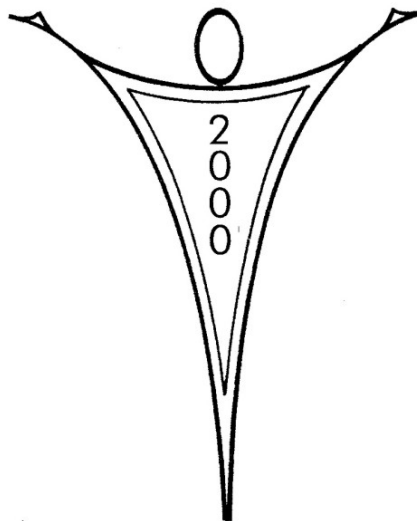




Millennium year 2000

*What it meant for the Charlton Kings
Community Players and what came after ...*



Whose Birthday Did You Say?

The year began with the staging of a major community production being the portrayal of the life of Christ to celebrate the millennium.

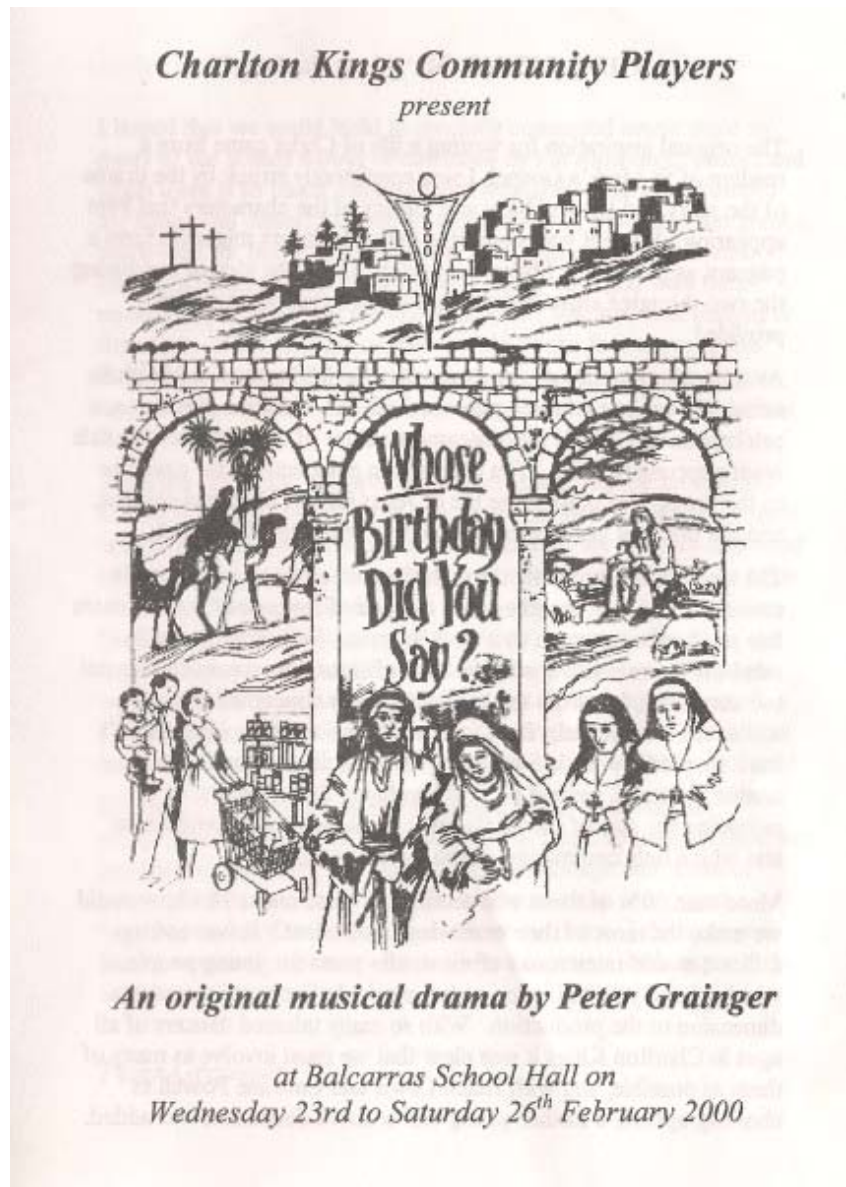
Preparations took over a year from the writing of the script, its presentation to the community, to casting and rehearsals. There was an amazing response and well over a hundred people turned up for auditions. Such a big production also needed dedicated production teams and work was shared between many different people.

