

# PERFORMING CROYDON

Folk drama and dance tended to be seasonal, asking for the return of the sun and life, giving thanks for harvests, celebrating the fertility of the ground and improving the fertility of the people. They slowly became more sophisticated and today are generally practised as an entertainment.



Colombian circus, Queen's Gardens, 2004

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The Human Clinic, Whitgift Centre, 2004

# DANCE

**Dance is essentially celebratory and ritualistic. There are set steps to specific types of music, whether morris dancing, Scottish dancing or line dancing. Folk dance thrives in England long after the origins and creators have been forgotten. It's taught in schools (or at least it used to be) and evening classes and forms part of the celebration of cultural and religious events in many of Croydon's communities.**

## MORRIS DANCING

The term 'morris' is believed to derive from 'Moorish', as a new style of dance was introduced in 1336 by teams of professional Moorish sword dancers. They were brought to England by John of Gaunt, who married the daughter of the King of Leon and Castile at a time when the Moors occupied much of present-day Spain. For a while this new style was preeminent, but the term was retained even after the old style was revived.

Morris dancing is said to be a ritual dance of celebration and invocation, the dancers springing up and down to arouse the earth. Set dances were performed on the same day in the same village by groups of men. As the vigorous dances were often in honour of a goddess, they were not chauvinistic in their exclusion of women. Almost constant pregnancy would have meant that women were generally too weak to take part. Today conflict surrounds whether women should be included in morris teams, with the Morris Ring still not allowing mixed troupes.

According to a book by Joan Warwick, a 'Grand Fête al Fresco' at Beulah Spa in August 1836 involved grotesque dancers and an 'Old English Maypole morris dance'.

The custom largely died out as the population became increasingly urban. A revival took place in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of the work of Cecil Sharp, a collector of folk songs who saw his first dance in the Cotswolds in 1899. It is now this style of dancing that is practised widely throughout England, but in a few areas the original dances are still remembered and performed. The dancers would originally have been working men, but the morris revival is now predominantly a middle-class activity and has largely lost its status as a 'popular' culture.

Nowadays morris dancers pop up all over, but not often enough for me. In 1992 the newly extended 'country fayre' in Selsdon Woods promised morris dancers, while dance was a big attraction at Tudor Week in Croydon in 1996, celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Whitgift Foundation. In 1995 Shirley Windmill was opened to the public as part of National Mills Day, with morris dancing featuring among the entertainment. In 1998 over 150 clog and morris dancers were expected to dance in Lloyd Park on Sunday 20 September. The dancers included Old Palace Clog, which was playing host to dancers from across England. They were due to perform outside St Paul's and the Globe Theatre in London the day before.

## NORTH WOOD MORRIS

Croydon has its own morris side in 'North Wood Morris', which first performed back in 1975 when the dancers were part of the Scout movement and they organized an event for a folk festival. As they couldn't find any morris men, they learned a couple of dances. And they haven't stopped since. They reportedly practise every week and are often in search of new dancers and musicians.

Their name comes from the Great North Wood which once covered much of the north of the borough. Elected members of the Morris Ring in 1984, the team performs dances from various English villages, largely variations of the Cotswold morris style, but also Staffordshire dances, Border Morris and Long Sword,



Northwood Morris in the Whitgift Centre, 1996

Being in the Morris Ring, the male side is obliged to dance separately from its female counterpart, Penny Plain, Tuppence Coloured, but other types of show are staged jointly. For instance, at Christmas they perform a mumming play around local pubs.

The male dancers' costumes consist of white shirts and trousers, green waistcoats, bellpads decorated with yellow and green ribbons, and green and yellow baldrics. Worn across the shirt, the baldric was derived from the harness once worn for carrying a sword. The baldric of North Wood Morris bears the badge of an acorn to represent the oak trees of the Great North Wood. They have a picture of a boar they call Nugent, commemorating the wild boar that were common in the woods.

