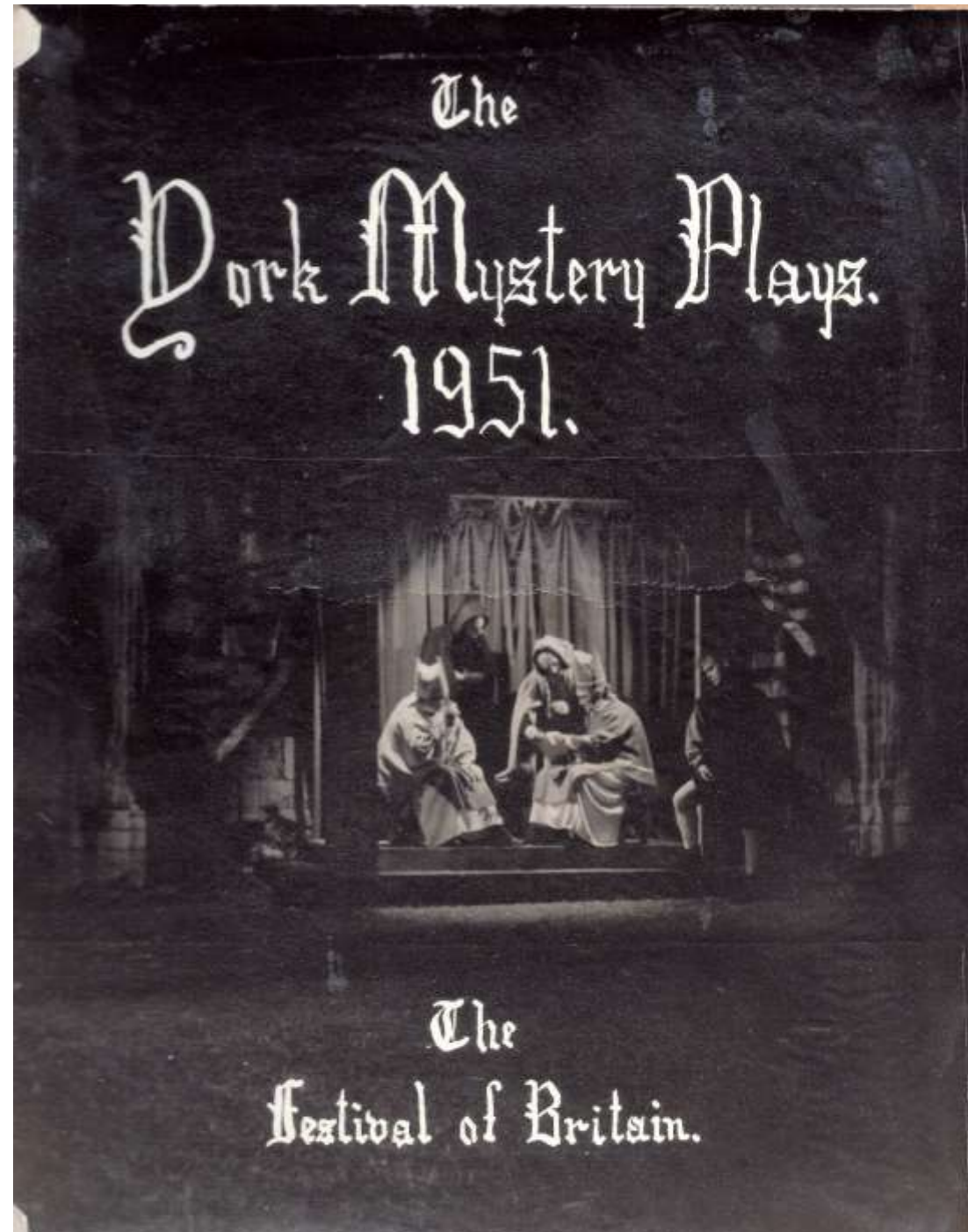


A talk in 61 slides



1951 and the Mystery Plays

- Background – start in 1949
 - Festival of Britain
 - York chosen as one of the Festival Hubs
 - Many events taking place
-
- Preparations for the Plays – publicity, the stage
 - Performances and behind the scenes

Cuttings Christmas 1949

Director Keith Thomson named

YORKSHIRE Evening Press
YORK, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1949. A KEMSLEY NEWSPAPER

Coun Capital Mecca For Famous In Art, Music, Drama And Sport

YORK HOST TO WORLD IN GREAT 1951 FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

Brilliance Is Main Theme

HOST to the world in June, 1951, for the great Festival, York will be a city of brilliant splendour for a fortnight—a city of wonderful music and drama; dancing and fireworks; floodlighting and fairs; exhibitions and sport.

This is the picture drawn to-day by the announcement of the provisional programme, details of which are given below and will be reported to the City Council at its next meeting. They represent the translation into terms of actual events of the original outline proposals.

From the opening of the Festival with a special service, at which the Archbishop of York (Dr. C. Garbett) will give the address, on the morning of June 2, until a magnificent fortnight draws to a close with fireworks and a procession of hosts on the river on the night of Saturday, June 10, York will stage some of the most outstanding events in its long and distinguished history.

The programme, says the Artistic Director (Mr. Keith Thomson), in his statement to the York Festival Society and which will be presented to the City Council, takes no account of the fact that a number of concerts and plays do not of themselves constitute the type of Festival envisaged.

"DRESSING UP" THE CITY

"There is," he states, "all the 'dressing up' of the city, the fun and games, the processions and pageantry, and the spontaneous enthusiasm of the inhabitants yet to be added."

Mr. Thomson calls on citizens to "join" through their imagination, each event taking place, to realise the real effect of all the great spectacles in the Minster and the Balaia, and the impression that will be made by the re-enactment at night of, for instance, the Crucifixion in the Museum Gardens.

After detailing that the Festival Society's present financial commitments do not extend beyond the promotion of the architectural competition (estimated at £500), other incidental charges and all actual expenditures to date of £252, Mr. Thomson goes on: "It has, however, been necessary to make a number of provisional arrangements with certain orchestras."

