



# Around The World With Mr. Punch

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## The Clown Prince of Spin



It's always nice to keep tradition alive - especially the tradition of using puppets to poke fun at our political masters. Anyway, that was the thought behind letting Tony Blair appear as *Tony The Clown* at the Aberystwyth Punch and Judy Festival last August. Letting him take over the plate-spinning routine in the show provided the perfect reason for introducing him as *Tony, the Clown Prince of Spin* and thus firmly aiming at his government's perceived weakness as being strong on spin and short on substance. Coming, as it did, during the legal enquiry into the events surrounding the tragic death of weapons expert Dr. David Kelly and the so-called "sexing-up" of the British government dossier on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction it had a more pointed (and poignant) topicality than when the

puppet routine was conceived. The puppet was made by Brian Davey at the request of your Editor (who did the plate-spinning) and drew additional media attention to the Festival by being featured in at least one mass circulation UK daily paper as well as on TV.

Punch 'Profs' and partners performing that week-end were Dan Bishop, Rod Burnett, Clive Chandler, Tony Clarke, Brian & Alison Davey and Glyn & Mary Edwards. These were augmented by the Walking Tall Theatre Company's troupe of Giant Dancing Punch and Judy figures (Punch, Judy, the baby, and Clown Joey) accompanied by the Jumbo Jazz Band. Also on hand were the Bostin' Arts Puppet Workshop running a free puppet making stall for passers-by. Special overseas guest was Andras Lenardt from Hungary with his inimitable *Mikropodium* theatre presenting micro-scale puppets of jewel like quality.

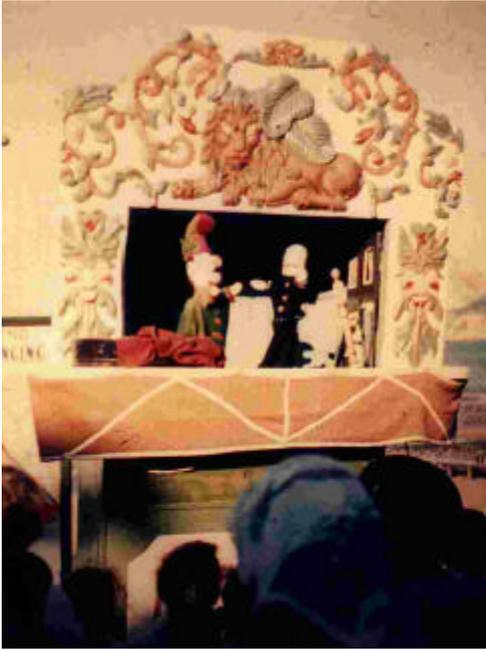
The event was described by Aberystwyth as "wall-to-wall Punch and Judy" and took place mainly along the seafront promenade (which still has traditional donkey rides). An evening event in a small local theatre saw the College perform to a full house with a mixture of puppet routines plus question and answer sessions to an enthusiastic audience.

The Festival was organised by Jim Griffiths, Town Clerk of Aberystwyth, with Clive Chandler of the Punch and Judy College of Professors. It attracted some 5,000 visitors to the town over the August Bank Holiday and was short-listed for an award by the Welsh Tourist Authority. If anyone thinks that Punch and Judy are not welcome at the seaside these days - let them consider Aberystwyth and reflect.

Jolly  
Holidays  
and a  
Happy  
New Year  
to all our  
readers



# PUNCH AND THE UK LICENSING BILL



***Prof. John Codman's celebrated Llandudno  
Punch Show of yesteryear***

Punch and Judy performers - along with puppeteers and other artists or entertainers working in their traditional areas in the UK - have found a great deal of extra red tape surrounding their activities over the past few years. Starting with the ubiquitous Public Liability Insurance requirements introduced a few years back there soon followed the need to fill in Risk Assessment Forms in order to comply with various provisions of the Health and Safety Inspectorate when performing in public. Later came the requirement to have a certificate stating that an official Criminal Records Bureau check had been run for the purposes of gaining clearance for working with children and other vulnerable members of society. Not all of these represent nanny state bureaucracy gone mad. Some are a genuine response to societies changing attitudes towards the care of the young and the scare of paedophilia and others (we Brits blame the Yanks!) are due to the increase in the culture of litigation. 'Ambulance chasing' lawyers (an unknown phenomenon in the UK until very recently) have caused a sea-change in public attitude to risk - and the

rewards of suing for damages at the sprain of a wrist.

And then came the Licensing Bill.