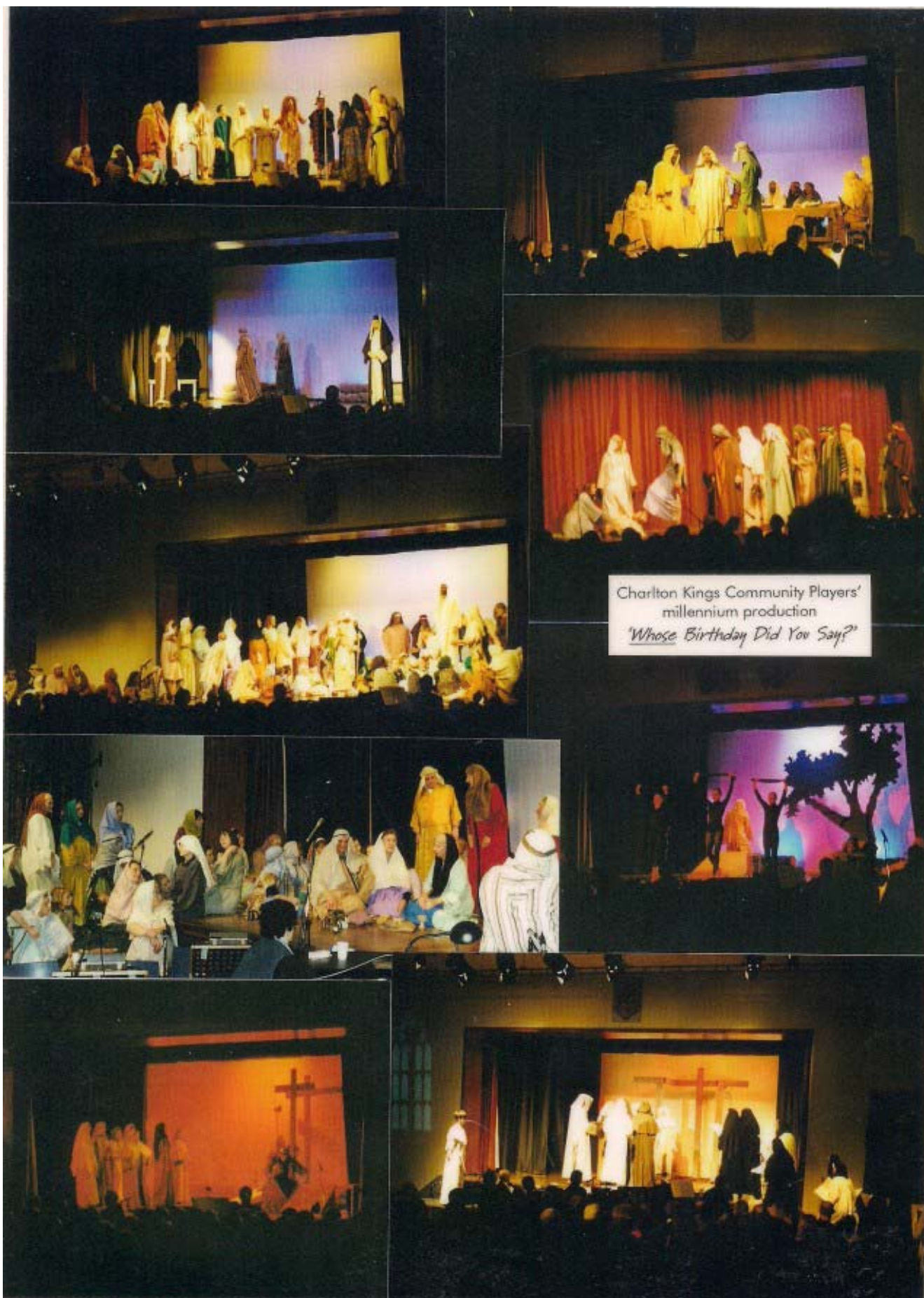
The music and songs were composed by members of the community and the production included various dance scenes blending with the storyline.

