

# WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE



## RINGS OF CHANGE SCRIPT Knowlton Rings 1994

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## RINGS OF CHANGE

### Scene 1 In the Beginning

*Music in front of the church. Then audience is led round the church for starting point near yew trees facing in to church. CHORUS in position hidden behind outer rings. (Sharon's side crouch just above skyline in order to see cue.)*

*The storyteller speaks. During the speech everyone gradually forms circle surrounding audience, repeating gesture 'kindling charms'.*

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.

*Percussion. Musicians play. Then Storyteller blows horn once.*

- 1: In the distance CHORUS appears on either side from behind parallel rings. All stand on summit of ring in freeze. On drum roll, Adrian's side raise arms and call 'GANDABROH; GANDABROH; GANDABRAY'. Drum roll. Sharon's side responds on drum roll, raising arms to chant 'ACHANAY; ACHANAY; ACHANOH'. Adrian's side lowers arms as others raise theirs. Repeat.*
- 2. Horn blows. Sharon and Adrian lead groups out. All move in 6 steps, bend and put movement of planting to action with words. Use inward breath to stand and breathe out as walk.*
- 3. As sides come close to centre, they freeze and focus, making eye contact with each other for first time. Hold eye contact. Then continue into moment of fusion.*
- 4. All move in and form semi-circle around Storyteller and Musicians. Adrian/Alec/Daniel P standing at back, pushing with palms into each other. Amy/Jessica/Daniel H at front.*

*Storyteller blows horn.*

Chorus:       *(spinning in a circular motion)*  
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.

*Pause. Slow change. Men make semi-circle at back standing. Women kneel in inner semi-circle. Freeze. Movement sequence begins, passing yarn along as they speak.*

We'll spin you a yarn  
Of snow-white chalk  
Of a sacred henge  
As round as the moon. *(all howl 'ooh' sound)*

*Pause. Women start, repeating first line over and over as they clap hands.*

We'll weave you a web  
Of clear bright fire  
Where people kindle  
Charms for their gods. *(all turn to face audience and shout last word 'gods').*



## Scene 2

### Neolithic Ceremony at Knowlton

*Barbara moves forward carrying horns. All clapping 'fire rhythm'. Sophia on outer bank raises bowl of fire and shouts "I OFFER YOU THE GIFT OF LIGHT". All move backwards. Daniel H stands and is crowned with horns by Barbara. Adrian and Daniel walk forward, kneel and lift him up onto their shoulders. They carry him off away from the audience with his arms raised. All watch them go.*

*Music. Drums stop walking sequence and start "the hunt".*

*Tuppy's group move away, crouching towards stage right. Stop.*

*Gill's group move away to stage left. Stop.*

*Shooting of spears/arrows.*

*Groups run forward.*

*As Daniel H is set down he runs fast up bank, pawing ground and tossing antlers, then runs along the ring towards the yew trees.*

*All throw spears. Daniel H wounded. Runs down bank and freezes half way.*

*Pause. Groups run forward.*

*Others run back to Barbara. Still moment.*

*Storyteller turns audience around and leads them off to the mound.*

*Procession up path towards and beyond yew trees. Skipping and spiralling and whooping.*

*Together all hurl spears at Daniel H.*

*Make bird formation. Amy and Jessica as claws. Gradually build up momentum/*

*All charge downhill, pick up Daniel H and carry him to the mound. Lay him in the centre.*

## AT THE MOUND

*Barbara and Neolithics in ritualistic ceremony with chants. All kneel and make 'oooh' noises for a while.*

Barbara: All for the good of the moon!  
(Removes horns. Daniel H resuscitated and joins group)

All (*rising as they speak*): Rise up, spring moon, and welcome!

Barbara (*facing left/west*): We live in your light  
And your journey shows us the way  
To conquer darkness.

*Turns to right/east.* 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,

*All run round, turning in to each other*

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. Then in clump start swaying back and forwards. As he speaks, Storyteller turns audience round, walking around mound as he does so. CHORUS moves carefully together, left foot forward first, heads down, rocking.*

Storyteller: Some three thousand years passed, some thirty-six thousand full moons  
came and went. During all these revolutions, all these years, the people still  
came to worship at Knowlton. Still they loved their gods and goddesses, their  
rivers, their seas, their hills, their valleys.