This new piece of legislation currently undergoing a governmental 'consultation process' (Hah!) before becoming UK law is complex and contentious. It proposes to update radically the entertainment laws previously updated in the 1960s and only tinkered with since. Whether it represents a ferocious unleashing of further red tape that will interfere in such innocuous pastimes as pub singalongs or whether it represents a landscape of new opportunities for working performers is hotly contended. Equity, the actors and entertainers union, believes it represents new opportunities with the exception of one or two areas for which it is seeking exemption.

Punch and Judy Shows are one of those areas.

At this point the story veers off into the bizarre and we need to go back to the 1960s. At this time The Lord Chamberlain's Office held sway as

it had done for centuries and plays were subject to official censorship (by means of the dreaded 'blue pencil') by the functionaries in his department. The 1960s legislation was designed to sweep away this anachronism and bring the whole field up to date. Various new statutes were enacted about where entertainments could be mounted and what licenses and permissions the various premises would need. Along with this went various categories in which different types of performance were defined so that everyone knew what was what when actually seeing that they law was carried out correctly.

These categories are being carried forward to the new Licensing Bill - and one of them defines the Punch and Judy Show as being carried out in 'premises'.

In the intervening years there have been no cases of any town council or other similar licensing authority actually treating a Punch and Judy booth as 'premises' requiring a license - but that is not to say that this state of affairs will continue. Cash-strapped local government is under a legal obligation to maximise its income. If it overlooks taking money from Punch and Judy it will be in breach of its duty. Hence the fight to secure exemption.

The government doesn't - of course - talk directly to Punch and Judy performers (although individuals can in theory petition their MP to make the case on their behalf). Serious discussions are carried out with bodies such as Equity and Arts Council England - and the Punch and Judy performers of England have good contacts with both.

Equity is making the case for Punch and Judy with vigour - and



**Postcard of Ryde on the Isle of Wight (date unknown). The side of the booth also advertises 'marionettes'.**

we expect no less from Arts Council England.

The preceding information sets out the background to the story. The extracts below (from the a letter by Punch and Judy College of Professors to their contact at Arts Council England) explains what it could mean in practice if exemption is not gained.

*"It's a simple message to the effect that the final half a dozen or so beach Punch and Judy Shows in the UK will be put out of business unless they are exempted from the provisions of the Bill. This may not seem a great deal - but if it were the last half dozen exponents of Hebridean mouth music (or some similar cultural curiosity of long pedigree) you'd find musicologists equally up in arms and rightly so. You'll know that The College takes a pro-active stance on the best interests of the Punch and Judy tradition and we trust that ACE can help us.*

*I would imagine that 99.9% of Punch and Judy performances will not be affected by the provisions of the new bill as the tradition of Punch and Judy as primarily a busking entertainment has long given way to Punch and Judy as a pre-booked attraction at various venues. These venues are always appropriately licensed. But to keep a seaside pitch alive (and it is the*

*seaside which is the perceived cultural stereotype as to where you'll find Punch and Judy) a different set of factors come into play. It has long been a bone of contention that seaside borough councils will make performers tender for a concession in the same manner as ice-cream vans and donkey rides. Having to pay for a 'pitch' - and often then having to compete for custom with the same council's programme of free summer entertainments which paradoxically may well contain street theatre - has virtually extinguished Punch and Judy at the seaside. It's a commercially fragile proposition at the best of times and any additional outgoings in the way of a license fee will - I am convinced - be its death knell. Although the Minister's stated intention is to encourage local authorities to license public open*

*spaces such as seaside promenades, if any resulting costs are passed on to the performers it will have the same terminal effect.*

*If this government is to go down in social history as the one which finally ended a much loved seaside tradition it should at least be made fully aware of what it is doing, and it needs organisations of the weight and provenance of Equity and ACE to draw it to their attention.*

Needless to say there have been mis-informed scare stories in sections of the UK press to the effect that the Licensing Bill will put an end to Punch and Judy. This is manifestly not so - but the long pedigree of the show has resulted in the quirky situation of it being classed as a play which requires premises for a performance - rather than as 'an entertainment' (such as a street-entertainer might provide) which does not.

UK Profs should - I suppose - be thankful that they don't receive funding from central government. Were this to be the case a whole fresh set of paperwork would descend requiring each Prof to provide 'statistical evaluation and monitoring feedback' along with detailed information about 'performance indicators and ethnic monitoring'. Don't ask!