Each year North Wood Morris celebrates the coming of summer in Croydon, keeping up an age-old May Day tradition by dancing on the site of the old Maypole on Crown Hill. Now that tramlines run down the hill, the dancers have presumably had to change the precise spot they use. They welcome the dawn with energetic dancing, and

the Fool goes round with his hat, collecting money for charity from the small crowd of early risers.

In 1984 the May Day audience consisted of family members dragged out of bed and a couple of policemen sitting in the warmth of their patrol car. The dancing began with a routine by the women of Penny Plain, Tuppence Coloured in the Queen's Gardens while

it was still cold and dark, with the men due to do the Crown Hill performance at 6 a.m.

Cakes and champagne featured in the dancers' celebrations of the start of their tenth season, following dancing at dawn

on Crown Hill with an audience of 20, while the milestone of the morris men's 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary in 1996 was marked by a series of special events.

On Hallowe'en 1992 North Wood Morris and a number of guest teams, including the Wild Hunt Morris and some clog dancers, danced outside various haunted pubs and the Whitgift Almshouses in Central Croydon. All told, there were about 80 dancers. Nightfall saw a torch-light procession from Selsdon to Croydon Round Table's firework display in Sanderstead.

New Year's Day also sees the brave men of North Wood Morris in action outside public houses in and around Croydon. In 1985 the featured hostelrys were the Beehive on Woodside Green and the White Bear on Featherbed Lane in Chelsham. By 1995 they were dancing on Boxing Day at the Cricketers in Addington Village, and the White Lion, Warlingham Green, followed by performances on New Year's Day in Tatsfield and Warlingham.

In 2001 North Wood Morris were calling for morris men and women to take part in a nationwide day of traditional English ceremonial dance on 19 May. Unfortunately, the newspapers lost interest and I didn't see any coverage.

The dancers were interviewed in 2004 by the *Croydon Guardian*. They explained Cecil Sharp's involvement in helping the tradition survive, but I bet he didn't dance on the peak of Scafell for charity like our gallant heroes did in 1996.

## MORRIS IN SHIRLEY

A photo from 1910, held by the Croydon Local Studies Department and reproduced in North Wood Morris' 1992

programme, shows the Shirley Village Boys Morris team, about which little is known.

## WILD HUNT MORRIS

In the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1999 the morris dancers claimed that their type of dancing had a longer tradition than the Cotswold variety performed by North Wood Morris. They wore grotesque costumes and masks and had 40 members, many of whom were teachers. The team formed in 1991 and met in the shadow of Bedlams Bank, Merstham.

They believed that the morris had pagan roots in Anglo-Saxon or even Celtic times and that the Cotswold style had been sanitised by the church and Victorians. The Hunt thought that the name 'morris' came from dancers blackening their faces as a form of theatrical disguise, acknowledging that the only black people known in those days would have been the Moors of North Africa, where Moorish dancing came from. Disguise also stopped the local priest from finding out who was taking part in pagan rituals, as sinners were brought before the Clerical Court and dealt with like petty criminals.

They explained that ritual dancing was a form of sympathetic magic. The 'Wild Hunt' occurred in a legend from northern and central Europe about the spectral wild hunt that ranged the fields and woodlands in the night. In English legend they were pursuing a white stag. The Hunt and its leader appeared before King Arthur. In the Saxon heartlands of southern England the Wild Hunt was led by Herne the Hunter. The dancers were accompanied by the Green Man, from another set of legends. He was widely celebrated in The May, the traditional beginning of

spring and the regeneration of life.

A leaflet they once issued tells a slightly different version, mentioning how researchers in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire discovered a variant of morris referred to in the archives as Bedlam Morris. They wore a disguise, mostly blacking their faces, and used sticks as a phallic symbol, never handkerchiefs. Wild Hunt Morris aimed to capture some of the original mystique and magic for the audience. They took their name from the Wild Hunt, led by gods such as the horned Celtic 'lord of animals', Cernunnos. They explained that in English legend the hunt's quarry was the white stag, and in Teutonic legend the hunt's leader was Odin, the quarry being a beautiful maiden.