*All stop.*



### Scene 3

#### Christians at Knowlton

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.

*Hand bells start to ring in the distance.*

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

*Bell rings. Christians enter from between the yews, carrying bible, cloth, cross, chalice and bell. They are singing The Credo. Pagans make a line as Christians approach, running from their mound to the Christians. Children break away and crouch at the front of the newcomers.*

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

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

                  Within this ring  
                  In the very heart  
                  We shall build God's church  
                  With Christian art. *(Christians gather Pagan children in)*

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

*Christians repeat song, facing audience at front.*

Barbara (*snatching children away*):

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.

Christian 2: On these pagan downs of Dorset  
Will dawn the first bright heavenly way  
Here Aldhelm and Birinus  
Shall preach the true and living way.

Christian 3: Shepherd our heathen fathers  
'neath the shadow of the Rood  
Teach them Credo, Paternoster  
Wash them in the Precious Blood.

Barbara & Pagans (*upstage to Christians*):

Away from our threshold! Away!  
You trample the paths of our ancestors; (*turns to front*)  
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.  
Their way of prayer muddles  
The soft acres of our fold.  
(*back to Christians*)  
Your way of prayer shuts out light with rock;  
Sets thinking into darkness.

*Music. Stylised movement and wailing. Crescendo of singing: Pagans (downstage left) chant AACHANAY. Christians chant CREDO. During this many pagans are converted and made to kneel (upstage right).*

Christian 1: (*as other Christians change converts to shape of church*):

Here shall there 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.

*Bells start to ring, softly at first.*

Christian 1:    One God  
                  The true God  
                  For ever and ever.  
                  Amen!

*Bell ringing becomes louder. Christians begin filing away round Adrian. He sings in style of Gregorian chant.*

Adrian:        One silver pax  
                  One brass cross and ewer  
                  One cape of red silk  
                  One streamer of canvas  
                  One front cloth of blue silk

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

*Action sequence. SFX. Drum beat. Pagans turn backs. Mournfully at first, they begin moving round to investigate damage to the altar.*

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

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

Tuppy:        Over there, John Parkes' croft.

Jake:          Over there, Robin Gibby's place.

Sharon:        And Lords came and went. Ours was Sir Giles de Braose.

Barbara:      And all the while the church grew and shifted – a flint here, a stone there until it fell to the Danes.

Sharon:        But it rose up again, with the pure white chalk from our downs used to strengthen the walls.

Gill:            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.

ALL:            Whose wail sent the people into their graves.

Tuppy:        I'll spin you a yarn of blood red roses...





## Scene 4 The Plague at Knowlton

### PROLOGUE

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.

*CHORUS of pagans becomes a ship and 'punt' along. Then gradually becomes a scythe.*

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. (*CHORUS scatter*)  
But fairs continued about the Dorset countryside and at Knowlton there was many a good one. And to those fairs came those who offered hope in dark and troubled times.

*Drum beat to crescendo.*

*The audience is turned around to hear fair music and see the Great Bird dancing with Little Meg and the Healer and her Husband preparing for the fair, either setting up cart and range of packets with cures and potions etc. or emblems mounted on poles representing death, cures, resurrection, etc.*

*When all is ready, the Husband stands on the ledge of the church. The Healer suitably armed with a tray of potions, stands ready in a pose. Meg is sent away behind the audience.*

Husband: People of Knowlton gather round!  
We have travelled far to this holy ground!  
We bring you cures for every ailment  
Ague, sickness, palsy or gout  
Swollen bellies or broken snout  
My fair wife here is blessed by the Lord,  
For from the Holy Well at Cerne  
She drank when she was born  
Yes, St Augustine himself, my friends,  
Has touched her with his mighty rod  
She is wise and will help you all  
Praise be to the Lord!

Healer (*holding up jars of potions*): Aches and bruises?  
Stricken by wind?  
Then this Oil of Swallows is just the thing!  
Walnut leaves, rosemary, sage and bay  
Crushed with sheep's entrails  
In my very special way.  
Then twenty four young swallows, feathers and all,  
Pounded in firmly to make up a balm  
That'll keep you safe from many a harm!

Husband: See how she's blessed by the gift to heal  
No mystery lies hidden from her  
Her powers are real!  
For a very small price only she'll minister to you  
So come along, Knowlton, what's to do?  
We've treated Kings, we've treated Queens...

