

WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE



RINGS OF CHANGE OUTLINE SCRIPT Knowlton Rings April 1994

Synopsis (as per 16.3.1994)

Scene One: *Outside at angle to south of church.* Audience on ridge near entrance. Observe in the distance ensemble of field walkers/sounds/singing. Audience is led forward by Storyteller in towards church, staying on south side.

Scene Two: *Outside moving from west to altar at east end of church on raised hummock.* Neolithic ritual. Audience become moving 'sandwich' with music/singing coming from within church and outer ring of Neolithics circling with fire/sounds etc. Audience led right around to north side of church to watch end of 'endless' ceremony.

Scene Three: *As above.* Storyteller stops audience and gets them to face yews, looking north with backs to the church. Saxon Christian scene. Christians may enter through the yews and come up to the middle of the Rings, facing the church. Confrontation with local pagans.

Scene Four: *Outside in east front of church.* Storyteller introduces Plague Scene, moving audience as necessary to see effigy of death and cart arriving.

Scene Five: *In Church.* Storyteller turns audience and introduces Duke of Monmouth Scene.

Scene Six: *In Church.* Storyteller moves audience around for Bell Robbing Scene. Chorus from everyone.

Finale: *Outside.*

Scene 1 In the Beginning

Audience on ridge with church ahead at slight angle. When all is ready Storyteller blows horn once. Music. Drums.

1. In the distance ensemble of field walkers appear on either side from behind parallel rings. All stand on the summit of the rings in freeze. One half calls 'E'; others respond with 'O', then they offer 'E' and others reply with 'O'. Horn call again. All move in 6 steps, bend and say 'E'; do planting action and rise up on 'O' sound. Continue until all are in and forming semi-circle around the Storyteller and Musicians.

2. Group movement / word piece.

CHORUS: How many tales are spinning here?
 Spinning in Knowlton's ancient round
 Records of life and death revolve
 In grooves of chalk and turf they sound.

 We'll spin you a yarn
 Of snow-white chalk
 Of a sacred henge
 As round as the moon.

 We'll weave you a web
 Of clear bright fire
 Where people kindle
 Charms for their gods.

Storyteller: Once, longer ago than we can imagine, before Roman invaders taught us how to stake words like butterflies onto paper so as to record our strange and wonderful practices, once long ago, when women and men told stories to their children and their children told stories to their children, and there was no beginning, no middle and no end, but a circle of life and death and life, people chose this site. And with their strong hands they opened up the earth to build fine, white circular chalk henges. For many years afterwards they came here and celebrated.

Scene 2 Neolithic Knowlton

The audience are led around the church. They watch/share a procession. Figures appear on the banks; voices; cries; tableaux; conjuring up of a bird; kite sequence. Audience finishes on either side of the church around small hammocks facing gap in rings and yew trees.

Barbara and Neolithics in ritualistic ceremony with chants.

Barbara: All for the good of the moon!
Rise up, spring moon, and welcome!
We live in your light
And your journey shows us the way
To conquer darkness.

See how the light turns into dusk
Into night and day slips
Backwards over the circles.

Rise up wind, our songs
Ride on your back,
High as the skylark,
And fly in thermals
Over our henge hill.

All: Rise up wind, our songs
Ride on your back
High as the skylark,
And fly in thermals
Over our henge hill.

Freeze.

Storyteller: Some three thousand years passed, some thirty six thousand lunations came and went, moved slowly around in circles. During all these revolutions, all these years, it would appear that the people still came to worship at Knowlton. Still they loved their gods and goddesses, their rivers, their seas, their hills, their valleys.

Scene 3

Christians at Knowlton

Christians appear from between yews, singing 'Credo ...'

Chorus: We'll spin you a Saxon yarn of yews
Of searing seeds and snottigogs
Red as wine as a Saviour's blood
A shaft of light in a ring of dark.

Storyteller: Not so very long ago, only a thousand years or so, a new god was brought here. Christians came to plant their cross of stone and lime on Knowlton's mound of chalk.

All singing.

Pagans: E – O
Christians: Credo

Christians: (Oliver) This is the place
We have chosen for God
The one God
The true God
For ever and ever.
Amen!

(John) Within this ring of darkness
Within this pagan ground
Children howl like savage beasts
While others dance around

(Robert) Within this ring
In the very heart
We shall build God's church
With Christian art.

