

1936 Pageant in Wherwell Abbey Grounds – Paul Jewitt & Mrs Watson

Our Wherwell, as it doth appear
In Chronicle and ancient story
Hath witnessed many a deep fear
And dread encounters grim and gory.
Our history from one cruel fact
Takes its beginning; and ere long
Followed another awful act
As wrong will ever bring forth wrong.
They tell us too of battles stern
Betwixt the Saxon and the Dane;
And later, how a king did burn
The nuns within the holy fane *(archaic for church)*
Of our fair Abbey – yet from the brood
Of savage crimes and evil ways
Through many a holy Abbess good
Came forth swell peace and prosperous days,
Man's folly wrath and wickedness
Changing, at last to Blessedness.

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Here on this pleasant stage of green
We set our momentary scene
And shine to pass a Summer's day
Presenting in our humble play
A counterfeit of ancient days
With other folk and other ways

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First of Elfrida, cruel dame
We show the fierce and woeful tale
Who wrought many a deed of shame
And then repented, took the veil
Founder of that fair Abbey here
That grew and flourished many a year:

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The play begins: Good folk, give ear
And mark the scene that shall appear

+++++ scene 1 +++++

One treachery, another brings
They play with fire who cozen kings
Our ladies – who their lords betray
 May seem to triumph for a day
Yet mark my tale: ere all is done
 Bitterly ends each crime begun.

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Here further then: Hon Earl and King
 Set forth upon a fair morning
 A-hunting in the forest green
That men call Harewood still ween (?)
 They hunted and they halloed long
Through chase and leafy glades among
 And many a noble buck they slew
Ere one great stag they had in view
 Which led them to a hollow dell
Deep in the wood, you know it well
Men name it now as Dead Man's Plack
 And what befell - alas alack
 Tis ours to show
In *him (?)* it won a name so black
 We bid you know

+++++ scene 2 +++++

Ambitious hell (?) has taken root
And soon will bear it's poisonous fruit
Seemingly success brings on more crime
And violence darkens still my rhyme.

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Know then Elfrida, Edgar's queen
Full many a year of pomp hath seen
 But now a widow, each sad hour
She mourns the loss of former power.

Her stepson Edward, fills the throne
 But the boy Ethelred's her own

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And eagerly she plots her sin
That throne for Ethelred to win

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Tis done – the young king Edward's slain
Triumphant she's in power again
But mighty is the fall of pride
The angry people cast aside
Their wicked queen. At Amesbury she'll dwell
In solitude.

The rest: the players tell

+++++ scene 3 +++++

Elfrida's tale is ended – Ancient lays

Tell how she dwelt, a pious penitent
In this fair Abbey which she caused to rise
Where you, my hearers stand
After long years and being very old and weak
With weight of years, she fell by chance
Into this stream which flows before our feet.
And falling so was drowned....

T'was long ago a thousand years or so
And be it as it may, this much is sure:
That full six hundred years the Abbey stood
Bringing prosperity and blessing
To Wherwell Village and it's happy folk.

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Therefore we set before you our scene
Of later days when Henry then was king
Where you oh all see the Abbey in its prime
Ruled by the pious Abbess of the time

+++++ scene 4 +++++

Thus many prosperous years befell

Each Abbess ruled both long and well
Till saddest happenings, cruel foes
Brought her high fortune to a close.

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Our next shall show how Henry stern
Destroyed the Abbey-in its turn
With many another noble place
Whereof there scarce remains a trace
A mighty ruin here and there
Marks where those noble houses were
Beneath whose shadow lived and died
The people of the countryside
But we must on: this brief sad scene
Tells of the glories that have been

+++++ scene 5 +++++

So much for sadness and for grief

And now an episode (quite) brief
We'll tell a story – both funny and gory
By way of comic relief

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It seems that once upon a time
When fairytales were in their prime
A toad once hatched an egg of duck
And from it came by evil luck
A remarkable creature, of hideous feature
With the head of a cock and dragon's tale
They thought it didn't look very nice
And gave it the name of Cockatrice
Now when it grew up it took to scouring
The country round, and it began devouring
The mice and the rats, the dogs and the cats
And then the little boys and girls
With nice blue eyes and golden curls
It even managed a full grown man
So that's when the murmuring began

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How it was slain by a lad named Green
Is the subject of our final scene.

+++++ scene 6 +++++