Hall and are accompanied by other local dignitaries. The actors perform several scenes in front of the Duchess. All the actors are in casual dress – John Stuart Anderson, who is playing Jesus, is wearing bell bottom trousers.

Intertitle: 'Intermission' (It was filmed is on two reels.)

The second part of the film opens in the Museum Gardens where the stage is being built by Shepherd Construction. Timber is being fitted onto a tubular steel frame, covered with boards, and cut railway sleepers give it a medieval appearance. The cross that Christ will carry is shown as well as the trap-door that Adam and Eve use to come on stage. At the first rehearsals scheduled to be done on stage, it is pouring with rain. The actors and other crew, including Edward Taylor, make their way over to the De Grey Rooms. The following day is sunny, and rehearsals continue on the main stage. Again, Edward Taylor is present (only today with his arm in a sling.)

Next, onto the booking office on Museum Street, where organisers sort out the arrangements, and in the booking room, customers buy tickets referring to the seating plan on the desk. The commentary notes that 57,000 seats in total are available at prices from 50p to £1.50.

The first dress rehearsal is also a photo call. Television crews and the press are present, photographing the actors and filming the rehearsals. There is the scene of Christ on the Cross, and a BBC 'Look North' crew film the nativity scenes.

On opening day, crowds arrive for the show, and the program sellers are dressed in medieval costumes. The first performance gets underway.

The last 14 minutes show brief scenes from several of the pageants, interspersed with actors waiting back stage. It begins with The Creation and Fall of Man, followed by the Nativity; Herod and the Magi; Lazarus being raised from the dead; The Incredulity of Thomas; Pontius Pilot washing his hands; Christ led to Cavalry; The Crucifixion; The Resurrection; and finally, The Last Judgement.

Catalogued material not online

York, 1954 [not on online catalogue]

Wakefield Anglo/German Festival, 1984 [not on online catalogue]

Yorkshire Silhouette, c.1951 [not on online catalogue]