Villager 1: What are you doing here then?

Healer: 'Cos today is your chance to be seen!

Villager 1: How do we know these cures will work?

Villager 2: Be quiet, John! They seem to be ever so wise. Why don't you listen? Might learn some sense!

Husband: That's right, my dear. Pay no heed to doubting Thomases.

Villager 2: No, John, his name is.

Husband: John, Thomas – take it as you wish, my dear! I see you are in need of some comforting!

Healer: Husband!

Villager 3: What we need is some proof!

*Other villagers agree.*

Husband: Very well. We will offer a little demonstration to convince you.  
Now good people here today  
If you want to be cured  
Step forward without delay!  
For first one up won't have to pay! *(He notices his wife going into a trance)*  
But wife, what's wrong? Speak, dear, say!

Healer: O-h-h-h! Evil!  
I sense an evil presence! A sick girl  
Coming this way! O-h-h-h!  
A terrible sickness!

Husband *(to audience)*: Make way, make way!  
Let the child through  
My wife will cure her  
Drive the sickness away!

*Girl, Meg, appears tottering and looking very ill.*

Villager 1: I've not seen her around Knowlton.

Villager 2: No, she don't come from the village. *(to others)* Do you know her?

Husband: QUIET! QUIET! WE MUST HAVE QUIET!

Healer *(to Meg)*: What's your name, child?

Meg: They call me Little Meg.

Healer: Now, what ails you, girl?

Meg: Fever! Fever! *(she shudders and squirms about)*

Husband: And see, terrible boils on her arms!

Healer: And have you been sick a lot, little one?

Meg: I've got a pain in my leg.

Husband *(heavily)*: Your leg looks fine to me, my dear. I think you misheard the question, my dear.

Meg: Oh yes, I've got trouble with my hearing.

Healer: Oh, a bad ear! We can cure that.

Healer: Come here now, Little Meg, and take your medicine.

*The Healer and Husband hold down Little Meg and try to put medicine in her ear. She struggles.*

Meg: No, Father!

Villagers: She said "Father"!

*All laugh scornfully.*

Husband: She said "Father in Heaven" for the cure. She's a God-fearing child.

*All scoff.*

Villager 3: We'd have seen her in church before now if she was God-fearing and if she come from Knowlton.

Husband: She's very shy, very shy! Go and sit down now, Meg.

*Little Meg sits down on the grass, crying.*

Villager 1 (*steps forward*): I'll buy one of those there remedies if you like, if you do one of your demonstrations for me. If you can cure him, that is. (*she pulls her husband down from the church wall by the leg*) I tell you what! If you can cure this one here, I'll buy one of those remedies there.

Villager 2: You leave me out of this! It's all nonsense!

Husband: Of course, we can cure him, my dear. You tell us what the ailment is.

Villager 1: It's his snoring! He snores all night, every night. I don't grab a wink of sleep. It's like sleeping with a pig!

Villager 2: Here, Elizabeth! Hold your tongue! Don't you dare...

Villager 1: If you're not careful, I'll tell them about the other ailment.

Husband: And what might that be, I wonder! I'm sure we can find a hot poultice to straighten that little problem out!

Villager 1: Let's just stop the snoring first!

Healer: Bring him to me! *(to Meg)* Bring me that big book, child. My Tome of Miracles will guide me!

Husband: Been in her family for countless generations!

*Meg brings the book. Villager 2 is dragged over by Husband and Villager 1. Healer consults the book.*

Healer: It's very simple. 'S' for Snoring. *(reading)* Ah-ah! 'A curled letter like a slumbering husband'! Let us begin! First he must be spun around towards the sun six times!

*Villager 2 is spun around, he trips up and falls.*

Villager 2: Ugh! You've dropped me in some sheep dung!

Healer: That's a vital part of the cure that! *(reads)* Now raise him up!

Villager 2: Now you've hurt my back!

Husband: We can cure that after the snoring.

Healer: Tip the sufferer backwards to open his passage.

Villager 1: His what??

Healer: Now fetch me that little brown bottle, girl. *(Meg brings a bottle)*

Villager 2: I'm not ...

Husband: Quiet now!

Villager 1: What are you going to give him?

Healer: A concoction of my very own. Extremely effective!

Husband: And very cheap too. Only a shilling ...

