

The University of Reading
Department of Meteorology

presents

Robin Flood and His Merry Mets

Pantomime
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Prologue

NARRATOR: A long long time ago, this very room you are sitting in was the site of a large forest, the biggest forest in the land ! And in this forest, there were people who lived a simple and happy life, where the Sun always shone, the rabbits nibbled luscious grass all day long, and Teletubbies popped up through holes in the ground. But dark clouds descended on the land when the King departed for the fourth WMO Conference on Saharan Rainfall. While the King was away, the evil Sheriff of Bracknell took the opportunity to build up his wealth and strengthen his army to overthrow the King on his return.
Our story begins one dark and stormy night at Bracknell Castle.....

Dimly lit, Rain, Wind, Thunder, Lightning. Witch sitting in front of crystal ball, Sheriff enters

SHERIFF: So, what words dost thou have for me in such foul weather.
It better be important. As the Sheriff, I don't have much time for trivialities.

WITCH: I've seen it in the Sun !

SHERIFF: I thought you got the Express ?

WITCH: No, no, I've seen it in the spots on the Sun.
They say "Beware, Beware, the Flooded Man" !

SHERIFF: The Flooded Man 'ay ? Who is this Flooded Man ?

WITCH: He is the Man with the Flood.

SHERIFF: Hmmm, I see you're as helpful as ever !
Tell me as I'm here, what's the chance of a white Christmas ?
The stable boy has challenged me to a bet, I think his name is Bill Hill, and I don't want to lose.

Witch looks into her crystal ball

WITCH: Ahhhhhhhh, the sky may be dark, and snow could fall
Yet the Sun may show and the shadows stand tall
The wind may howl and the heavens stay dry
For the question is not when, but why !

SHERIFF: Honestly, I wonder why I ever come here.
You're about as helpful as a stick of celery in a croquet match.....

Sheriff exits murmuring to himself, thunder, lightning

WITCH: When shall we all meet again ?
In thunder, lightning or in rain ?
When the hurly, burly's done ?
When the croquet's lost and won ?
Nay, when the Flooded Man has come
That will be aft the set of Sun.
Where the place ?
In the dell,
With the Sheriff of Bracknell.

Lights go up, telephone rings and Witch answers in chirpy telephone voice

WITCH: Hello, Piers Corbyn Weather Action. How can I help you ?

Act 1

Unfortunately missing!

Act 2

SCENE 1

In the castle, -fairly dark, with a chair and a stool. The Sheriff is sitting in the chair, with Guy on the stool next to him looking apologetic.

NARRATOR: Back in the castle, after failing to reclaim the cases, Guy is trying to explain what went wrong to the fuming Sheriff.

SHERIFF: You've really messed up this time, Guy. How could you let those vermin steal my cases? That bunch of amateurs, who haven't even got their doctorates yet, have made me the laughing stock of the Forest, and it's all your fault!

GUY: *(blubs nervously)* Of course it is all my fault, sire. Your infallible judgement reigns supreme in this forest. For you are the master of all cases, indeed, the very Headcase of the world.

SHERIFF: Yes, I am the Supreme Headcase!

GUY: But all is not lost, Sire. They didn't manage to steal them all. In fact, I have one here.

He produces a case with the word 'SHERIFF' written on it

SHERIFF: No, that can't be mine! Please, don't bring that abomination near me!

GUY: Why not?

SHERIFF: Because I'm extremely case-sensitive!

Guy puts the case away

SHERIFF: Thank heavens for that. Now, we must lure Robin Flood to the castle with a cunning and devious plan - my specialty *(ha, ha, ha)* I know his weakness - I can catch him. He won't be able to resist the challenge of...

GUY: What? What? What is your amazing, superlative plan sire? *(crawl)*

SHERIFF: *(triumphant)* A crochet contest!

FX: *Dramatic chord*

CAST (omnes): Uh?!

