

Bodmin Play

The play is a revival of the Bodmin Mock Mayor custom translated into a modern mummings style. The Beast of Bodmin becomes the spirit of Cornwall who is hunted, captured and tried by a jury of Bodmin dignitaries (The Ragadaslow – forefathers) lead by Justice Jan Tregeagle, for crimes against the (English) establishment. Witnesses are summoned in the form of historical figures such as Flamank and Angove (leaders of the 1497 rebellion) and contemporary characters such as Miss Minx a television personality with a second home. The outcome, with the support of a vociferous campaign on the part of Bodmin children to “free the beast”, is the exoneration of Cornwall’s spirit in the form of the beast and the castigation of the establishment.

Although initially introduced with a detailed written script which was carefully rehearsed the play evolved over the six years to date to become much more communal in authorship with a series of improvised sketches within the framework of the original narrative. These improvised sketches can incorporate contemporary issues. For example when the local MP, Dan Rogerson, took part in the play in 2009 against a background of news coverage around MPs expenses his lines involved an assurance that his character would not be claiming expenses. Local people have grown into the characters and the social context of the play is also enhanced by the action of the Helliers, the hunters, played by young people whose task it is to chase the beast around the town with much shouting but little to rehearse.



Despite this modern interpretive creativity and vision of a future Cornwall, the play nevertheless has continuity with the traditions of the past and uses these as a medium for comment. In particular the use of masks, bizarre costume and the creation of large hairy pantomime “beast” are anchored firmly in Cornish guizing tradition.

Cast / Ragadaziow

worthies of the Borough:

Justice Jan Tregeagle - wants eradicate beastliness

Timmy Clark /Black Hunter - meek and mild/transforms to 'devil'

Tommy Trewartha - everyman, drunkard, wise fool

Alf N Safety - jumped-up paper-pusher

King Henry English - King Athelstan/Henry etc combined

An Gof and Flamank - Cornish Heroes

Sir Anthony Kingston -reprisal-monger

Oliver Crapwell - roundhead

Isabard Grimly Cunard—capitalist

Doctor Lazar St Lawrence - analyse this

Ms Meeja Minx - celebrity bimbo

St Petroc - our man



Ragadaziow Piper



Helliers, Beast and Casket for St Petroc's Bones

Synopsis

10:00 Mt Folly Procession of Petroc's bones enters space (including Ragadaziow) Tregeagle creates alarm; The Beast has been sighted Ragadaziow send out the Helliars to hunt the Beast (promise beer as reward) Helliars hunt Beast around the town

10:30 - 3:30 Trial enacted at various locations in Bodmin using puppet beast while the full size one pub crawls with the Helliars. Tregeagle delivers damning accusation Ragadaziow (the Jury) don masks to take part Black Hunter defends the Beast by showing scenes from the past The Beast is Attacked by King Henry, has its tongue ripped out, by Kingston is gelded by Cromwell and put to work by Cunard Helped by St Petroc (splinter out of eye) Black Hunter sums up Judgement is made Black Hunter demands due payment (Tregeagle's soul) Tregeagle is pursued instead Beast is 'freed'

15:49pm Mount folly Trial repeated with the full sized beast (1549 is the date of the last Cornish rebellion)

Sources:

Participant observation: 1st Sat in July 2005 -2010

Photographs: Bodmin Riding and Heritage Day