**Unidentified seaside show of recent times.**

# MARI LWYD

*There seems to be a Welsh theme within this issue - although your Editor's Welsh ancestry plays no conscious part in this. It is as well, however, to remind North American readers that Wales (like Quebec) has a political party with aspirations to Welsh separation from England. There is already a devolved Welsh Regional Assembly and the Welsh language is alive and kicking. Indeed at least one Prof at the recent Aberystwyth Festival was dissuaded by locals from flying the red white and blue UK national flag in the heartland of the Welsh Red Dragon flag. The Welsh are Celts and still resent conquest by the Romans and the subsequent Anglo-Saxon tribes. Nevertheless, Mr. Punch has made himself at home in Wales and has even penetrated one of the more obscure corners of Welsh folklore as the following article indicates.*

The Mari Lwyd custom has been described as "a pre-Christian horse ceremony which may be associated with similar customs spread over many parts of the world"..... and it was associated in North Wales with both Christmas and the New Year. It is likely, however, that visits by the Mari Lwyd party were made over a period of several days in each case and that the association with any particular day during the Christmas season had become exceedingly tenuous.

The Mari Lwyd.... was carried about and the first intimation often received was the sight of

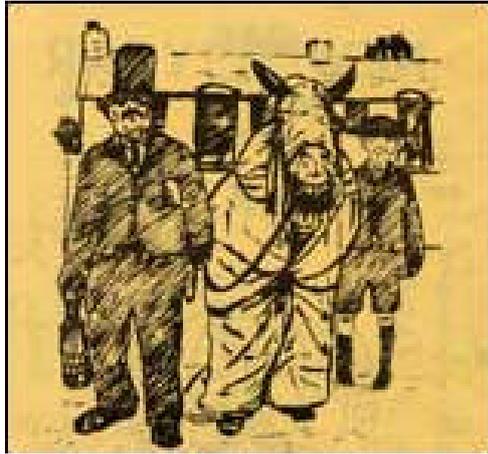


this prowling monster peeping around into the room or sometimes shewing his head by pushing it through an upstairs window.... when the procession approached a house it was intended to visit, the leader tapped the door while the party sang the traditional rhymes..... The party outside engaged in a battle of wits with the householders and sang extempore verses to which those indoors were obliged to reply in a similar.... The Mari Lwyd then entered the house and paid special attention to the womenfolk, nudging, playing, neighing and biting then, besides talking... Having sung, danced and played about the party sat down to food and drink.

These carrying horses are still believed to bring good luck and fertility to the houses they visit and those who are touched by them. It is therefore very strange that, in Wales, sometimes a singing contest takes place between the residents of the house and the Mari Lwyd party, apparently designed to keep the luck-bringing visitors out. The Mari Lwyd men were normally



blacked up. They were dressed, not only in their best but decorated with ribbons. The Mari also was decorated, being the pride of the village. An article by Cadrawd in 'Cymru' 1912, refers to a party of revellers calling themselves 'Hoen Dawnsywyr'. They carried a Mari Lwyd, who must be able to dance a jig. There was also a Punch and Judy. They had no music, but Punch beat time with his cudgel, while they danced. They would end by gripping each other's wrists and whirling round "with such velocity that they would end up quite dazed." Before Y Fari was admitted, those inside would sit back around the walls. The Mari Lwyd and her leader would come first, then the Punch and Judy side by side. The leader would then drop the reins and perform a step dance with Punch and Judy. These two were dressed as nearly as possible, like the popular puppets. In Mumbles, one member would play the part of coachman and whip the horse until it slowly died. This is unusual, although there is ritual beating of the



Gwasseilwyr and of Punch beating Judy. According to a report in *Archeologia Cambrensis* 1888, work of the Mari Lwyd originally belonged to another party, the Gwasseilwyr

We have also included in our researches such Seasonal customs as the Mari Lwyd. An example of this carrying horse was taken to the Folkestone Festival in 1961 by the Llangollen dancers. Kent has a similar Hooden Horse, which is carried round at Christmas time. It is smaller than the Mari and has a wooden head with champing jaws. It is covered with a dark brown horse cloth and is generally in a crouching position; a striking contrast to the tall white Mari Lwyd. The unrehearsed meeting between these horses was an amusing episode to an otherwise dull festival.