Christmas greetings To All Our Readers

Christmas Likely To Be Dry And Mild

Mr. Keith Thomson, Artistic Director of the York Festival

1951 FESTIVAL

Brilliance Is Main Theme

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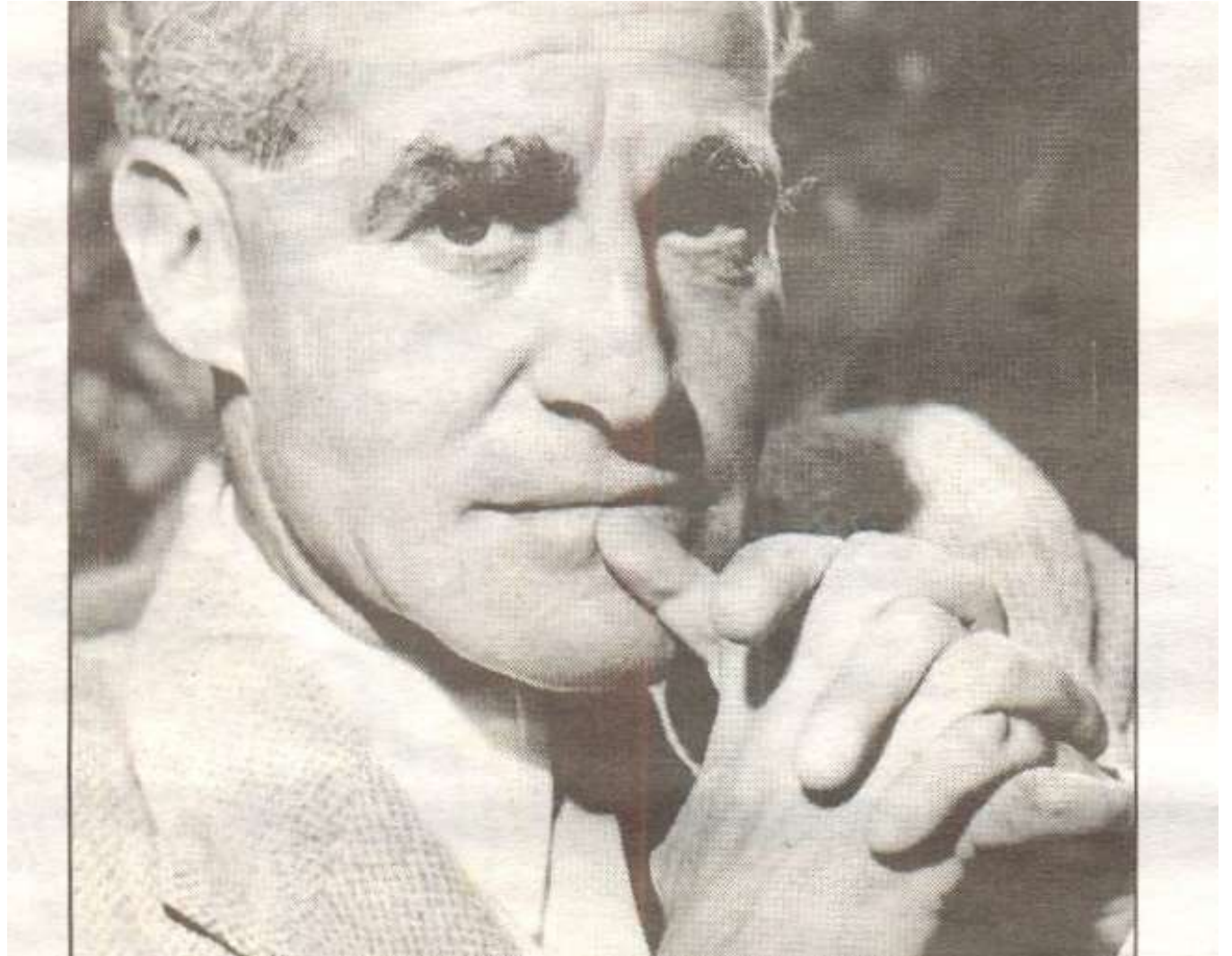
This Sheriff of York (Mr. A. S. Rymer), Chairman of York Festival Society.

Choice made in 1949

Fortunate to have cuttings from the family of **Keith Thomson**, artistic director of the whole Festival.

Deputy Director: **Hans Hess**, Director of the Art Gallery, shown here.

He was the Deputy Artistic Director of the 1951 Festival. Later on he was the Artistic Director.



Exhibitions prepared



Hans Hess with the Princess Royal. 'She opened an exhibition at York Art Gallery of masterpieces from famous Yorkshire houses, among them pictures from her own home of Harewood. She became the Gallery's first royal visitor when it had risen from the ashes more beautiful than before.'

Archbishop of Canterbury, July 1950

The chief and governing purpose of the Festival is to declare our belief and trust in the British way of life, not with any boastful self-confidence nor with any aggressive self-advertisement, but with **sober and humble** trust that by holding fast to that which is good and rejecting from our midst that which is evil we may continue to be a **nation at unity** in itself and of service to the world.

Quoted in The Festival of Britain 1951, the official guide to the Festival

Housing

- More than 400 houses in villages around the city have been offered to put up overseas visitors, free. A grand gesture.
- But York realises a proud past can be made only by looking into the future. To mark the Festival two modern blocks of flats are being specially built.

January 1951 *York Press*

Built 1951 - Festival Flats, Fishergate (also Castlegate flats, next to St Mary's)



Left: Fishergate, Right: Castlegate



South Bank Exhibition Catalogue

Sold for 2 shillings and 6 pence



York chose usual heraldry for its 1950 advance leaflet

The York Festival is organised by
THE YORK FESTIVAL SOCIETY LTD.
(Company limited by guarantee, and not having a
share capital)

Chairman:
COUNCILLOR A. S. RYMER, J.P.

Secretary:
T. C. BENFIELD, ESQ.

Artistic Director:
KEITH THOMSON, ESQ.

Assistant Director:
HANS HESS, ESQ.

Festival Offices:
1 MUSEUM STREET, YORK, ENGLAND

*As an introduction to the Festival, special courses of
lectures on Music, Drama, Painting and Sculpture have
been arranged by the University of Leeds to take place in
York during the winter.*

*Enquiries to the Department of Extra-Mural Studies,
The University, Leeds, 2*

Printed in Great Britain by
The Herald Printing Works, York and London—92562

— 8 —

YORK FESTIVAL 1951



June 3-17

FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

Many events happening in York

ART, HISTORY and ARCHITECTURE

ART GALLERY

Exhibition of Masterpieces from the great Yorkshire houses

PUBLIC LIBRARY

Exhibition of Mediaeval Books and Manuscripts

CASTLE MUSEUM

The world-famous Kirk Collection of Bygones in its unique setting of the old "street"

GRANDMOTHER'S TREASURES EXHIBITION and Display of Period Dresses

YORKSHIRE MUSEUM and GARDENS

Mediaeval Sculpture, Roman and Anglian Remains, Yorkshire Pottery and Natural History

RAILWAY MUSEUM and OLD STATION

Special Exhibition of Railway History

EXHIBITION FLATS

Two modern blocks of flats, specially designed and built for the Festival

PERIOD ARCHITECTURE

The Roman Multangular Tower, the Mediaeval City Walls, Gates, Parish Churches and Guildhalls, The Shambles (the oldest street in Europe), the Tudor King's Manor, the Georgian Assembly Rooms, Mansion House, Streets and Houses

OTHER EVENTS and INTERESTS

Regatta and Night River Carnival

Festival Club in the ASSEMBLY ROOMS

Masked Georgian Ball

Brass Band Contest and Massed Band Concert

Special production in the JOSEPH ROWNTREE THEATRE of "Highwayman Love", a Yorkshire Operetta, by the York Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society

Displays of English Folk Dancing

Many famous houses and the historic Abbeys of Yorkshire are within easy reach of York, and special transport facilities will be available.

Hospitality Scheme for overseas visitors in the surrounding countryside.

BOOKING ARRANGEMENTS

BOOKING OPENS ON 1st MARCH, 1951

Requests for accommodation and ticket reservations should be made direct to:

York Festival Offices,
1 Museum Street, YORK, ENGLAND

Festival information can also be obtained from:

Festival of Britain Information Centre,
Leicester Square, LONDON

British Travel and Holidays Association Information Centres at:

47 Leicester Square, LONDON

336 Madison Avenue, NEW YORK, 17, N.Y., U.S.A.

372 Bay Street, TORONTO, Ontario, CANADA

331 Dominion Square Building, MONTREAL,
P.Q., CANADA

6 Place Vendôme, PARIS

Thomas Cook and Son Ltd.,
Berkeley Street, LONDON, W.1, and Branches

Dean & Dawson Ltd.,
14 Bolton Street, LONDON, W.1, and Branches

A second brochure giving full details of programmes, prices and dates of all Festival performances, with Ticket Order Form included, will be issued later. Send your name and address to the York Festival Offices, 1 Museum Street, York, as soon as possible, if you want a copy.

Big Festival Plans

Yorkshire Evening Press January 1951

One of the most colourful social events in Yorkshire will be a masked Georgian Ball in York Assembly Rooms, first used in 1732 and now being renovated for the Festival.

Descendants of the original subscribers to the Assembly Rooms are being traced. They will be invited to this **fancy dress ball** and will see a performance of the minuet performed again in a hall that has seen it many times. Already 250 descendants, many of them living in Yorkshire, have been traced.

Inside York Assembly Rooms



Peacocks arrive in Museum Gardens where Plays staged



Permanent Guests

HOW obstinate a peacock and his mate can be! I must have spent 10 minutes scrambling among the bushes and shrubs in York's Museum Gardens urging Joey and Jemima on to the lawn.