All Christians: This is the place
This is the place
We have chosen for God
One God
The true GOD
For ever and ever.
Amen!

Barbara: This is our proud space,
Our centre, where hearts are healed
And fevers calmed by our mother of the gods,
Oldest and most mysterious divinity
Out of whose shape seasons flow
On whose belly and thighs we worship.

John: On these pagan downs of Dorset
Will dawn the first bright heavenly way
Here Aldhelm and Birinus
Shall preach the true and living way.
Shepherd our heathen fathers
'neath the shadow of the Rood

Teach them Credo, Paternoster
Wash them in the Precious Blood.

While he speaks Oliver and Robert can mime key moments and sing Credo quietly and end with movement piece.

Barbara & Pagans: Away from our threshold! Away!
 You trample the paths of our ancestors;
 We have seen thousands of suns and moons turn through
 This arc which is our heavens. We stand in the open and
 Feel the light enter our spirits.
 Your way of prayer muddles
 The soft acres of our fold.
 Your way of prayer shuts out light with rock;
 Sets thinking into darkness.

John: Here shall we stand
 In years to come,
 One church of red heathstone
 Greensand and lime

 Nave and chancel
 Chapel and tower
 With bells to ring
 The holy hour.

Chorus: One God
 The true God
 For ever and ever.
 Amen!

The Chorus turn and follow Barbara.

John (*in style of Gregorian chant*): One silver pax
 One brass cross and ewer
 One cape of red silk
 One streamer of canvas
 One front cloth of blue silk

Other Christians: Two red silk banners
 One front cloth of blue silk
 Two corporas and
 Three bells in ye tower!

Action sequence. Choral singing from those not speaking.

Barbara: Slowly, we moved back, over the vallum, into the fields, slipped back over the years into the soil.

Other Pagan: And our children grew up in these furlongs of Chenoltune and ploughed here.

Other Pagan: Over there, John Parkes' croft, over there, Robin Gibby's place. And Lords came and went. Ours was Sir Giles de Braose. And all the while the church grew and shifted – a flint here, a stone there until it fell to the Danes. But it rose up again, with the pure white chalk from our downs used to strengthen the walls. Yet when the time came in 1348, nothing could stop the shriek of the old crone, the wild bird whose wings cast shadows over this place. Whose wail sent the people into their graves. "I'll spin you a yarn of blood red roses..."

Exit muttering verse until out of ear shot.

Scene 4

The Plague at Knowlton

Chorus: We'll spin you a yarn of blood red roses
 Flowering on cheek, on belly and thigh
 A ring, a Knowlton ring-a-roses
 Now the pockets are emptied
 And filled up with posies.

 Beware the black clad crone
 With the wild snake hair
 Beware the eyes that bulge
 The taloned feet that claw.

 Like a gurt bird of prey
 She swoops with her scythe
 A-harvesting at Knowlton
 Of rotting flesh and bone.

Storyteller: Into nearby Weymouth there came a ship. It had travelled many, many leagues from the hot climes of the Levant. And this ship carried on board a deadly cargo. When it was unloaded it began to spread all about the surrounding countryside, like a huge scythe cutting down all those who stood in its path. But there were those who went about proclaiming acts of faith, promising that they could provide elixirs in these dark and troubled times.

Audience turned and summoned over by Daniel P and Dawn in role as Quacks. They demonstrate cures using stooges of their own. Audience and Chorus join in at appropriate

moments. Finally three children come forward crying that their mother is ill with red spots and black boils. Quacks panic and beat hasty retreat.

Bodies of various Chorus members collapse and Christians move about chanting and blessing the dying. Meanwhile bells ring slowly and funereally.

Audience are led away hurriedly by the Storyteller and round inside church for Monmouth scene.

Scene 5

Monmouth at Knowlton

Chorus: We'll spin you a yarn of a rebel Duke
Whose revolution came to naught
A red round 'O' a howling mouth
From Sedgemoor fled to Knowlton's ring
To Knowlton's 'O' so secret round.

Storyteller: Once there was a Duke who wished he was a King. Now this Duke, whose name was Monmouth, felt quite sure that the ordinary people, the poor labourers of England, wanted him to be King too. So the Duke of Monmouth sailed across the sea from the Netherlands and landed in the western part of the county of Dorset. From there he marched inland to Somerset, gathering himself a small band of men armed only with pitchforks and clubs. Well, the King he raised a much bigger, better armed force and he sent them to meet the rebels at the Battle of Sedgemoor. And there they routed the Duke's men in the very last battle to be fought on English soil. The Duke fled along with his friend Lord Gray and, it is said, he managed to reach Knowlton.