*Meg gives her the bottle. Healer hands her the book. They all hold Villager 2 tight.*

Villager 1: What's in it then?

Healer: A mixture of lavender, mint and rosemary.

Villager 1: That sounds nice enough, eh, John?

Healer (*as she is pouring some down his throat*): Mixed up with a slice of snake's bladder and kidney of hare.

*Villager 2 gags and breaks free.*

Villager 2: That tastes foul!

Husband: No, there's no chicken in it.

Villager 2: You've poisoned me! I'm going to chunder! (*he goes to vomit*)

Healer: Oh, it may not taste too good! But it'll work! And you'll need another bottle to rub up your nose just before you go to bed.

Husband: But you can have that for sixpence.

Villager 1: You look terrible, John. (*to Healers*) What have you done to him? You have poisoned him! Come on home, John! (*they start to leave*) You were right about them!

Healer: Give it time!

Husband: You can't leave yet! You haven't paid! Come back here!

Villager 1: To think I trusted them!

*They are interrupted by the noise of drumming. The Giant Bird and Death with a scythe appear with 3 children, dragging a cloth representing their mother. Wailing and keening sounds.*

Villagers' Chorus: I know those children. They're from Lumber Lane. Where's their mother?

Husband: What's wrong, children?

Child 1: My ma's ill.

Child 2: They say you cure people.

Husband: That's true enough, child.

Healer: What's wrong with your mother?

Child 2: Sick all the time.

Child 3: Hot and cold.

Child 1: Shivering.

Child 2: Burning.

Child 3: Big spots on her arms (*showing her arm*) like this one – only bigger!

*Healer immediately recognises they are real plague sufferers. She beckons her Husband to her and starts packing.*

Healer (*to Meg*): Help pack up, Meg! (*to Husband*) Come on!

Villagers' Chorus: Sounds like another plague case, don't it? Well, help them then!

Husband: Well ...er...wife. (*he runs over to whisper in her ear. Freeze*)

*Some villagers approach the children, who are still weeping in a huddle.*

Villagers' Chorus: Don't you worry! They can cure your ma.

Healer: It's here then. I told you we shouldn't have stopped here!

Husband: There's money to be had!

Healer: No, you fool! Listen! Don't you hear the beating of her wicked wings? She's following us, mocking us. The old crone! Nothing can stop her! Nothing! She'll destroy us all!

Villager 3: What's she on about? Oy! Where are you off to? Thought you could cure the plague! You healed that girl! Hey, look she's leaving with them! It was all a trick! Rascals! Deceiving innocent folk! COME BACK!

*Healer and family run off. The Bird appears and dances round the Children with the Villagers. The Musicians approach and sing 'Ring a Ring of Roses, etc.' The Children and Villagers collapse and die.*

*The Bird climbs onto the church wall. Music. Bell tolls loudly. Monks sing Latin chants for the dead.*

*Villagers go off to Right to enter at the back of the church. Storyteller stays with audience.*

Storyteller: Some folk have said that when the Old Crone flapped her deadly way into Knowlton's ring of chalk she carried off every last one of the poor villagers in her monstrous talons. But others say 'No'. Some survived as best they could. Tending their small patch of land, their pigs and their cattle as best they could. And for a few hundred years more the church bells called the faithful to worship and the faithful responded with fine voices that echoed about Knowlton's ring.



## Scene 5

### Enclosures at Knowlton

*All in church, backs turned, holding candles. Singing, then silence. Sounds of drumming as audience walks up to end of line and faces the church.*

*When SFX stop, all turn to face the audience. Stand still.*

*Jeff and Adrian walk to the front. Unroll proclamations. As they are read, all lean forwards, wide eyed. Gradually all Villagers are 'nailed' into the ground. Chorus also repeats the word 'enclosure' softly.*

Jeff/Adrian: "Notice is hereby given that in this year of our Lord 1723, the parcel of land at Materly, in Knowlton Fields, is formally enclosed by Thomas Redman, Landowner according to this lease."

"According to this indenture of 1737 between Edward Seymour of Woodlands and Humfrey Sturt of Horton, to enclose the said common land known as Knowlton Field and allot every parcel of such land in one parcel lying together."

"This agreement of 1738 between Edward Seymour of Woodlands and the Earl of Shaftesbury to exchange and enclose parcels of land in Knowlton Common Field and Knowlton Common Meadow. Thus will be replaced the earlier system where the land lay dispersed and promiscuous."