The Wild Hunt performed at Witchfest at the Fairfield Halls in 2002, where their costumes are said to have alarmed

dance near four street preachers from the USA, who were protesting outside with banners in red and black bearing words like 'sin' and 'death'. This was aimed at distracting the queue of visitors from the commotion the preachers were making with their megaphones.

## OLD PALACE CLOG

Another team of dancers meeting in Croydon is Old Palace Clog. This time, it's women only. They formed in 1985, dancing Lancashire carnival dances from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Each town would develop its own dances for events and ceremonies, so many are named after towns, e.g. Preston and Lytham St Annes. The dances were traditionally danced to brass, but at the moment they tended to have fiddle music. When featured in the *Croydon Advertiser* in 2001 they were working on a dance to be named after Croydon, due to be ready later that year.



Clog dancers, North End

some visitors who must have wandered into the wrong event. At Witchfest 2003 the event organizers sent out morris dancers (the Wild Hunt again?) to

Clog dancing is apparently easy to learn. According to the experts, beginners don't get despondent, as they can be competent in a couple of weeks. They have bells on their shoes and dance with sticks and garlands. Old Palace Clog were aged from 20-50 and reasonably fit. The group was due to have a busy summer, performing at festivals and folk events across the UK and practising at the South Norwood United Reformed Church in Enmore Road.

They had already danced in Spain and

Belgium and were due to star in May 2001 at Kiev's third international festival of theatrical arts. One of the clog dancers was from the Ukraine. and the dancers had been invited by the Department of Culture. Again, I unfortunately didn't spot a follow-up article in the media. In 2002 they could be seen dancing at the Samaritans' fête in Ashburton Park, Addiscombe.

## OTHER DANCE

This is a quick overview of other references to dancing in and around Croydon. There was a display of Scottish dancing for Pentecost in Sanderstead in 2000. There used to be a brass band at Beulah Spa for people to dance to on the lawns. VE Day in 1945 saw dancing on the streets all over Croydon, something the Health and Safety bods would have problems with these days. The Chinese Year of the Rooster was welcomed in with a traditional lion dance at the Clocktower in February 2005. The performers included students from the Croydon Chinese School. They made Chinese lanterns, while a professional Chinese dancer gave a solo performance and music was played on a 'sheng'. The day's festivities were organized by the Council's museum service.

# RELIGIOUS DRAMA

**Our Celtic forebears celebrated the New Year at midwinter: at this time of year whatever was done ritualistically was believed to affect the rest of the year. This belief is reflected even now in our New Year's resolutions. Winter drama aimed to mirror nature and prompt it to come alive again, as in mummers' plays. This is an example of sympathetic magic.**

Drama slowly become more sophisticated. In the Middle Ages dramatic Easter services formed the impetus for mystery plays, whose aim was to teach the scriptures to the illiterate masses who had no access to the Latin Bible. The word 'mystery' refers to the 'mysteries' of the craft guilds who performed the plays, not to any religious aspect.

## THE EASTER SEPULCHRE

The dramatic service of the Easter Sepulchre was similar in origin to mystery or miracle plays. They were both intended to popularize religion at a time of mass illiteracy. The difference here was that this was a religious rite treated dramatically, rather than a popular drama on a religious theme. In some places there would have been people acting as angels, the three Marys, the soldiers, etc. Dialogue was based on the scriptures, to make the story intelligible to the populace.

This service is known to have been performed in All Saints, Carshalton, as evidenced by inventories taken early in the reign of Edward VI referring to 'Item, a peynted cloth for the sepulcre'. The site used was on the north side near the altar, on tombs made to resemble a sepulchre, defined as a small room or monument cut out of the rock or built of stone and intended to house the dead. The place would be draped with curtains and lit by candles.