At last, with regal grace, they strutted into the sunshine and a photographer secured the accompanying picture.

The birds arrived in the gardens last week. They are not here just for the Festival fortnight, but permanently.

In fact, Jemima has decided that the time has come for settling down. She laid an egg soon after her arrival.

Sunday 3 June -Minster service to open the Festival



CHURCH TAUGHT FREEDOM TO NATION



The Archbishop of York (Dr. C. Garbett) blesses the Prime Minister on the latter's arrival at the Minster.

British character... the balance of law and freedom....the progress and regress of the last century – these were the themes running through the address with which the Archbishop of York (Dr Cyril Garbett) speaking from the pulpit of the Minster yesterday, bestowed his blessing on the city's Festival Fortnight.

“Humility and meekness are not our national virtues. But we have a deep respect for honesty and straightforwardness, a natural kindliness, humour, love of courage and adventure.”

There were causes for heartfelt thanksgiving: the awakening of the social conscience of the nation, with its determination to remove poverty, bad housing and ignorance. “It is most fitting that the opening of the Festival of York should take place in the Minster”.

York Minster

Hallé Orchestra on 7, 8 and 9
June, with Sir John Barbirolli

Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra
12 June, with Maurice Miles and
organist Francis Jackson

But *“The audience will understand
that in a cathedral church there can be
NO APPLAUSE. Should, however,
they wish to express their appreciation
in this customary manner at the end of
the performance, the Conductor and
artists have been asked to appear outside
the South Door at the top of the steps”*

Mystery Plays too!

*“In view of the nature of the subject
of the Plays, it is expected that the
audience will not wish to applaud.”*

Sophisticated musical events. (11am start)

<p>YORK FESTIVAL <i>in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of the City of York</i> 3rd - 17th JUNE, 1951</p> <hr/> <p>Amadeus String Quartet</p> <p>Norbert Brainin - <i>Violin</i> Siegmond Nissel - <i>Violin</i> Peter Schidloff - <i>Viola</i> Martin Lovett - <i>'Cello</i></p> <hr/> <p>ART GALLERY MONDAY, 11th JUNE, 1951, at 11-0 a.m.</p> <p><i>Programme Threepence</i></p>	<p>YORK FESTIVAL <i>in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of the City of York</i> 3rd - 17th JUNE, 1951</p> <hr/> <p>JOHN FRANCIS <i>FLUTE</i></p> <p>MILLICENT SILVER <i>HARPSICHORD</i></p> <hr/> <p>MERCHANT ADVENTURERS' HALL <small>(by kind permission of the Governor and Court of Assistants of the Company of Merchant Adventurers of York)</small> TUESDAY, 12th JUNE, 1951, at 11-0 a.m.</p> <p><i>Programme Threepence</i></p>	<p>YORK FESTIVAL <i>in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of the City of York</i> 3rd - 17th JUNE, 1951</p> <hr/> <p>London Baroque Ensemble</p> <p>Karl Haas - <i>Viola and Viola Pomposa</i> Gareth Morris - <i>Flute</i> Roger Lord - <i>Oboe</i> James Whitehead <i>Viola da Gamba and Violoncello piccolo</i> Maurice Westerby <i>'Cello</i></p> <hr/> <p>ART GALLERY WEDNESDAY, 6th JUNE, 1951 at 11-0 a.m.</p> <p><i>Programme Threepence</i></p>
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Rialto, Fishergate, switched between film & music

YORK FESTIVAL

in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of the City of York

3rd - 17th JUNE, 1951

Hallé Orchestra

Leader : Laurance Turner

Solo Violin : ENDRE WOLF

Conductor :
SIR JOHN BARBIROLI

RIALTO CINEMA

(by arrangement with J. X. Prendergast, Esq.)

WEDNESDAY, 6th JUNE, 1951
at 7-30 p.m.

Programme Sixpence

YORK FESTIVAL

in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of the City of York

3rd - 17th JUNE, 1951

The
YORK FESTIVAL SOCIETY

presents

MALCUZYNSKI

RIALTO CINEMA

(by arrangement with J. X. Prendergast, Esq.)

SUNDAY, 10th JUNE, 1951
at 7-30 p.m.

Programme Sixpence

YORK FESTIVAL

in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of the City of York

3rd - 17th JUNE, 1951

OPENING FESTIVAL CONCERT

Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra

Leader : Reginald Whitehouse

Soloist : CLIFFORD CURZON

Conductor :
MAURICE MILES

RIALTO CINEMA

(by arrangement with J. X. Prendergast, Esq.)

SUNDAY, 3rd JUNE, 1951, at 7-30 p.m.

Programme Sixpence

Actors from the plays read poetry

PROGRAMME

MILLICENT SILVER

The Earle of Salisbury's Pavan
Meridian Alman
The Primrose

*Byrd
Giles Farnaby
Martin Peerson*

JOSEPH O'CONOR and JOHN VAN EYSEN.

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's Day
My Last Duchess
To his Coy Mistress
To Lizbie Browne
Whenas in Silks

*William Shakespeare
Robert Browning
Andrew Marvel
Thomas Hardy
Robert Herrick*

MILLICENT SILVER

Prelude
A New Ground

*Purcell
Purcell*

JOSEPH O'CONOR and JOHN VAN EYSEN.

Ode on Melancholy
Ode to a Nightingale
Ode on a Grecian Urn

*Keats
Keats
Keats*

MILLICENT SILVER

Nocturne A major

Field

JOSEPH O'CONOR and JOHN VAN EYSEN

At the House of Mrs. Kinfott
O God, O Montreal
Go and Catch a Falling Star
Blue Blood
A Glass of Beer

*Osbert Sitwell
Samuel Butler
John Donne
James Stevens
James Stevens*

MILLICENT SILVER

Air gai
A Folk Story
Gigue

*Herbert Murrill
Moeran
William Busch*

JOSEPH O'CONOR and JOHN VAN EYSEN

EXCEPT FROM HENRY IV
Act 4. Scene 5

William Shakespeare

YORK FESTIVAL

*in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Corporation of
the City of York*

Recital

of

Poetry and Music

Joseph O'Connor

John van Eyssen

and

Millicent Silver

HARPSICHORD and PIANO

MERCHANT ADVENTURERS' HALL

*(by kind permission of the Governor and Court of Assistants of the Company
of Merchant Adventurers of York)*

WEDNESDAY, 13th JUNE, 1951
at 3-0 p.m.

Programme Threepence

Rail Show links past and present



The Lord Mayor of York (Ald. J. H. Kaye) on the footplate of the first passenger engine, at the opening of the rolling stock exhibition.

‘The exhibition gives the visitor the chance to see how his great, great grandparents travelled by rail... and a peep at the coaches used by royalty past and present.’ (The National Railway Museum opened in York in 1975.)

Private Enterprise joined in

JUNE 4th to 16th 10 a.m.—10 p.m

 **SPECIAL
FESTIVAL
ATTRACTION**

1911 see the

**VINTAGE
CAR
DISPLAY** 

1951

at

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3 Lines 3 Lines

LENDAL BRIDGE, YORK

Theatre Royal celebrates George Hudson this week

THEATRE ROYAL
YORK

ALL THIS WEEK
EVENINGS 7-0. MATINEES Wednesday & Saturday 2-30.

**York Repertory Company's contribution
to the York Festival**
PREMIER PERFORMANCES OF

SOUNDING BRASS

An exceptionally human and all-absorbing play, based on the life of a York man, **GEORGE HUDSON (the Railway King)** by **LESLIE BURGESS.**

Dress Circle 6/- & 5/-; Stalls 6/- & 5/-; Pit 2/6; Upper Circle 2/-; Gallery (unreserved) 1/-.