GUY: *(tentatively)* Brilliant, Sire, but surely you mean a *croquet* contest?

SHERIFF: No, no, it's definitely crochet. I've heard he can knit a tea-cosy at 100 paces.

They continue to discuss the plan as they leave the stage

NARRATOR: Guy was beginning to suspect that the Sheriff had lost the thread. With a knitted brow he tried to work out what on earth his master wanted....

SCENE 2

The scene opens with the Merry Mets crowded round a poster stuck to a tree. The tree is actually played by a person.

LITTLE JOHN: What's all this then?

MED. JOHN: Looks like a poster or something.

BIG JOHN: What's it say?

FRIAR FISH: Let me have a look: Ahem, 'By procu.... procu....proclamation of the Sheriff of Bracknell, notice is hereby given of a Banned Crochet Vest

MED. JOHN: A what?

LITTLE JOHN: You know, I never go anywhere without my crochet vest – *(insert John Holden joke here....)*

FRIAR FISH: Errm. Sorry, a 'Grand Croquet Contest'. Yes, a 'Grand Croquet Contest to be held at the Whitsun Fair on Bracknell Green. The prize - a prestigious Golden Mullet' – 'ere, mullet's in season at the moment, that's a good prize.

BIG JOHN: Are you sure it's mullet? Sounds like a funny prize to me.

FRIAR FISH: Errm... Oh yes, I'm sorry, that's 'mallet'. Shame, I like mullet....

AL: Well, you have got fish on the brain, Friar.

LITTLE JOHN: Are you going to enter, Robin?

ROBIN: Well, I can't resist a croquet contest - but who would partner me?

MARSHALL: I will, Robin - I've always admired your firm, great...

AL: *(interrupting)* You can't possibly go, Robin, the Sheriff will recognize you. I'll go instead. *(smug)*

MARSHALL: No, Al, this is a pantomime. You're not getting your own way this time.

AL: Oh Marshall, that's just Bottom Torque - I rather think I will.

MARSHALL: Oh no you won't

AL: Oh yes I will

They continue to argue in classic panto style...

MARSHALL: Please! Robin and I are going to the contest. We'll just have to go in disguise.

LITTLE JOHN: Yes, Maid Marshall can dress as an oceanographer

MED. JOHN: What do they wear then?

BIG JOHN: Oh, red wellies and thermohaline stockings - keeps you warm

FRIAR FISH: And helps the circulation.

LITTLE JOHN: Robin can wear his yellow Lidars.

Exit Medium Range John to get wellies.

BIG JOHN: Surely it would be better if Robin went as an oceanographer and Marshall as a Radar expert. Who would see through that?

MARSHALL: That's an excellent idea! Oh Robin, I can't wait to see you in those red wellies. You see Al, it'll be perfectly all right.

AL: Bah! I'm off to Hadley on Thames - the outlook's much better there.

ROBIN: Where was that, Al?

AL: Oh, err, just off for a walk.

Exit Al. Enter Medium Range John with the red wellies.

ROBIN: Ah, the wellies. And they're bright red, to boot. I'll just make sure they fit.

He tries on the wellies, but they're too small.

ROBIN: Damn, they're too tight. How did I end up with wellies that were such a poor fit?

MED. JOHN: Well Robin, I took all the measurements we had for your feet, plotted them on a graph, drew a straight line through at least two of the points, and then extrapolated forward to find a best-guess estimate for their current size. That should be good enough for most people - it's not my fault if you've got highly non-linear feet.

(Medium Range John could demonstrate this process on a flip-chart if it was deemed funny enough)

ROBIN: Well, I suppose there's not much we can do about it now - Marshall, would they fit you?

Maid Marshall tries on the wellies - they fit perfectly.

ROBIN: It looks like we'll have to follow our original plan - Maid Marshall in the red wellies, and me in my lovely yellow Lidars. Who could possibly recognise us?

Exit all.

