

crafts **The English Mystery Plays** theatre inclusivity **at St Mary's University College** 70 pageants schools **for Corpus Christi 2014** diversity churches 70 community groups drama **1,500 participants** community engagement urban life co-operation **guilds** tradition performance Englishness vibrancy London humour

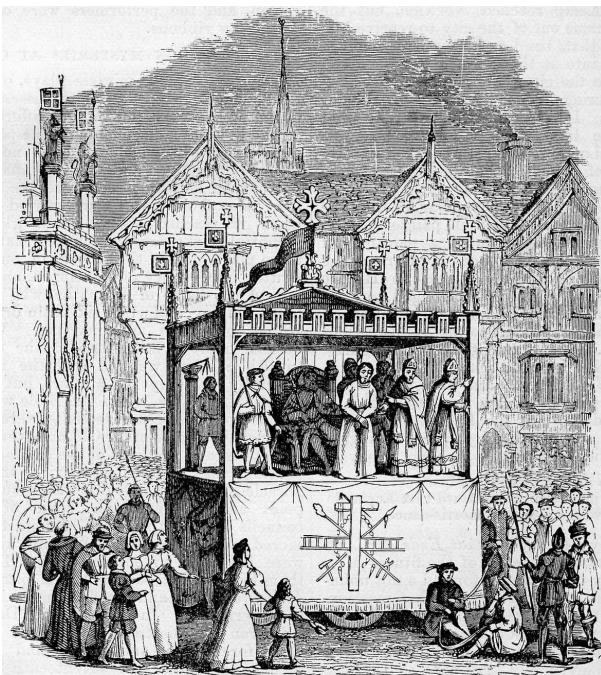
In 2014, St Mary's University College will host the biggest performance in English history of the Corpus Christi guild plays. Involving 1,500 participants who will reflect London's awe-inspiring cultural richness, and welcoming visitors from across London and the South East, this historic event will see community groups acting out the English Mystery Plays on 70 pageants (trucks) in their local areas, and then around the University College's 36-acre campus in Twickenham.

Diversity

Seventy local organisations from all over London, including schools, colleges, community theatre groups, businesses, parishes, prisons, and museums, will be invited to participate in this historic event. They will be led by 7 hub organisations that will be carefully selected to represent London in a way that is true to our capital's remarkable diversity.

Exchange

The 70 community groups will rehearse the English Mystery Plays in preparation for Corpus Christi 2014. Academics and students from St Mary's will work side by side with community members in rehearsals, workshops and set-building projects, exchanging knowledge and sharing ideas.



A scene from the Chester cycle (15th Century)

Collaboration

On Friday and Saturday, the community groups will take their performances directly to local audiences, acting out the plays on their pageant wagons in a variety of familiar spaces. This is in keeping with a tradition that dates back to the 13th century, when guild-sponsored performers would travel around town and perform the Mystery Plays to local audiences several times during the Corpus Christi feast.

On Sunday, all 70 community pageants will muster at St Mary's for a sensational public performance of the plays in the pleasant open spaces of the University College grounds. In a joyful celebration of our shared cultural history and of English theatre past and present, audiences will witness the collaboration of 1,500 participants in an event of astounding scale and spectacle.

English tradition

Theatre has played a central role in the creation of the English urban identity, and the English Mystery Plays showcase an astonishing array of distinctively English theatrical and poetic styles. Portraying scriptural scenes from Creation to Doomsday, they have been much embellished since their emergence in the 10th century as simple liturgical readings. They are witty, moving, and bawdy by turns, and full of the colour and vibrancy of town and city life in the Middle Ages; yet their spirit of inclusive participation has great resonance for life in the city today.

The 2014 Corpus Christi performances of the plays at St Mary's University College will carry forward England's honourable tradition of co-operative theatre, offering a timely opportunity for collective celebration of community through drama performance.

Project outline

September 2011: Fundraising and recruitment initiatives begin.

September 2012: Project is publicly launched. Seven organisations around London are established as hubs. Reporting to a project manager at St Mary's, each of these hubs will have an area manager who will lead the commissioning of 10 local groups to rehearse one Mystery Play each. Three members of St Mary's academic staff, including a qualified stage technician, will be available throughout the term of the project to assess progress and to offer their expert advice and hands-on help.

November 2012: Every area manager is assigned between 8 and 10 St Mary's Drama students to facilitate workshops, rehearsals, set-building, costume design, and other activities with participating groups. Drama lecturers at St Mary's have extensive experience of training student facilitators on other projects, including the *Drama in the Community* project in Richmond, and a series of large-scale community engagement events performed at the National Trust property, Ham House & Garden.

February 2013: Workshops will begin, accompanied by education packs designed in collaboration with London museums and libraries. These will contain information about the history of the City of London and of English community theatre, giving participants a sense of the historical and cultural context in which they are working.

January 2014: All of the participating groups begin to rehearse their performances.

June 2014: The Corpus Christi performances of the English Mystery Plays take place around London and at St Mary's University College, marking the 750th anniversary of this important religious festival.

July 2014: Reflective projects begin, including academic conferences, the publication of papers, and the analysis of impact assessment outcomes.



St Mary's University College student facilitators at a workshop at Ham House & Garden (2010)

Community engagement

The craft guilds of English cities are at the heart of the history of these performances, so we very much hope that every London Livery Company will want to be involved with this amazing project. This is a valuable opportunity for the guilds to make use of their charisms to engage with London communities, and to contribute their skills and expertise to the creation of a wide-reaching public arts event that will be remembered by participants for many years to come.

Because the project touches upon so many aspects of culture both past and present, there will be a highly diverse range of opportunities for guilds to participate in ways which are historically and practically appropriate for them. The project will be a celebration of Englishness in all its abundant variety, encompassing literature, heritage, storytelling and crafts, as well as an exploration of the role that drama can play in social, political and religious movements.

The next step

Please contact George Casley at St Mary's University College to arrange an initial meeting, during which we can discuss any contributions and involvement that might be appropriate.

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