*All freeze, now on their knees. From the rear, the Vicar announces:*

Vicar: From henceforward, Brethren, there will be no more services at Knowlton. Parishioners will have to travel along the road to Horton. And let us conclude by singing Hymn ...

*All sing and pack up bags, gradually exiting through the rear arch of the church.*

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 repeats "Revolve, Revolve, Revolve". Chorus moves back as the Storyteller leads the audience closer to the tower for the bell-stealing scene.*

Storyteller: So this little church was left to fall into ruins. All that remained were its bells. And they say that on a windy day Knowlton's bells could be heard as far away as Wimborne to the south and Cranborne to the north. *(Bell ringing)* And a fine sound they still made. Such a fine sound that some folk must have thought it a terrible waste for such fine-sounding bells to stay idle in the old church at Knowlton. For what use were they serving there?

And so one winter strangers from Sturminster Marshall arrived with a ladder and a rope, *(mimed sequence)* as snow fell, white as Knowlton's ancient chalk mound.

*Urgent whispering can be heard from outside. Eventually a ladder appears at the window. Then faces appear, Adrian first. He beckons others and then addresses the audience. SFX.*

Adrian *(to audience)*: It was a cold, cold night when we finally reached Knowlton to get the bell. I remember the crunch of the white snow as we tip-toed over to the church. It wasn't quite as easy as we'd thought.

*He calls to the others and sets the ladder down for them. The others appear. Amy holding the lantern, then Jessica holding the rope, then Alec looking backwards from Stage Left as if having just entered the Rings. Loud whispering and exaggerated clumsiness as Adrian helps Amy up first.*

Jessica *(holding the rope)*: I'm scared. Look! *(All look out at the audience)* I can see faces there!

Amy (*now looking down from the window*): Don't be such a ninny!

Jessica: Huh! I just heard a cockerel crowing!

Amy: So?

Jessica: That's bad luck in the middle of the night!

Adrian: It was just a fox barking. Look, there's no-one there. (*to Alec*) Hurry up, William! Let's get on with it! We haven't got much time. (*Alec mounts the ladder*) Any sign of Sid?

Alec: No, no sign of Sid or his cart.

Adrian: But you told me he'd be here!

Alec: He said he would! Promised me!

Amy (*shutting them up*): I'm cold! Let's just get on with it!

Adrian: Right then. Shine that lantern up there, lass. (*Amy does*)

Alec (*looking in and up tower and almost shouting with pride*): There's the bell! Hanging up there like a ripe cherry ready for the plucking! Just like I said it was!

All: Sshh!

Amy: Keep your voice down!

Alec: Don't worry! There's no-one else here!

Jessica (*still on ground with rope, facing front and looking scared*): You never know!

Alec: Move that ladder over to the wall! (*They do. He talks in a stage whisper as they move in*) All we need to do is get the rope up there and loop it over that beam there and then play it through the pulley. Easy! (*All look up in disbelief*) (*to Jessica*) Pass the rope then!

Adrian (*to Amy*): Bring the rope!

Jessica: No! (*stays at front cuddling the rope*) He's my friend!

Adrian (*to Alec*): She's never been the same since her mother died. (*to Jessica*) Look, I know! You can go up the ladder with it, can't you? That way you get to hang on to it, your 'friend'!

Alec: Up you go, girl! (*He helps her onto the ladder*)

*Jessica takes a few steps up the ladder but then stops.*

Jessica: I'm frightened! I'm not going any further!

Amy (*taking rope*): Oh, I'll do it! I'm no gurt baby!

*She climbs up, encouraged and advised by the others, getting more and more enthusiastic. Then silence as she stops near the top. Then she climbs down.*

Alec (*as she climbs down*): Well?

Adrian: What's wrong?

Amy (*going on outer ladder to the ground*): I ...I couldn't reach!

Jessica: You were scared too!

Amy: I was not!

Jessica: Were!

Amy: Wasn't!

Alec & Adrian: Sshh!

Adrian: These children are hopeless! You'll have to go up and fetch the bell.

Alec: Oh no, I think you should go.

Adrian: You're the eldest!

Alec: Aaah – and the wisest! So I ought to stay here and supervise. From the ground.