SCENE 3

NARRATOR: With the Whitsun Fair in full swing, Bracknell Green eagerly awaited the start of the Sheriff's grand croquet competition. All, that is, except the Sheriff himself, who still hasn't cottoned on to what Guy has organized....

SHERIFF: I'm terribly excited - my Mother was awfully good at croquet.

GUY: *(aside)* I'm not going to be able to pull the wool over his eyes for much longer. *(to sheriff)* Actually Sire, I organized a croquet contest instead.

SHERIFF: What? We won't get Robin here with that - you've unraveled my seamless plan!

GUY: I'm very sorry sire - *(smug)* but he might turn up.

(Croquet contest) (Snooker riff)

NARRATOR *(in his guise as the commentator)*: You join us here at the Crucible on Bracknell Green for the Sheriff's Grand Croquet Contest. After a series of scorching heats this afternoon, only two pairings are left. Playing red and yellow are Dobbin Mudd and Chemical John, from the heart of Bracknell Forest. On the other side are the dastardly Willy Winn and Betty Doesn't, both on day release from the Ferrel Cell at Reading Jail.

(more croquet)

SHERIFF: It's nearly over, and there's no sign of Robin Flood. If you didn't have your head in the clouds so much we wouldn't be in this precipitous situation. We might never catch him now!

Guy blubs. Al arrives

AL: Hail, sire!

SHERIFF: Al Scarpered!

VOICE: *(off-stage)* Where?

VOICE II: *(off-stage)* Hadley Centre! (boom, boom)

SHERIFF: Al, what ill wind brings you here? It's not Thursday afternoon.

AL: No, but.... *(whispers in sheriff's ear)*

SHERIFF: Ah, red wellies: what a cunning disguise! So Dobbin Mudd is really Robin Flood. Seize him!

FX: *Screams, yelps, etc*

NARRATOR: Despite his cunning plan, the sheriff still didn't get his man. And, encumbered by his Lidars, beautifully yellow though they are, Robin failed to prevent them kidnapping Maid Marshall instead. Not even the scriptwriters know how they're going to get out of this one...

ACT 3

SCENE 1

NARRATOR: *(enters)* And so the entertainment portion of our programme comes to a close but before the drinking and dancing can commence our tale must be concluded. The evil Sheriff of Bracknell, planning to capture Robin at the Croquet competition, mistakenly kidnapped Maid Marshall. And now he has taken Maid Marshall to the foreboding Bracknell Castle.

(Sheriff, Gisbourne, Piers, Al, enter with Maid Marshall wearing red Wellies)

GISBOURNE: Robin, Now you are safely locked away in Bracknell castle from where you shall *never* be rescued.

MARSHALL: *(high voice)* Oh no. I wish I'd never.....*(deep voice)* Oh no. I wish I'd never fallen for that ingenious trap of...

SHERIFF: Shut up. Weren't you listening ? The Narrator's already done the recap.

PIERS: Master, the clouds speak mightily of your ingenuity and foretell of a long imprisonment for The Flooded Man.

SHERIFF: Really ? How's does that work then ?

PIERS: *(pointing)* Well if you look at that fluffy grey one. That means that your lucky colour is magenta and you should always carry your coffee mug on a saucer.

GISBOURNE: *(pointing)* That one looks like a deer sitting on the toilet.

(others look puzzled and squint)

MARSHALL: Which one?

GISBOURNE: *(points again)* There just next to the lap dancing mini.

SHERIFF: That's not a deer, it's more of a gazelle.

PIERS: No it's actually the sign of the welcoming albatross. It's a sign that you should beware of left handed butchers and sign the out of hours book even if you are just working late.

(Al enters)

SHERIFF: Yes Yes what is it ?

AL: Sire, I can give you some useful information.

GISBOURNE: More useful than "Avoid Jake and Claire just before the beginning of each term ?"

AL: Much more useful. I've come to tell you.....you haven't caught Robin, *(points to MM)* that's Maid Marshall !