BOX OFFICE OPEN 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Telephone 3568.

MONDAY, 11th JUNE :: FOR ONE WEEK

1066 — AND ALL THAT

A Musical Comedy based on the Memorable History

GOOD SEATS AVAILABLE IN ALL PARTS FOR EVERY PERFORMANCE

York Theatre Royal celebrates 1066 with an augmented orchestra



MONDAY, 11th June, FOR ONE WEEK
EVENINGS 7-0. MATINEES: Wednesday & Saturday 2-30.

**York Repertory Company's contribution
to the York Festival**

1066—AND ALL THAT

A Musical Comedy of that Memorable History by Sellar & Yeatman.
A Witty and Unforgettable Cavalcade of English History
from the Roman Conquest to the Present Day.

— AUGMENTED ORCHESTRA —

Dress Circle 6/- & 5/-; Stalls 6/- & 5/-; Pit 2/6; Upper Circle 2/-;
Gallery (unreserved) 1/-.

BOX OFFICE OPEN 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tel. 3568.

GOOD SEATS AVAILABLE IN ALL PARTS FOR EVERY PERFORMANCE

Commencing 18th June: **TRESPASS**, a Ghost Story
by Emlyn Williams.

Business joined in!



TENNIS RACQUETS
By All Leading
Makers
Repairs on
the Premises

ENTIRE RE-STRINGS
FROM
18/6 to 82/6

ALL TENNIS RACQUETS ARE CLEANED AND RE-CELLULOSED LIKE NEW BEFORE BEING RE-STRUNG

ROBSON & COOPER
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*For Festival Year
and All Years*

MACDONALDS
for
BETTER FURNITURE

17-18 FOSSGATE — YORK

YORKSHIRE EVENING PRESS, Monday, June 4 5

FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN
Shopping Week



See our FESTIVAL presentation of
'DORMA' Productions — EBORCRAFT Furniture
'BEAR BRAND' Hosiery and CELANESE Underwear

Some **FREE TICKETS** for various **YORK FESTIVAL** events are to be presented to some customers on each day next week.

Any Purchaser may be the fortunate recipient.

W.P. BROWN LTD., DAVYGATE CORNER
YORK

Moving on to the Mystery Plays, from archive material (www.yorkmysteryplays.org)

Preparations of many kinds.

Canon Purvis prepared script from an English text of about 1430, first transcribed into text in 1884.

Next slide is the first programme, reproducing a page, showing the difficult text

The Sadllesces

For nowe my selfe has sene thy hoke
 we liste no lemmyn to lisse in londe
 yis lyste yon hast pmyeped
 to folles yat lisse in leede
 ye same pat i yame fnde
 I see fulfild in dede

Als voyce crand to folke i kende
 ye weyes of criste als i wele kenne
 baptiste hym with bothe my hande
 Even in ye floode of flume jordanne
 ye holy goste fro hemene distende
 als a white downe downe on hym pame
 the fadir voic my mirche to mende
 was made to me euen als, manne
 this is my sone he saide
 in whome me pmes full wele
 his light is on vs, lside
 he comes, omc cures, to fete

Of pat same lyste lernyng have i
 as nle moyses he mustered his myght
 And also vnto modit hely
 wher we were on an hille on hight
 whyle as snowe was his body
 And his face like to ye sonne to fete
 fro man on molde was so myghty
 Grantely to lobe unapnste ynt lyste
 pat same light se i nowe
 Ghymyng on vs faceyne
 wherfore wendy i nowe
 we shulle soue passe fro payne

Helpe Belsabub to hynde ye boyes
 Ench harroue was neuer are herde in helle

Johes Baptista

Moyse

pmg diabols

y diabols

The Sadllesces

Why rooris pon soo tebalde pon popis
 what is de tude crime pon onyghte talle
 what heris pon noyt yis vnygh mofte
 pes lurdans put in hymbo dwelle
 yei make menymy of many soies
 And mysteres grete murtre yame emelf
 murtre uay-nay pat popes is past e
 more hele shal yei neuer hame
 yei crie on criste full faste
 And saie he shal yame sone

In if he same yame noyht we shal
 for they are sperde in speacall sone
 whyle i am pme and pemapall
 Schall yei neuer passe oute of yis place
 ealle vpe asfome and duaball
 To misse ye comfynthe in yis case
 Sele berit mid behal
 to mirre pame pat wilke mystries mase
 Say to Satan oute fire
 And bidde pame bringe also
 knaser lonely of fyre

Al redy lorde i go

Attolite portas pmapes
 Open vpe ze pmapes of paynes fere
 Et eleminum eternas
 yomre yendles zaus pat ze hame here

What paye is pere pat makes pces
 And callis hym hym of vs in fere

Alred lenand with outen lees
 he is a hym of vertues fere
 A lorde meill of myght
 And stronge in ilke a stonre

pmg diabols

y diabols

pmg diabols

Belsabub

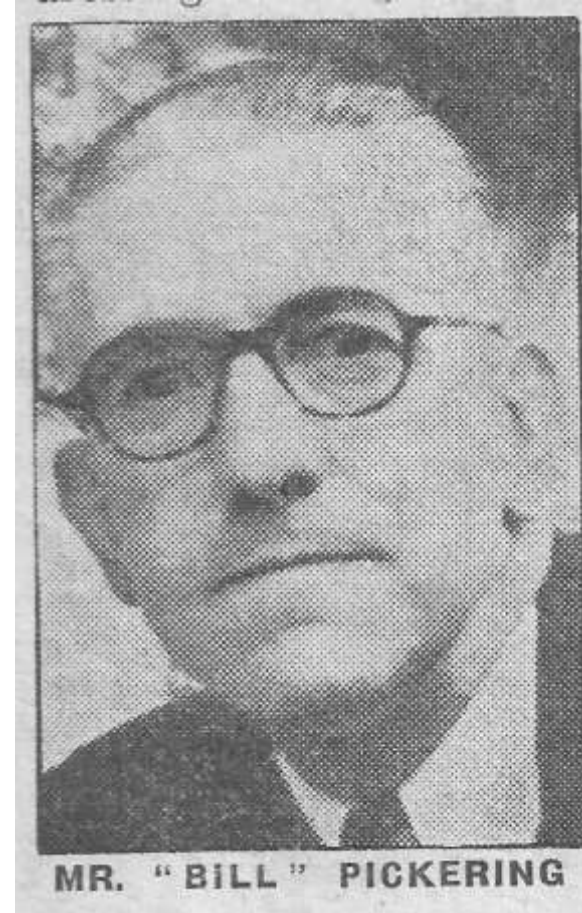
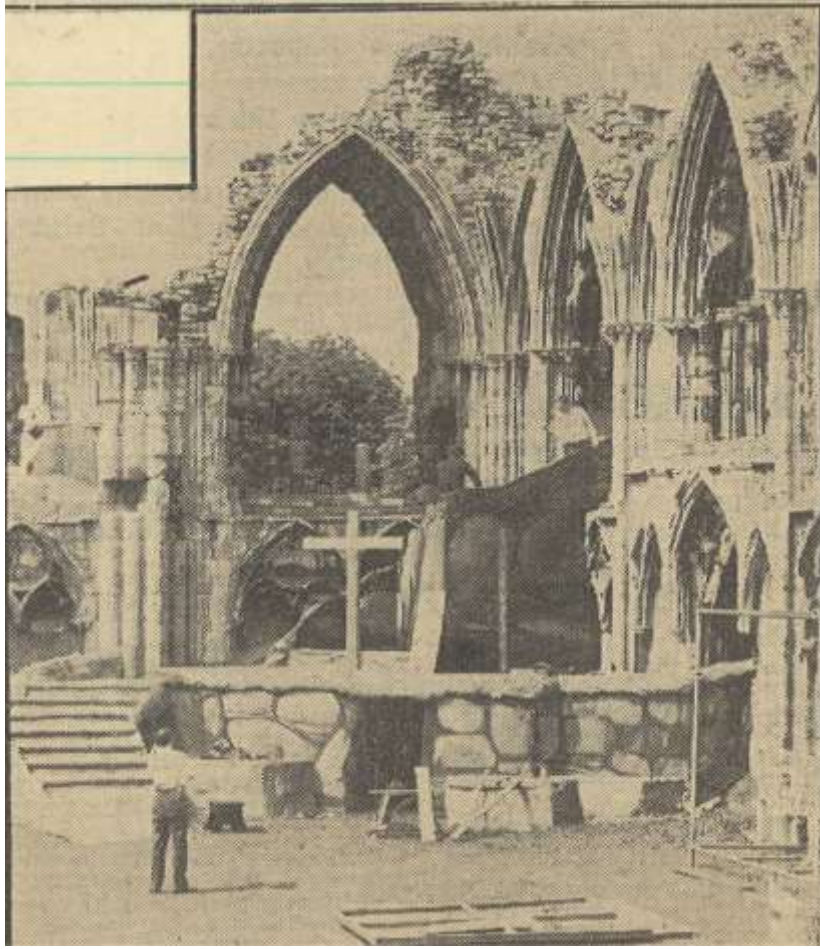
y diabols