Against the north wall of the chancel of All Saints is a monument to courtier Nicholas Gaynesford and his wife. However, they were not buried there, as

the tomb was constructed before their deaths and no dates were ever entered. While remote churches may have found it difficult to find a workman to add dates, the proximity of this church to London makes this an unlikely explanation. As the tomb occupies a position commonly used for this service, Gaynesford probably had it erected specially to aid the celebration of Easter.

During vespers on Good Friday a crucifix, generally taken from above the high altar, was carried by the priests, along with the consecrated host, and placed reverentially in the temporary sepulchre. From that time until Easter Day a watch would be kept day and night. Before mass the clergy would remove the host and crucifix and return them to the altar. The bells would ring out and the mass would start with the singing of 'Christ is risen from the dead!'

Christopher Herbert, Bishop of St Alban's, has a database of around 700 known or suspected sepulchres, so Carshalton was not alone. He reports that the Sepulchres were usually found on the north side of the chancel and that benefactors of churches sometimes

incorporated their own tomb into an existing structure. The Dissolution and Reformation saw the destruction of many Easter Sepulchres, especially the wooden ones, and the rites associated with the structures fell into disuse after the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## MYSTERY PLAYS

Mystery plays began in England in the early medieval period as simple playlets with two characters, a dramatic input into the Mass. The script consisted of questions and responses. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century whole cycles of mystery plays were being performed. Only fragments of these now remain. Performed outdoors throughout England, full cycles were put on in cities and short extracts in smaller towns. The York cycle is almost intact and a section from it is performed in that city every four years.

The plays were written at the height of the Marian cult. Their aim was didactic, as the bulk of the population was illiterate. They featured stories taken not just from the Old and New Testaments, but also from the Apocrypha, which is no longer regarded as part of the Bible. However, it provided the stuff of many legends. The various 'Corpus Christi Pageants' were trundled from site to site on heavy carts the day after the Corpus Christi procession and performed to audiences seated on wooden terraces throughout the town.

Each section of the play had its own actors and scenery, with the guilds providing suitable actors. For example, the Flood episode would be performed by shipwrights. In contrast to secular plays of the day, women were allowed to take part. Mary, the Queen of Heaven, would have a gilt face regarded as befitting her position. Today the leading roles of Jesus and Lucifer are

often played by professionals, with Lucifer generally getting star status and the best lines.

Protestantism virtually finished the mystery plays off. Henry VIII was not happy with them, so they ceased to be performed during his reign. Reintroduced under Mary Tudor, a devout Roman Catholic, they were effectively stopped by Elizabeth I. The Queen called in the manuscripts 'for perusal', but they were never returned. Only those guilds which had been suspicious of Elizabeth's intentions had kept copies, and it is these which are performed today.

Nowadays the plays are generally staged by the great cathedral cities, using any extant fragments of their own cycles, or borrowed cycles if the original scripts have been lost. There is no evidence that mystery plays were ever performed in Croydon. However, they were put on virtually everywhere in the Middle Ages by the guilds, so why not Croydon?

Mystery plays were staged in 1991 and 1992 in Croydon. The two plays were totally different in style, although both were acted in the open with audience participation. North Wood Morris and Penny Plain, Tuppence Coloured, two associated morris teams, produced a modern adaptation of the passion plays, written by Tony Harrison, in Addington Park in July 1991. The biblical episodes covered by the script began with the journey to Bethlehem and ended with the crucifixion scene. The performance included songs, music and dance, and the scenery and costumes were simple. As this was a promenade performance, the audience moved about the park with the action, joining in celebratory dancing and forming the crowd in crowd scenes,

following Jesus to the top of 'Calvary' with his cross.