The Mari Lwyd is a primitive type of seasonal horse, carried round at Christmas time. It consists of a horse's skull, set on a pole and carried upright by a man, completely hidden by a white cloth. The impressive example at St.Fagans has bottle ends set in the eye sockets, ears made of cloth and profusely decorated with ribbons. A variation from Pembroke is made of cloth and

stuffed with straw and carried on a pitchfork. This, according to Marie Trevillian, was known as 'Aderyn bec lwyd' or 'Bwca Lwyd' (Bird with the grey beak or grey puck). The name 'Mari Lwyd' has been subjected to several interpretations. The most convincing is that from Dr.Peate, who suggests that it is simply the grey mare. Antiquarians have called it the blessed Mary and have given it all sorts of Biblical associations, such as the flight to Egypt, Balaam and the Ass, and the donkey turned out of its stall to make way for the birth of Christ. But its origin goes much further back, to prehistoric times. The horse and stag has long been regarded as symbols of fertility. A palaeolithic drawing in

Pinhole Cave, Derbyshire, shows a man wearing a horse's mask, while those drawings in the caves of the Dordogne and Northern Spain show that the veneration of these and other herd animals was one of the earliest known beliefs. The Christian missionaries tried to stamp out these pagan practices and what they could not eliminate, they finally adopted. Hence the Biblical interpretations and co-ordination with the festivals of the Church.

The Mari Lwyd should not be confused with the Hobby or Tourney horse, which owes its form to the age of chivalry. This consisted of a horse and rider; the body and trappings of the horse being slung from the rider's shoulders. The Mari Lwyd belongs to the same family as the Kentish Horse, the wild white horse of Ireland and the wild horse of the Cheshire souling play. These carrying horses are still believed to bring good luck and fertility to the houses they visit and those who are touched by them.



# THE BACK PAGE

## EDITORIAL

Readers will have noticed the slightly truncated length of this issue which is due to a number of reasons - some trivial; others of more moment.

On the trivial side the shortage of material is due to carelessness. Your Editor shamefacedly admits to having mislaid beyond the call of duty a couple of articles held over for publication. Less trivial, however, is the underlying cause of this error: the current workload of the Editor whose hands are kept pretty full by Mr. Punch and a variety of other wooden headed wonders.

Nevertheless the future is looking very positive as Diane (Prof. Freshwater) Rains has agreed to Co-Edit the Journal. This will be part of a general makeover of the WorldWide Friends web presence which - at the time of writing is ranked No 1 by Google if you search the web for Punch and Judy)

The Journal can only be as good as its contents, however, and readers are urged to forward any articles or snippets on Punch related matters. In our incarnation as a printed Journal there were many more technical and performing issues submitted for publication than is currently the case. These are particularly welcome.

All correspondence (as ever) to editor@punchandjudy.org

## PUNCH USA

UK residents (and even Profs) often register amazement at the existence of a Punch and Judy tradition in the USA. Here then are one or two snippets from a recent historical timeline published by the *Puppeteers of America* (and reprinted here with all due acknowledgements). The first entry below is also the first recorded example of a puppet show in America.

**1745** *The Pennsylvania Gazette* advertises "an agreeable comedy or tragedy by changeable figures of two feet high....a merry dialogue between Punch and Joan his wife."

**1828** *The Collier-Cruikshank* version of "Punch and Judy" is published in London and a production based on that text is performed in New York by Mr. Matthews.

**1850** *Punch and Judy* follow the *Gold Rush* west performing at Sandy Bar, near San Fransisco,

"in a rough building of pine poles covered with canvas"

**1876** So popular had *Punch and Judy* become in post-civil-war United States that in the fall of 1876 "not one unemployed *Punch and Judy* performer could be found in New York City"

**1895** As a young man, *Harry Houdini* is hired to work in circus sideshows doing magic and playing *Punch and Judy*.

Considering this last entry, maybe David Blaine could be tempted to take up *Punch*?

## The Swazzler

The *Punch and Judy* Fellowship Newsletter (named *The Swazzler*) has a new Editor in Paul Jackson.

Paul will be known to readers of the Journal as an occasional contributor in the days when we were a printed publication and will wish to join in sending him best wishes on his new (and inevitably time-consuming) undertaking.

## toby's tail piece

Plucked from cyberspace and forwarded to the Journal came this posting to an online forum. "**Paul Zaloom does a very interesting *Punch and Judy* show, although it's *Punch and Jimmy*, with a gay/queer/homosexual *Punch*. There will be an interview with Zaloom about this in the next issue of *Puppetry International*, which is focused on sex and puppets.**" (The mailto address that was attached was: owner-puptcrit@lists.village.Virginia.EDU in case anyone wants to track down further info.)

Personally I'd always thought that **Punch and Joey** would have been the neater gay storyline for anyone wishing to create one. The puppets are already in the cast and most of the set routines would still work. The 'outing' of *Punch* in an "Oh Yes he is - Oh No he isn't" exchange would no doubt be a popular piece of audience participation and plenty of publicity surely awaits the first traditional Prof to opt for a gay 'Kissy Kissy' sequence.

Glyn Edwards