h

Gutau

Samd

Mr Pickering's set is underway



1951 was a different world.

The volunteer Stage Director's problem

“Mr Pickering is a district meat agent for the Ministry of Food....has been designing scenery for York Settlement Players for more than 20 years and has also designed sets for the Rowntree Players.

The question of materials threatened to hold up the building of the set as certain suitable types of wood are on permit. **But a lot of wood is on loan and has been cut as little as possible so it can be returned to the owners in the same condition as it was received.”**

More preparations





She shall be called Woman . . .

She will bite the apple and offer it to Adam . . . at each performance of the York Mystery Plays, which open on Sunday in the grounds of St. Mary's Abbey. Miss Joyce Rankine, 20-year-old actress wife of a York Repertory actor, has been chosen for the part of Eve because of her "good looks, figure, voice and acting ability." Here she is at a rehearsal in the leather costume which she will wear in the plays.

Pre-publicity:

Miss Joyce Rankine has been chosen for Eve because of her 'good looks, voice and acting ability' Here she is in the leather costume which she will wear in the plays



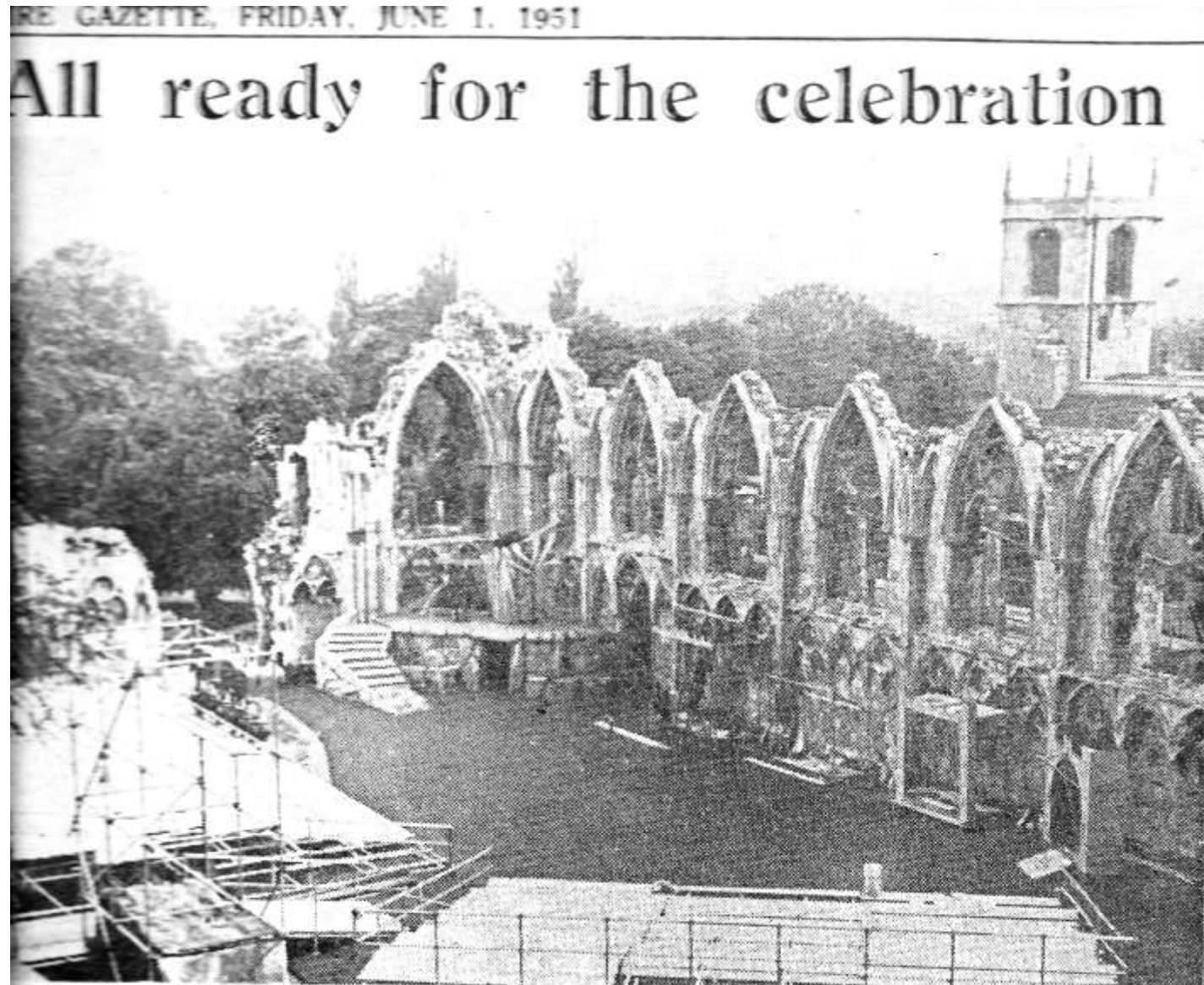
The Adoration of the Child by Shepherds and Angelic Host. The simple drama is particularly moving when seen against the ancient abbey walls and the open sky.

YORK REVIVES HER MYSTERIES

Pre-publicity – fake scene, fake Jesus



The four sets and the seating



The stand

- Since I prepared these pictures, I have been volunteering in York Explore, cataloguing CYC engineers and architects drawings.
- CYC engineers designed and contracted for the stands, their plans and sketches are in the City Archives. They are really interesting – and can be inspected.
- In 1960s the sets became more elaborate and CYC designed staircases for the actors up through the walls of the Abbey. There is a beautiful detailed drawing of that wall.