The Upper Terrace at Crystal Palace provided an adaptable setting for the Ridgeway Theatre's Easter 1992 performance of the Passion Plays, adapted by Mike Punter from the York Cycle. The play began with the fall of Lucifer, moving rapidly forward to the Creation and Adam and Eve's fall from grace. Switching to the New Testament, Jesus was seen wandering in the wilderness being tempted by Lucifer, who was then banished to hell. Various miracles and prophecies illustrated the well-known story, leading to Jesus's betrayal by Judas. Following the trial Jesus was crucified for treason while soldiers gambled at the foot of the cross. Descending into Hell, Jesus rescued Adam, Eve and the entire human race and ascended to Heaven, having defeated Lucifer once and for all.



Mystery play, North Wood Morris

# SECULAR DRAMA

**What is regarded as secular now may originally have had a religious element, as in mumming. Mumming is now performed by secular groups, often folklorists, and mostly in pubs. You can't get more secular than that.**

## MUMMING

Mummers plays are a form of ritual folk drama revolving around death and resurrection. There is a set formula with traditional characters and costumes. Many sources say 'mummer' is a Middle English word of Germanic origin, linked to the word 'mime', meaning a dumb show, i.e. a play without words. Another source may be the French 'momeur' or the Roman 'pantomimus'. In some areas of England the participants are called 'guisers', linked to the word 'disguise'.

Whatever the origin of the word, most ancient mummers plays were performed in Anglo-Saxon areas, but they contain Celtic elements in disguise. And they also acquired words somewhere along the line. As with morris dancing, there is male-only tradition, any women's parts being played by a man in drag. Mumming is performed at midwinter, when the old year dies and the new begins. The theme is therefore death and resurrection, based on the idea that whatever you do ritualistically at that time will affect the rest of the year. This is an example of sympathetic magic. The aim was to mirror nature, prompting nature to do what was depicted in the drama, i.e. come alive again after the darkness of the long winter.

In the ancient tradition disguise is necessary to help the actor go out of himself and link with the mysterious. Some of the magic might be taken away

from the ritual if actors were recognized by the onlookers. Old records have the actors dressed in green to represent the evergreen growth cycle.

These ancient plays survived into the 19th century, performed in public houses by groups of young working men. Like many traditional morris dances, they died out in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the teams were wiped out by the First World War. The plays have since been revived by people looking for links with the past and wishing to mark the passing of the seasons.

According to the Surrey Archaeological Collections (Vol. 58 from 1961), the Folklore Society had records of over 800 mummers plays in Great Britain, but only 3 from Surrey (Barnes, Horsell, Thames Ditton). More recently, Mrs Hodge's Mummers are recorded as having performed a mummers play featuring St George and Turkish Knight for charity outside pubs in Caterham, Warlingham, Bletchingly, Oxted and Godstone during the festive season at the end of 1985. And 1993 saw them performing a five-minute play in Caterham pubs, again in aid of charity. The *Croydon Guardian* noted that they had been active for 13 years. A 1992 leaflet for North Wood Morris says that they, too, perform mummers' plays at local pubs at Christmas. Their leaflet mentions an account from the time of Henry VIII, held by the Surrey County Records Office, that shows that morris

dancers performed at the end of George Street at the May Day festivities and also performed a mumming play. Mumming seems to be making a bit of a comeback.

Edgar Browne, son of Dickens' illustrator, Phiz, described mummers in Thornton Heath as young people dressed in home-made costumes 'of divers shapes and colours'. They were decorated with strips of paper sewn into the garments to imitate streamers. Each performer stood in the light of a lantern and 'announced his name and qualities in doggerel before joining in the dialogue'. The plays were very old, and Browne writes that the performers did not understand all of what they were doing. If you want an idea of the words, the following website reproduces a sample script recorded in 1900: <http://www.christmas-time.com/mummers.html>. The source of the script is unclear.

Identifiable characters were added as the plays became formalized into what we now recognize as mumming. Revivals include St George, a Turkish knight, the Doctor and various minor characters such as a Christianized horned god named Beelzebub, and Jack Sweep, a traditional figure sweeping away evil, but now collecting money, often with a pan. Jolly Jack, a more recent addition, is also a begging figure.