Adrian (*grudgingly starting up the ladder with the rope*): Well, I s'pose. Whenever you goes up a ladder things start falling about, don't they?

Alec: Don't know what you mean by that!

Adrian: That's why we're here, isn't it? You tinkering with that bell at Stur...that's what made it fall down and break!

Girls: Butterfingers!

Alec: Ah No! That's because it wasn't fixed on in the first place!

Adrian: And who fixed it on in the first place?

Girls: You did! Butterfingers!

Alec: But that was a long time ago. Wood rots, you see.

Adrian (*climbing ladder without the rope*): You girls, make yourselves useful – go and see where Will's got with that there cart!

*Girls leave and run round back. Alec perches himself on the ledge. Then shines the lantern and gives instructions.*

Alec: Now, come on, right to the top rung! Now throw the rope...

Adrian: Where's the rope?

Alec (*picks it up and hands it up*): Here's the rope.

*Adrian climbs up again*

Adrian: It's ever so high up here...Is that ladder safe?

Alec: Oh yes! Now hurry up, rope over the beam ... that's the way ... now through the pulley ... no, no, that way ... there, that's it ...

Adrian: It's hard, shifting it ...

Alec: Take the strain ...Hold tight! Careful!

*The next speeches are simultaneous.*

Adrian: It's too heavy!

Alec: Nearly there!

Adrian: CAN'T HOLD IT MUCH LONGER!

Alec: I've got the other end! Ease it down!

*Girls rush on, shouting.*

Jessica: We've seen something horrible!

Amy: Over by the yew trees! A huge bird!

Jessica: Black with shiny eyes!

Both: Come and look!

Adrian: I CAN'T HOLD ON! It ...it's slipping!

Alec: WATCH OUT! Run for it!

*All scream and cower as Adrian slides down the ladder. Bell Ringers sound CRASH.  
Freeze in huddle. Pause. Each step forward and talk to the audience in turn, then freeze.*

Amy: After it crashed down, we shone our lanterns on the Knowlton bell. Luckily there was only a small crack where it fell. But as we were looking at it, we saw some writing ...ever so small ... I was the only one who could read it. I remember, it started with "Whoever moves Knowlton's bell ..." And then (pause) the last part was blurred. I tried but I couldn't make it out.

Jessica: It was all Butterfingers' fault the bell dropped. But there was something strange about Knowlton. I knew we shouldn't have gone there. I told them! But they wouldn't listen.

Alec: The cold bit deep into you, that night we came to Knowlton. Will never did turn up with the cart. We stood shivering and grumbling for hours. Frightened someone or something might catch us. In the end we dragged the bell off, and we got the young 'uns to walk backwards in the snow – just to confuse people with the directions of our footprints, see. Well, eventually we made it right down to the river. I reckoned we could float it all the way downstream. So we rolled Knowlton bell to the bank and splash! You'll never guess what happened – it sank!

Adrian: We didn't give up though. Came back a few days later with Will's cart. We got the rope tied to the bell and all heave-hoed to raise it up out of the water. But it wouldn't. I cursed and I swore. But it still wouldn't leave its river bed. They do say that folk from Knowlton came too and tried to raise their bell. And I expect they cursed and they swore. But 'tweren't no use. Rope kept on breaking. Soon after the children of hereabouts began singing this song. "All the devils in Hell, Couldn't raise up Knowlton's bell". You can still hear it – if you listen.

*All off. Bell rings. Children sing.*

Storyteller: Some do say that if you drive along the Wimborne to Cranborne road on a pure snowy night and listen to the sounds in your heart, then you can still hear a distant sound of tinkling bells. And some do say too, that if you are really quiet and know how to shut out the noises of our bustling twentieth century for a while, you can hear other sounds, even voices from the past at Knowlton. But don't you fret, for they are not all bad. Three thousand years have seen many folk come here and go, in joy and in sorrow, in laughter and in tears, in rings of change. We hope our stories haven't done them an injustice, scaring them away for good. We hope we've joined our voices respectfully to that endless circle of life, death and life ...

CHORUS: Revolve, revolve and roundabout  
Roundabout the church and out

Rings of Change September 1994 at Knowlton Rings  
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Running rings round Knowlton's round  
Running rings round Knowlton

ALL (*circling*): 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.

Join us in the dance!

FINALE: CIRCLE DANCE WITH AUDIENCE