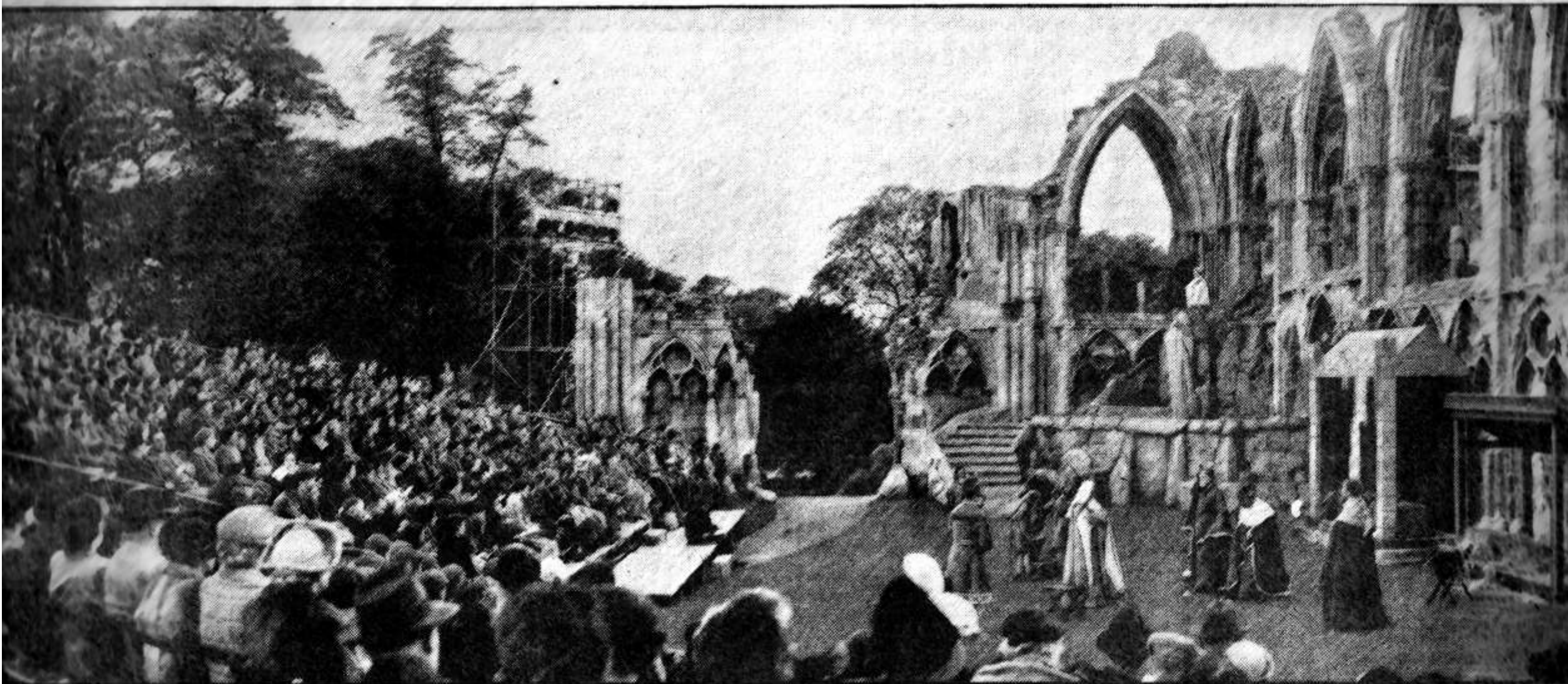
Four sets along the grass: stable, temple, palace, Hell



The Herald announces events. Mounted policeman.



MYSTERY PLAY IS STAGED IN CENTURIES-OLD ABBEY RUINS



The Infant Jesus is held in Mary's arms. And the Three Kings offer their symbolic gifts and worship the Child. This is one of the

scenes from the York Cycle of Mystery Plays, which, as part of the ancient city's Festival celebrations, opened in St. Mary's Abbey.

The Performance,
or a dress rehearsal.
Eve in her leather
costume. Satan
(John van Eyssen)
tempts her.



left - pre-publicity; right – actual.
“Obviously, the Tile-makers play- the
scourging – cannot be presented.”



Christ Healing the Blind Man, a group which catches the spirit of the medieval plays with their gaiety and reverence mingled.
Photographs: A. C. K. Ware



Jesus restores the sight of the blind man.—[Y.G.]

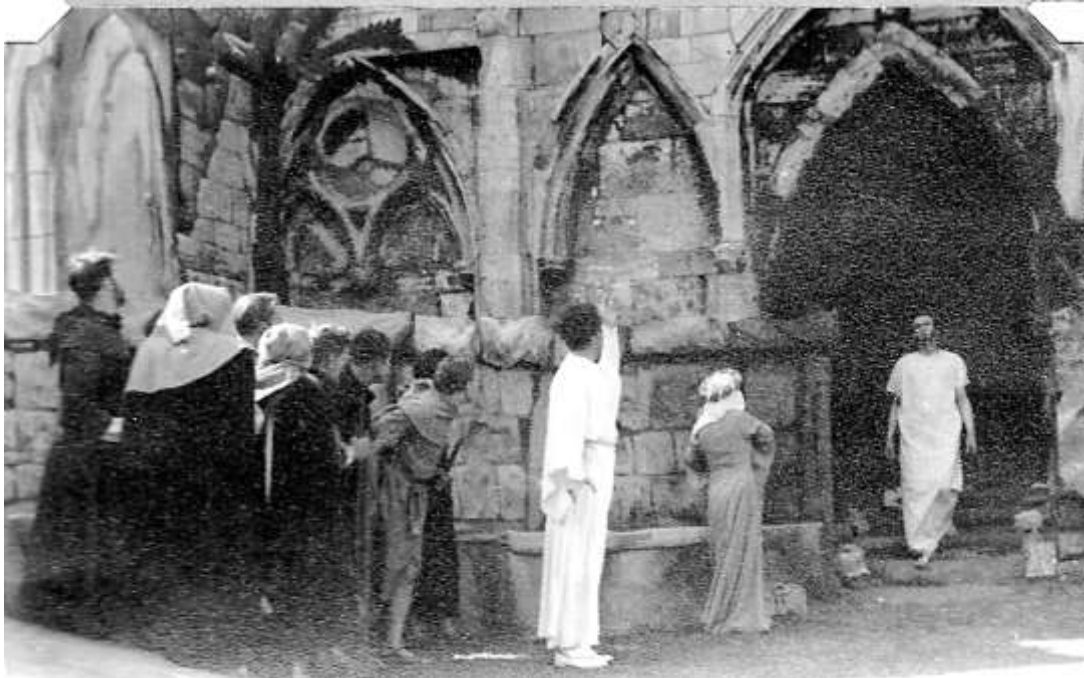


THE COMING OF THE MAGI : The Three Kings offer their symbolic gifts as they worship the child Jesus. This is another of the many dramatic moments in the cycle of York Mystery Plays presented in the Museum Park at York. The cycle comprises forty-eight plays, the work of many different hands.

Jesus' Ministry – healing the Blind Man



Ministry: Lazarus



(right:1954)





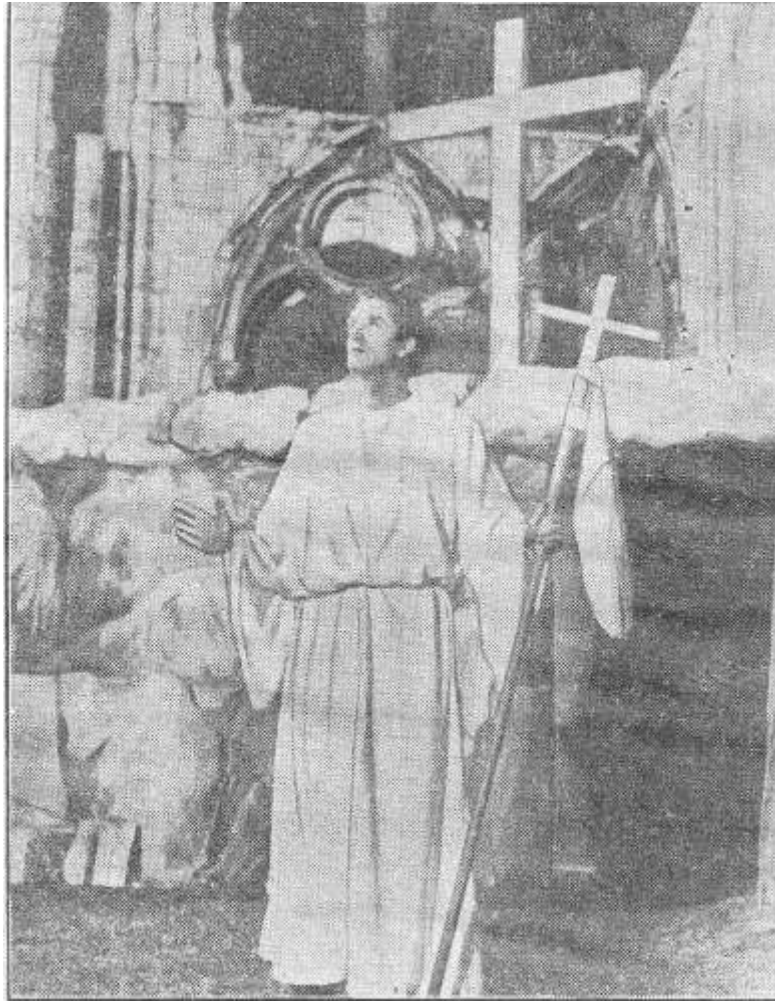
Caiaphas the Jew
approaches Jesus
with bad intention



Betrayal and death



Anonymous Christ – a sensitive role



A "Yorkshire Post" picture in the floodlit ruins of St. Mary's Abbey of the anonymous actor who will play the part of Christ in the York Festival Mystery Plays. In this scene, rehearsed last night, he is seen as he appears at the Resurrection.