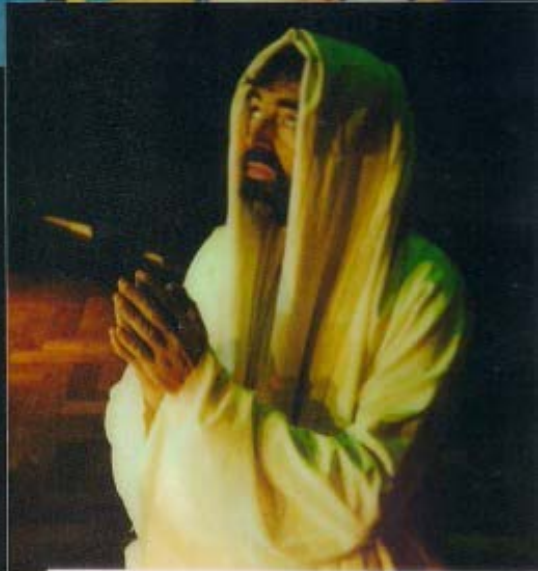
The play ran for four nights and a matinée to provide a wide opportunity for members of the public to see the production. It attracted a wide ranging and enthusiastic audience and various donations were made to local charities and projects from the proceeds. There were many speaking parts and also opportunities for walk-on parts. No-one was turned away and a rôle was found for them.

Costuming the production was one of the major tasks and was undertaken by a team of people. Garments of lovely desert colours, traditional style middle eastern robes and head dresses were constructed or were found from other sources. There were rich colours for some costumes and more pastel shades for particular scenes. These were required for children as well as adults and a variety of fabrics were used. Then there were the specials needed for particular characters.

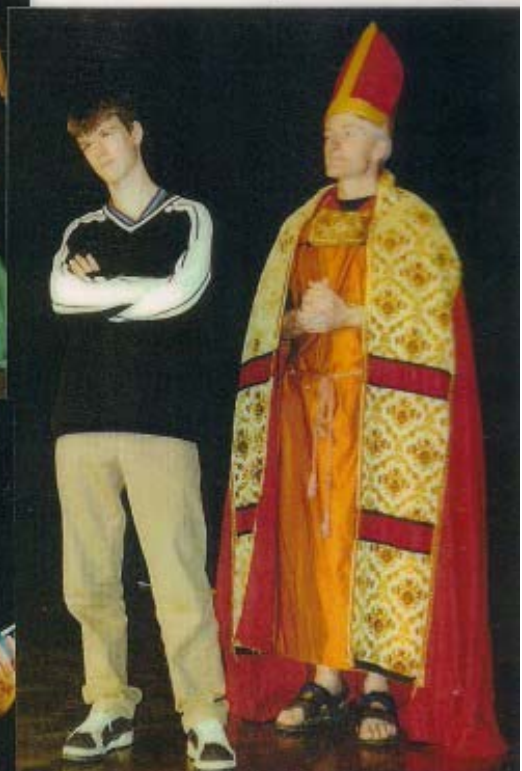
A Christ image was created to represent the production's spiritual and Christian dimension, and keepsakes were provided in the form of a small glass vase bearing the image and a metal brooch. A professional video was made from its live performance.







Charlton Kings Community Players' millennium production
'Whose Birthday Did You Say?'



Copyright Peter Grainger

What happened at Easter 2000?

The Charlton Kings Community Players (CKCP) have been performing street theatre in Charlton Kings on Good Friday since 1992. This supports the Charlton Kings Churches 'Walk of Witness' which starts at Holy Apostles on the outskirts and progresses through the village to different stopping places where a hymn is sung. The street theatre is performed in the Library Precinct, one of the stopping places. A cross is often placed on Timbercombe Hill and the walkers return afterwards to the Charlton Kings Baptist Church for refreshment. Drama presented might be written by local people or from other organisations offering suitable pieces.