Monmouth and his ally Lord Gray arrive breathlessly inside the church. They are plotting an escape. A strange boy appears from a ledge and reveals he and his brother live there. He shows Lord Gray a farm where they can get food and help. After Gray has gone, the brother (Jonathan) appears and warns Monmouth of his impending doom. In anger Monmouth kills him, but is cursed before he succeeds.

SFX. Bells ring as alarums preceding capture of Monmouth. All shout from outside the church, 'Catch him, Catch him' over and over.

Storyteller: So the Duke of Monmouth ended his great claim to the throne of England, captured soon afterwards beneath an oak tree at Woodlands.

CHORUS (*sing and move*): Revolve, revolve and roundabout
Roundabout the church and out
Running rings round Knowlton's round
Running rings round Knowlton

Scene 6

Bell Robbers at Knowlton

Chorus: We'll spin you a yarn
 Of muddied heathstone
 Of greensand stitched
 With lichen and lime

 We'll weave you a web
 Of rough-knapped flint
 Hard as the toll
 Of Knowlton's bell

Ring of bells.

Chorus: "Revolve, Revolve"

Chorus moves back as Storyteller leads audience closer to tower for the bell-stealing scene.

Storyteller: Now by the time the eighteenth century had come to hang its banners hereabouts, there were few people left living in and around Knowlton. So it was decided by those wise men who decide such matters that Knowlton no longer needed its own church. And from then onwards the good people of Knowlton had to make the journey to Horton to do their religious observances. This little church, that had seen Saxons and Normans worship in it, was left to fall into ruins. All that was left was its bells. And they say that on a windy day Knowlton's bells would ring out all around. *(Bell ringing)* And a fine sound they did make. Such a fine sound that some folk might have thought it a terrible waste for such fine bells to stay idle at Knowlton. For what use were they serving there?

 And one cold winter's night as snow fell white as Knowlton's ancient chalk mound, strangers from Sturminster Marshall arrived.

Mimed sequence.

All four appear framed in the tower window: Adrian (Charlie), Alec (Tom), Amy (Ruth), Jessica (Mary). They are nervous but the men pretend not to be. They put the ladder over and ease it down. They climb in. They re-set the ladder for the climb up to the bells. They argue over whose turn it is to go up. The girls go first. They feel scared and come down. They go off to look for Will with the cart. The men continue awkwardly. At climax, the girls return shouting that there are spooks by the yew trees. The bell is dropped with a CRASH. Alec, as Tom, yells "Run for it!" and they form a huddle facing the audience.

SFX Cacophony. Bell ringers.

At end. Each of the four bell-stealers in turn tells the story afterwards – moving in and out to of the freeze – in their own words.

Amy (*Ruth*): describes examining the bell, glinting in the moonlight, with a candle and seeing words with writing saying “Whoever touches Knowlton’s bell ...” and wondering what the remaining words say ... Mary, she said ... *Freezes.*

Jessica (*Mary*): unfreezes to say “Straightaway shall go to Hell ...” She adds that she knew it was all wrong from the start and tried to make the others leave without the bell but they wouldn’t listen. *Freezes again.*

Alec (*Tom*): unfreezes to tell of his plan to get the bell out and to the river and how the bell fell off the raft and sank like a stone. *Freezes.*

Adrian (*Charlie*): tells how they tried but failed to raise up the bell. Then, in panic and fear of discovery, they left. Later, they say, people came from Knowlton to retrieve their bell and even they failed. The rope kept snapping. It was as if the bell was destined to stay on the bottom of the river. A song was heard hereabouts soon afterwards. “All the Devils in Hell / Couldn’t pull up Knowlton’s bell.” *He sings and gradually everyone joins in.*

Handbells ring, louder and louder.

The audience is led out of the church for the Finale.

CHORUS: Revolve, revolve and roundabout
Roundabout the church and out
Running rings round Knowlton’s round
Running rings round Knowlton

ALL: How many tales are spinning here?
Spinning in Knowlton’s ancient round
Records of life and death revolve
In grooves of chalk and turf they sound.

FINALE: CIRCLE DANCE WITH AUDIENCE