The plays were originally in the form of mime, but words were added when they were Christianized. The language is a 16<sup>th</sup> century-style mix of prose and poetry, boast and bombast. The doctor's dialogue shows the influence of 18<sup>th</sup> century fairground quackery, but his origins are said to be in the traditional medicine man.

Unlike some customs, mumming was not suppressed by the Puritans. St George was the patron saint of the Crusades, so it is natural that he would fight a Turkish knight, the two representing stylised 'good' and 'evil'. However, most plays have the villainous knight being killed, although strictly speaking it should be the hero, St George, as the whole point of the play is the revival of the good by the Doctor.

## THE KYNGHAM GAME

In the early 1500s the Kyngham Game was performed at Crown Hill. The game, traditional to the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, was so popular in its day that the players were often sent along the Thames by barge to perform at sites from Walton to Richmond. It comprised words and dancing, but the words were lost long ago, possibly destroyed during the reign of Elizabeth I or the Reformation.

It is known to have been distinct from the King Game from Cologne or the May Game, which featured a May Queen. It was played on the 'specially appointed' Kyngham Day, which in 1506-07 fell during Whitsuntide.

The game involved a king and queen with nine attendants, of whom seven were dancers, but these were not ordinary morris dancers. The Kyngham Game Window in Kingston upon Thames shows the costumes of the characters, who have been shown to resemble figures in a Flemish engraving made by Israel van Mechel around 1460-80. The characters also appeared on cards for games and fortune-telling. The panes are laid out in the following order:

fool	Moor	Spaniard
franklin	maypole	Minstrel
Peasant	King of May	Lover
Disard	Queen of May	friar

The fool is depicted wearing a pointed hat resembling a church steeple and gives an imitation of the bishop's blessing with a staff bearing a pig's head and donkey's ears. This was the fools' retaliation for the Church's denunciation of them as thieves and vagabonds. Fools had once enjoyed great freedom and high positions at court, but many had been dismissed by this time and were forced to become strolling players and minstrels.

The maypole in the centre of the window bears two flags. One depicts the cross of St James. His festival was on 1 May and he was probably the patron saint of the May games and morris dancers. The other flag is that of St George, popular with mummers. The gillyflower held in the Queen's left hand was a symbol of summer. The disard was the comedian, contortionist and mimic, the word signifying 'eccentric', but his precise role is not known. Perhaps he was just meant to be entertaining.

### LIFE ON STAGE

Dramas have also sprung up now and then to commemorate people or comment on events. These include plays about Grim the Collyer, one of

Croydon's infamous charcoal burners. There was an age-old antagonism between the charcoal burners and the townsfolk, and 'Grim the Collyer of Croydon' was a popular drama that reminded audiences of the dirty, devilish and scurrilous character who had (allegedly) ruined their woods.

A celebrating the life of 'tragic heroine pilot' Amy Johnson was staged at the Warehouse Theatre in Croydon in 2001, marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her disappearance over the Thames Estuary. *Lone Flyer* by Abe Morris featured music from the 1920s and 1930s. Her historic solo flight to Australia in 1930 started and ended at Croydon Airport.

Paper Jack featured in a play staged in Hampstead, north London. It was written by Dennis Saunders of Thornton Heath, who remembered talk of Paper Jack from his schooldays. He was a familiar figure in Croydon, particularly in Surrey Street market and Waddon, where he held outdoor Sunday School. The newspapers carried photos of actor Bob Hewis in Surrey Street, dressed in newspapers for his role.

Live theatre formed part of the

celebrations for the opening of Shirley Windmill in May 1995 as part of National Mills Day. A Council grant and a donation from Selsdon Park Hotel made entertainments possible. This was the first time the mill had been open in 140 years.

