



Medieval mystery plays originated in the 10th century and were performed largely by the community itself. They helped to clarify and popularise the word of the Bible as well as provide entertainment. The term 'Mystery' was derived from the Latin 'mysterium' which means 'handicraft' or 'office'. The various trade guilds within a community would each take a story to present. The string or series of plays played one after another were known as a 'Cycle'. Although they were originally performed in Latin and strictly supervised by the clergy (who were not permitted to act themselves), the local vernacular gradually took over and non-traditional elements and humour were introduced.

This is intended to be very much a community event but in the place of 'guilds' the aim is for local amateur dramatic groups to provide the entertainment. Chris Lambert, head of drama at Theale Green Community School, has rewritten ten stories from a modern viewpoint. The school is providing the venue – its playing field! This features some grass covered mounds which provide a natural stage as well as a partly concealed space to emerge from. The audience is encouraged to move along in promenade style from mound to mound as each group takes its turn to perform.

The plays are:

1. Adam and Eve
2. Noah's Ark
3. The Nativity
4. The Slaughter of the Innocents
5. The Wedding at Cana
6. The Garden of Gethsemane
7. The Trial
8. The Crucifixion
9. The Harrowing of Hell
10. The Resurrection

A mixture of tragic and humorous tales to choose from. All are short (five pages) and can be learnt or read from the script. The narrative lines can particularly suit being read out. They can be plotted in as few as three rehearsals. A cast of thirty could all play a part but a troupe of four or five could easily manage in multiple roles.

The traditional format involved a chorus or group of narrators with individuals in principle roles and 'tableaux' employed to illustrate significant moments in the story. Sometimes a timely song was

introduced (something for the musical societies to think about!). Everything else is up for grabs: with or without costume? Stark simplicity or heavy on props and scenery? What style or genre?