THE DAILY MAIL, MONDAY, JUNE 4, 1951

TO THE 'MYSTERY' . . . TO MUSIC, OPERA, SHAW, TOO

THE POWER OF THE MAN ANONYMOUS

By CECIL WILSON

ONLY the fierce chatter of birds broke the hush as the trumpets died and the figure of Christ appeared among the actors in York's Festival revival of a 14th-century cycle of Mystery plays.

He was, like the other principals in this otherwise amateur company, a professional actor. Normally he favours on publicity. Last night, in keeping with the reverent dignity of the occasion, he remained anonymous.

In the major scene he was represented by a wax doll. When he made his first appearance before John the Baptist at the River Jordan he bore little resemblance to the accepted picture. He was clean shaven; his hair was dark and curly; his build sturdy.

Yet the audience, which included the Prime Minister, were so deeply absorbed in the spiritual power of the plays that it seemed quite natural, as if Christ himself were standing before them.

Imposing setting

This was the first production since 1572 of a cycle of plays originally performed on the Feast of Corpus Christi by craft guilds, in a rough, often grossly irreverent, fashion on wagon stages.

There were then 57 plays. Today only 46 survive. The present production reduces them to 30, leaving out much of the Old Testament but giving a generally balanced picture of the world's Christian history.

Appropriately for a 14th-century cycle, the plays, dressed mainly in mediæval style, are revived against the ruins of the 14th-century St. Mary's Priory, and

The centuries-old ruins of St.

The Daily Express 'outs' Joseph O'Connor



In the shadow of an abbey . . .

400-YEAR PLAYS SEEN BY 1,500 PEOPLE

PERFORMANCE: Mystery Plays. PLACE: Museum Gardens, York.

By JOHN BARBER

THEY re-acted the nailing of Christ on the cross at 10.30 last night. A bat hung in the murky air as the mob below shrieked and jeered. Only a Roman Centurion had shame. A voice in agony unfurled like a banner: "My God, My God, O why hast Thou forsaken me?"

Nothing like it has been seen in England for 400 years. Neither Church nor Lord Chamberlain had power to ban this three-hour public performance of our greatest mystery. Tier on tier, 1,500 people watched, shivering. Some were scandalised. Children pawed. I was absorbed.

Behind Jesus towered the ruined wall of St Mary's Abbey, 85 ft. long and pierced with eight lancet windows.

From them the All-Highest bearded and grave had hurled Lucifer. The demons danced on the grass below, biting each others tails.

Along the wall wooden structures stood side by side—Hell Mouth, the Bethlehem Stable; Pilate's house, the tree of Eden.

In the old days the trades people of York acted this history of the world from the Creation to the Last Trump.

DAWN TO DUSK

Each trade did one scene on two-decker wagons which trundled through the streets from dawn to dusk.

E. Martin Browne's fine production is in the medieval style. Everybody talks like Peter Piper. "In glorious glee, my glittering gleams," chortles Lucifer.

The Jerusalem mob wear doublets and wimples straight out of Robin Hood. Adam and Eve are created wearing long white combinations.

Most I shall recall the curly-haired, clean-shaven Jesus, a performance of noble humility by an actor whose name has been kept secret. He is 33-year-old Joseph O'Connor.

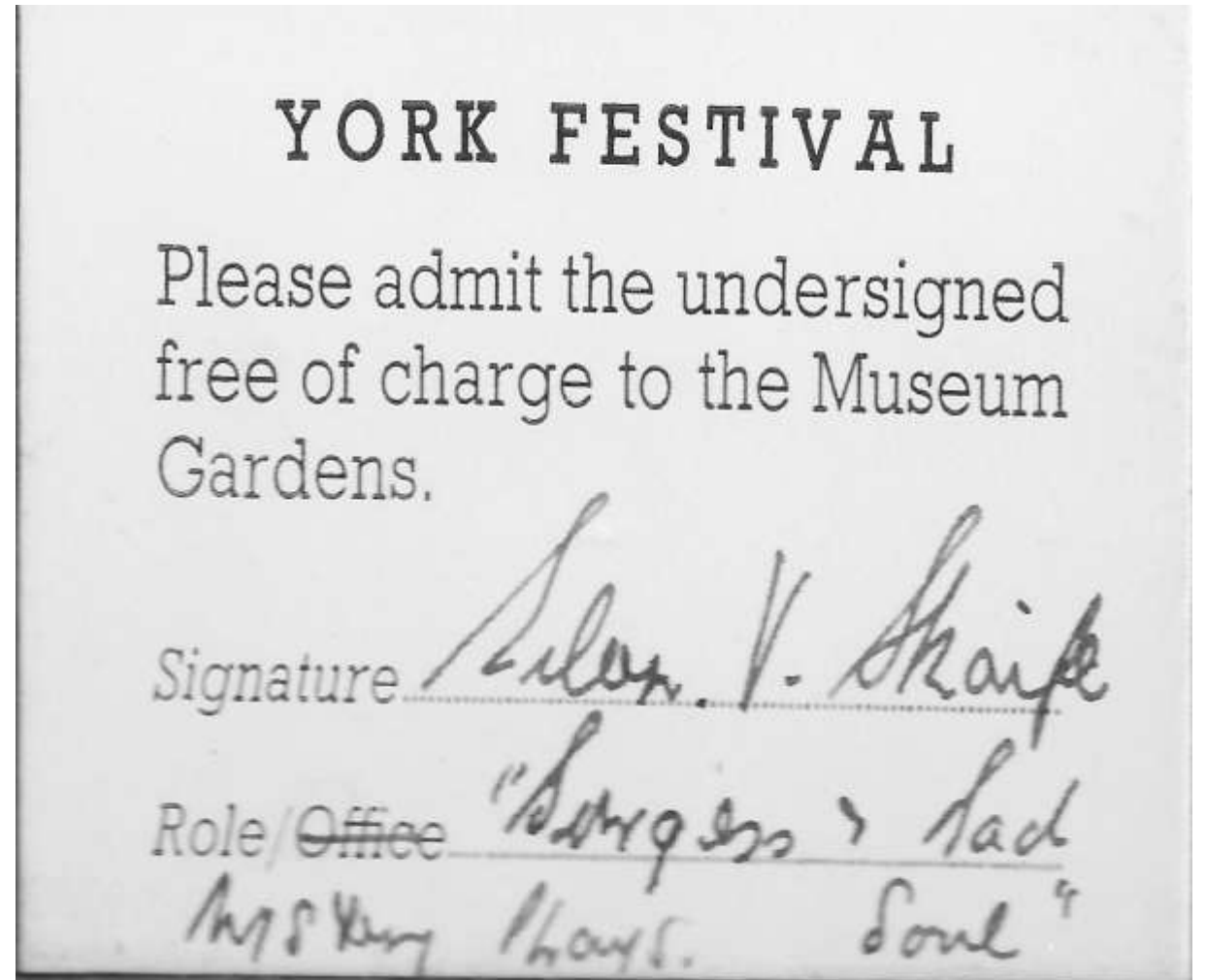
Dublin-born, he was with Donald Wolfit's company, and has acted in the West End and Regent's Park.