North Wood Morris has put on plays to critical acclaim, in Croydon and elsewhere (notably the Minack Theatre in Cornwall). This is in addition to their 1991 mystery play in Addington Village and their staging of *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens in the Stanley Halls in 1992. And we mustn't forget panto, that New Year tradition. Strangely, the October Fair that was finally scrapped in 1868 had included pantomime.

# STREET THEATRE

**Street theatre came to Croydon in July 2004. Before that, all I'd seen was buskers on North End and the celebrations of Tudor Week in 1995.**

## SUMMER FESTIVAL

The 2004 Croydon Summer Festival went under the name of 'Outside Now!' Basically, it was international street theatre featuring performers advertised as coming from France, Germany, Colombia, West Africa, New Zealand and the UK. The central Croydon sites where performances could be seen included the Whitgift Centre, the Queen's Gardens and North End.

Unfortunately, the day was rainy and very windy, which stopped some outdoor performances, such as the Spanish tumblers, and reduced the audience for others. The *Croydon Guardian* reported that crowds were down on 2003 (a festival I seem to have missed entirely). However, those who braved the weather were in for a rare treat.

An inflatable pig was set up outside Taberner House by the Whalley Range All Stars, and people queued to get the chance to have pigtails tied to them and peer inside the sow through transparent 'teats'. In the Queen's Gardens people could climb inside an inflatable cylinder to listen to ambient music, played by musicians outside the cylinder. A company named by the newspapers as 'Moving People's The History Men' used puppetry and visual effects in their Whitgift Centre 'Human Clinic' show analysing the human species. This attracted large crowds to watch the puppet doctors examine skeletons with strange laboratory equipment. I missed French comedians giving a show in a classic car in North End, as reported by the *Croydon Guardian*, and also whatever was due to happen at the mock-up of roadworks.



Whalley Range's inflated pig

The main afternoon attraction for me was a circus from Colombia called 'Circo para Todos', playing in the Queen's Gardens. The skies had looked leaden all afternoon, but it wasn't until the balletic acrobat performed at the end of the show that the skies finally opened and the audience reluctantly fled for shelter.

All the performers were former street children who had been recruited to the El Samán circus school. They developed their own routines and made their costumes, relying heavily on recycled materials such as old tyres,

which unfortunately seemed to chafe in tender places.



Colombian circus

The circus took a while to get going, but started with gods entering the arena on stilts. The performers acted out Colombia's history, from pre-Colombian days through the Conquest and on to the troubled present-day. The acrobat at the end represented hope for the future.

## OTHER STREET ENTERTAINMENT

In September 2004 Croydon Council's Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport, Stuart Collins, was reported as saying that he had been out of the country on holiday when Croydon's hot-air balloon festival was cancelled three days before the event was due to take place, because of unexpected downpours. He confessed to having been disappointed,

but said he couldn't have done anything about the weather. A lot of effort had gone into the organization of the event, but there was always a risk with outdoor events. He referred to the *Croydon Advertiser's* delight in pointing out that the event had been intended to replace the Selsdon Country Show that the Council had also cancelled. Mr Collins mentioned that the first balloon event they had planned had had to be cancelled due to the foot-and-mouth outbreak and pointed out that the Mela and World Party in Lloyd Park had been successful and that there was a great acrobatic show in the Queen's Gardens, all 'blessed with fine weather'. If he's referring to the Colombian circus, was he also out of the country for the downpour? It would be nice if senior Council members actually took time to attend their events or got themselves properly briefed.

Buskers were common on North End for a while, along with charity stalls and religious and other campaigns. In 2005 the Council completed £350,000 of environmental works on the pedestrianized street. Buskers had been banned during the works, but performers were now being permitted again provided they followed the new protocol governing all activity in the street. There is now a management advisory group made up of representatives from local business, the police and the Council. It will assess applications from entertainers, markets, filmmakers etc., and is intended to enhance North End's 'pedestrian ambience'.