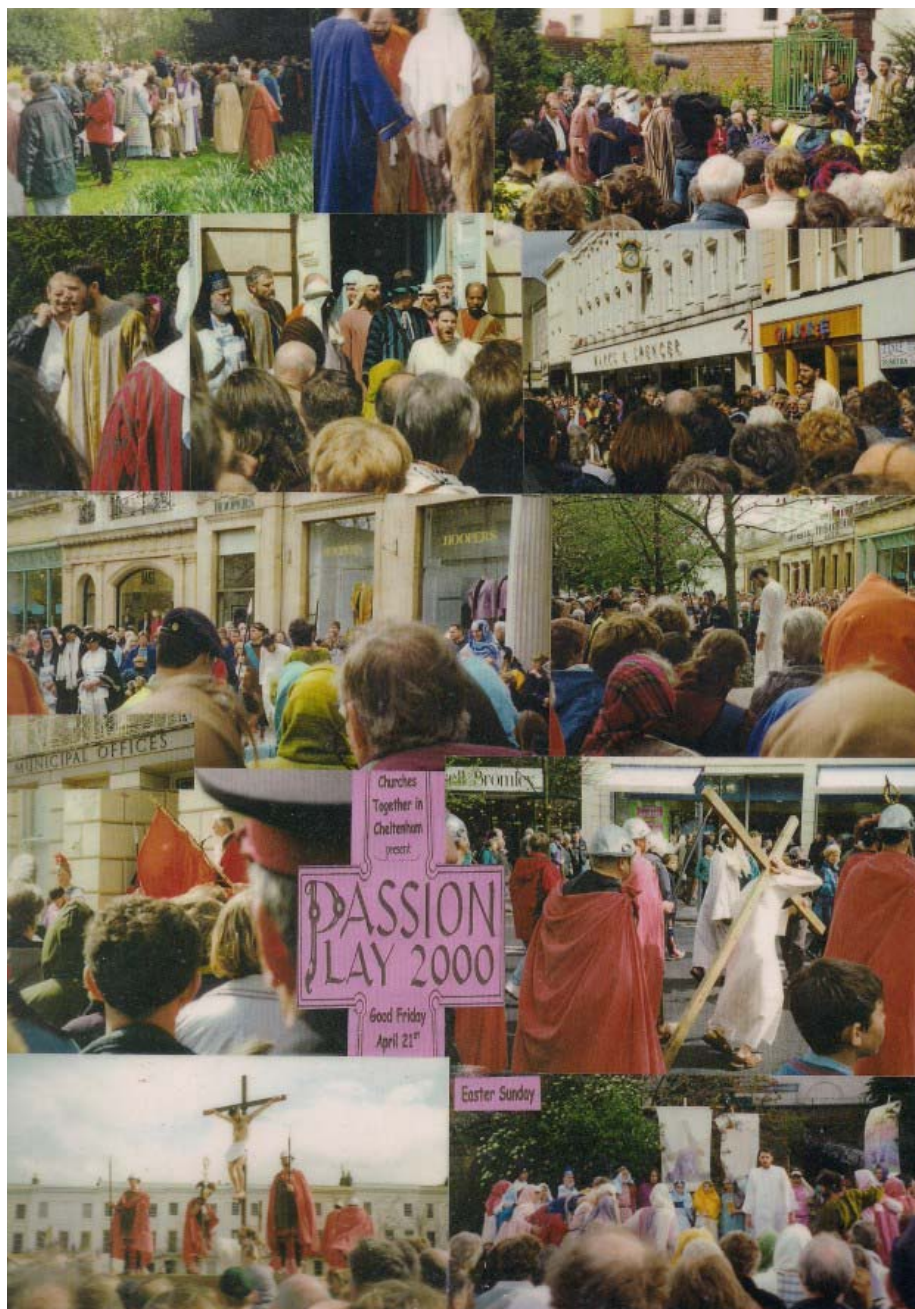
'The Light of the World' 1996

Riding Lights (Paul Burbridge, Murray Watts) Collection: *'Best Time to Act'*



At the millennium *Churches Together in Cheltenham* were responsible, in particular, for two initiatives. One was the production of a Passion Play in the town drawing on the involvement of local churches and the other a festival at Pentecost. The churches in Prestbury also wished to share their well established Passion Play within Cheltenham for the millennium. The Cheltenham Play had five acts with four delivered on Good Friday and the fifth on Easter Sunday morning.