He has a superb voice and is as effortlessly magnetic as the North Pole.

A 17-year-old girl, Mary Ure, portrays the virgin with sweet, passionless piety. She may have a stage future—she intends turning professional to see.

Naive and serene, the play ended with respectful awed applause. As drama it is tepid, so, perhaps, is a great cathedral service. But you do not feel afterwards as you did before.

Eileen Skaife donated her scrapbooks with
this pass



Behind the scenes



Joseph (Leonard Pickering)

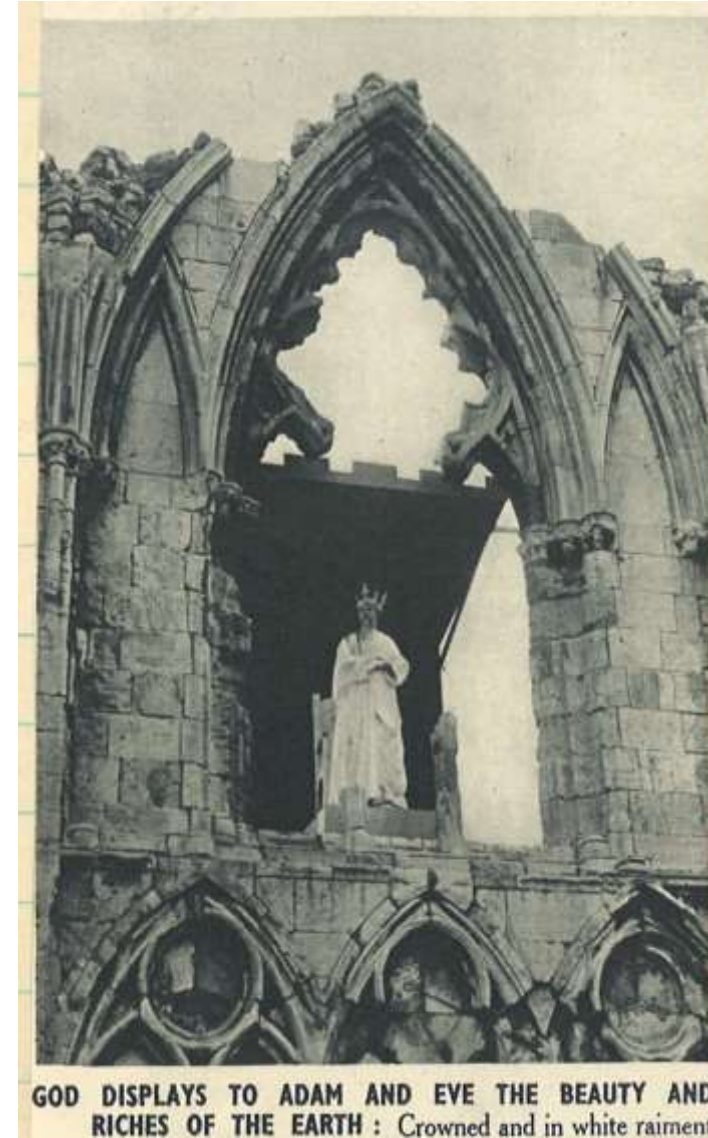
James (Hardo Milner)

Blind man (Donald Barlow)

Citizen (Eileen Skaife)

Poor woman (Lilian Pickering)

God at rest – God in action



GOD DISPLAYS TO ADAM AND EVE THE BEAUTY AND RICHES OF THE EARTH : Crowned and in white raiment

Archangel Michael with angels: spot Judith?



York Settlement Community Players

Adam at left



Behind the scenes: Jesus & gatekeeper; Satan



Behind the scenes: citizens, the Beadle



Citizens; Pilate



Left: Martha



Right: James



July 1951 *Dalesman*

The highlight of York's contribution to the Festival came last month with the revival of the medieval mystery plays. These enjoyed a well-deserved success and set a high dramatic standard.

In August visitors to Helmsley are to be treated to **Helmsley Festival Play 1951** ... in the grounds of the Castle... music has been written by Rev Austin Rennick of Ampleforth Abbey and the narrator will be Robert Speaight the actor.

The famous riding school at **Hovingham Hall** will be the setting for a musical festival from 27 – 29 July

At **Haworth** a Bronte Festival....at **Bedale** a pageant..... Festivities at **Bolton Castle**.

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THERE are few areas of Yorkshire where some attempt is not being made to acknowledge the Festival of Britain. Many towns and cities have already commenced their programmes, and even in the smallest of villages it will be possible this summer to capture some of the spirit of the Festival. In some parts schemes of beautification and improvement are taking place; generally, extensive programmes of events have been drawn up, in which all aspects of local life have contributed and be drama and exhibition. Yorkshire folk will be dipping back into history, recreating scenes from the past and welcoming others to visit and exhibit.

If the Festival has no other value, I feel it will have achieved much to this revival of interest in the human story of our Yorkshire heritage.

The highlights of York's contribution to the Festival came last month with the revival of the medieval mystery plays. These enjoyed a well-deserved success and set a high dramatic standard. In August visitors to Helmsley are to be treated to "Helmsley Festival Play, 1951," the script for which has been written by Dr. Herbert Read, who lives at Kettle's Marshside. Music for this play, which is to be presented in the grounds of Helmsley Castle on the 6th, 8th and 11th, has been written by the Rev. Austin Rennick, of Ampleforth Abbey, and the narrator will be Robert Speaight, the actor. Two hundred of the townfolk will show how Walter Esau founded Kirkham Abbey, how Rievaulx Abbey was founded, the assembly of the monks for the Battle of the Standard against the Scots at Northallerton in 1138, and how the victory was celebrated.

The famous Riding School at Hovingham Hall, between Malton and Helmsley, will be the setting for a musical festival to be held from 27th to 29th July, and visitors will have the opportunity of ac-



ing a Bronte Festival. It is a festival of Bronte plays, and during the fortnight the plays to be presented by Keighley Little Theatre are "The Brontës" and "Wuthering Heights."

From 17th to 19th July a pageant will be held at Bedale in which about 1,000 local people will take part. Included in the pageant will be a scene representing the granting of a market charter to the town in 1251. By an interesting coincidence, therefore, it will be the 750th anniversary. Castle Bolton's contribution—the festivities at ancient Bolton Castle between 25th and 28th July—has already been mentioned in these pages. A number of sixteenth century tableaux will be presented; there will be archery in the courtyard, a blacksmith at work in the cellars and others, suitably attired, will carry out the daily tasks of a bygone age.

One of the features that will, I think, be particularly attractive is the flood-lighting of the Castle. This should make a memorable picture in the dark.

INCLUDED in the festivities at Ripon—second oldest municipality in the Kingdom—will be exhibitions of art treasures, antique furniture and needlework (2nd to 7th July); Cathedral treasures (2nd to 14th July); Feas and Fair of St. Wilfrid, commemorating the return of the Saint from exile in 886 a.d. (4th August) and exhibition of Civic treasures in the Town Hall (13th to 16th August). At Skipton, in the West Riding, there have been displays of natural history, local history, art, drama and sports activities.

The way in which Yorkshire has responded in the Festival has been both

New Years Honours 1952



- Arthur Rymer, Chairman of York Festival Society, OBE
- Keith Thomson, Artistic Director, MBE
- E Martin Browne, producer of the Plays, CBE
- 80 people connected with the Festival in that Honours List, mostly London

www.yorkmysteryplays.org