The Players chose to support this by not putting on local street theatre leaving people free to be part of the Cheltenham Passion Play or follow it through Cheltenham. Various people joined the crowds following the action through the streets and in Cheltenham parks. It was estimated that some 600 people were in Imperial Gardens on the Sunday and a large number of them had breakfast afterwards in St. Andrew's Church, Montpellier. The Players significant contribution was the loan of its costume set from ***'Whose Birthday Did You Say?'*** (WBDYS). This provided support to other costume sets provided from other collections.



One of the robes made for WBDYS particularly stands out in photographs from the Players' costume set. It's the robe of black and green stripes and was worn by one of the disciples.



What happened in June 2000?

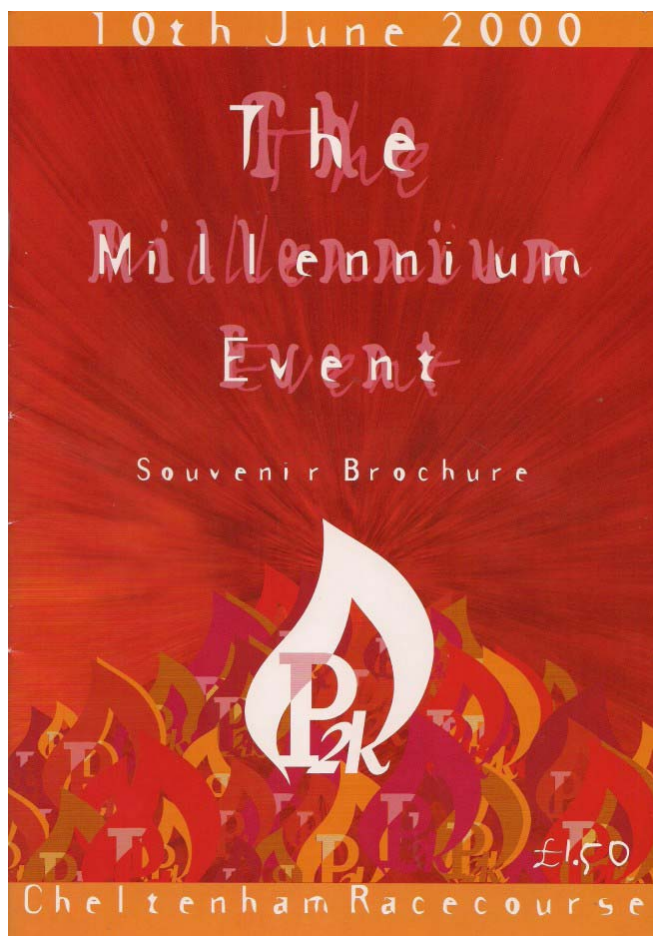
The second significant millennium initiative by Churches *Together in Cheltenham* was a festival of worship, music and theatre - Pentecost 2000 (P2k) - held at Cheltenham racecourse.

This was part of a major national millennium experience organised by the Churches' Millennium Office to coincide with Pentecost, when Jesus' disciples joined together for a feast in Jerusalem shortly after Christ's ascension.

The Cheltenham event was of the largest events throughout the country and was attended by the Princess Royal.

Activities at the event included music, workshops, debates, buskers, seminars, quiet areas for meditation, acts of worship, massed choirs, jazz bands, bistros, bars and restaurants, exhibitions, street theatre, a praise tent, a youth rally and more besides.

The Players performed the Pentecost scenes from ***'Whose Birthday Did You Say?'*** at P2k.



Charlton Kings Community Players
present excerpts from their recent production

Whose Birthday Did You Say?
by Peter Grainger
at

PENTECOST 2000

Saturday June 10th 2000 at 12.30pm in Theatre 1
at Cheltenham Racecourse.

The Players were overwhelmed by the tremendous enthusiasm and support from the audience at this production in February 2000. Here are just two of the comments received afterwards:-

"May I express my great appreciation of the production I attended last night at Balcarras. It really was superb, and I'm not a chap who easily says that of such productions. The content, the acting, singing and dancing and the wide age range and use of so many children was excellent. But it was the spiritual content that struck me as so moving..... I heard many similar comments on leaving."

"I was spellbound and could watch it all over again - such fine acting, such beautiful music, such magnificent costumes - the show could really go on television and reach a wide public. It was indeed a fantastic way to celebrate the Millennium and the wonder of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit were brought powerfully and poignantly home to us.

We look forward to performing the 'Pentecost' scenes again on 10th June.

See you there!

Tickets are available from Cheltenham Town Hall and will admit you to any of the daytime events
Adults £4.00, Under 16s £2.00, Family ticket £7.00, Single Parent Family £5.00

'Whose Birthday?' at P2k

Drama, concerts, questions, plays – opportunity was provided for local church and community drama groups to stage their work for a wider audience.

What happened in December 2000?

The Players embarked on a new venture. This was the very first production of a Christmas Show called '*Let Us Be Merry*' which derived its name from the traditional carol '*A Virgin Unspotted*' - recorded by Puzzlejug on CD '*Let Us Be Merry*' Traditional carols from Gloucestershire'. This has been performed by Puzzlejug members regularly at subsequent Christmas shows.



Early Christmas shows adopted an angel as their symbol but then a star 'appeared' and has been the usual show logo ever since. It's distinctive on notice boards and in shop windows.

2020 marks the twentieth production of '*Let Us Be Merry*' since the millennium

What has also followed on?

The activities for the millennium year have also resulted into other events and support in the community not only in Charlton Kings but also in Cheltenham and beyond.

The costumes for WBDYS have been used again and again for various productions and that green and black robe seems to have a life of its own worn by different people and in different productions and sketches.



'Let Us Be Merry' – A Christmas Collection (2005) staged tableau based on poems by U A Fanthorpe.

'A Man for this Season' – A Passion play (2013)

'Veronica's Veil' – street theatre for Charlton Kings 'Walk of Witness' (2018)

It's now in the care of the Charlton Kings Junior School *'Open the Book'* team who use it regularly in their telling of bible stories as part of the school assemblies. The Players have retained some of the WBDYS costumes in their costume store but the bulk of these carefully made garments have been donated to *'Open the Book'* teams locally and some given to the national training body for the *'Open the Book'* activity in schools.

A scene and song *'Love One Another'* from *'Whose Birthday Did You Say?'* was performed as street theatre in 2003 for the Charlton Kings Churches *'Walk of Witness'* on Good Friday in the Charlton Kings Library Precinct. A second passion play was written and performed in 2013 called *'A Man for this Season'*. The trial scene from the play, *'Josh on Trial'*, was staged as street theatre as part of the Charlton Kings Churches *'Walk of Witness'* on Good Friday in 2012 and a live video was produced.



Crowds – Charlton Kings Library Precinct 2012





'A Man For This Season'
26-28 March 2013



Four of the songs composed for WBDYS were built into the script and a special work was composed and performed for the classical guitar. The play ended with the singing of an anthem based on words by St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), music composed by David Ogden 2002.

The CKCP maintain a web site which includes photo story books of their productions. The history of the Players is available on request, which is a trilogy of photographs, programme scans and a distillation of what it has been done as a community drama group.

Copyright acknowledgements

WBDYS Christ image George Cross & Geoff Maynard; WBDYS programme front Geoff Maynard; WBDYS photo montages Peter Grainger; Street theatre photo montage Jill Muir; Cheltenham Passion Play photo montage Joan Osmond; Cheltenham Passion Play photographs (various and some unknown), The Cheltenham Newspaper Company Ltd, Tony Jeans; LUBM photo montage (unknown); CKCP photographs from productions Peter Grainger, Ray Talbot, Tony Jeans; 'Josh on Trial' & 'A Man for this Season' photo montages Peter Grainger

Reference links

<http://www.charltonkingscommunityplayers.com>
<http://www.charltonkingscommunityplayers.com/past-events/>;
<http://www.charltonkingscommunityplayers.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/timelineat2019.pdf>
<http://jesusfortoday.blogspot.com/2013/01/cheltenham-passion-play-introduction-to.html>
<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/>