GISBOURNE, SHERIFF, PIERS: Maid Marshall!

AL: Er, Yeah. Apparently the wellies didn't fit Robin so Maid Marshall had to wear them.

SHERIFF: You bumbling baffoons. Can I not trust you with anything ?

AL: Wait, all is not lost, I have an idea. I think Robin will try to rescue Maid Marshall and you can capture him when he comes to the Castle !

SHERIFF: No, wait, I have a better idea. I think Robin will try to rescue Maid Marshall and we can capture him when he comes to the Castle ! Piers, what is your weather forecast for the next few days ?

PIERS: T'will be stormy with strong winds and rain. Yes, *strong* winds and rain.....I think.

SHERIFF: Excellent. I have a cunning plan that will see the end of Robin Flood and his Merry Mets. Ha Ha Ha..

(all begin to leave)

GISBOURNE: *(to Piers)* So what do those crown and cricket bat shaped clouds mean?

PIERS: Oh, nothing.

SCENE 2

NARRATOR: So, does Robin have a plan to rescue his true love? (A-team Riff?) Does it involve getting captured, locked in a room and escaping by making an armoured tank from an old bed, a child's bike, a soft toy, a rusty lawnmower and two empty beer barrels? ... Somehow I don't think the budget would stretch that far. Even if the writers hadn't drunk it. (exit stage left, shaking head)

(Robin and the Merry Mets enter looking glum)

MERRY MET1: What are we going to do Robin? Maid Marshall's been captured by the Sheriff and ...

MED. JOHN: Okay Merry Met, there's no need to set the scene yet again !

FRYER FISH: What we need is a plan to get us secretly into the castle where we can find Maid Marshall and escape without being noticed.

BIG JOHN: Oh Crumbs, that'll never work. What we really need is a plan where we get into the castle but get discovered and have to kill all the baddies. Meanwhile someone accidentally sets fire to the castle and Robin rescues Maid Marshall, fights the Sheriff and escapes in the nick of time as the castle Oh Crumbles around their ears.

ROBIN: This is only a panto John, not some kind of Hollywood production, with a plot.

LITTLE JOHN: I agree with John, we need an ending with a twist.

MERRY MET1: We could just *storm* the castle.

MERRY MET2: Yeah, and *flood* them out

FRYER FISH: We could lay siege to the castle and set up camps all around it in a kind of *global circulation*.

LITTLE JOHN: And camouflage ourselves with some clever *vegetation modelling*?

BIG JOHN: Oh Crumbs! right, wait for it. *(thinks)* All us Mets get in a big hot air balloon and float

over the castle. When we're there we parachute in and kill all the baddies.

MED. JOHN: You mean in a kind of *convective para-met-iseation*.

ROBIN: Let's just head to the castle and see what happens.

(Robin and Mets on their way to the castle)

MERRY MET1: I need the loo Robin

ROBIN: Well, there's a tree over there.

MERRY MET1: Where... Ow.

ROBIN: This is a forest, where do you think.

(pause)

MERRY MET2: Oh, Oh, Oh, I'm sure I can feel something crawling up my leg !

MED. JOHN: Sorry.

(pause)

ROBIN: Here we are at the Castle men.

BIG JOHN: Oh Crumbs, look ! There's two guards over there.

ROBIN: Okay men, act casual.

(Two guards enter)

GUARD1: Halt, who goes there.

ROBIN: No-one, we've just come from there ?

GUARD1: Now then, none of that cleaver stuff meladdie. We have reason to believe that you have forced your way into this castle and are currently trespassing on Met office property. What have you got to say for yourself son.

MED. JOHN: Are you some kind of policeman?

GUARD1: Yes, Inspector Ketley Met Office Police Department, this here is constable Charlton. Her dad was a famous footballer you know.

BIG JOHN: M...O....P....D., MOPPED, must be one of the cleanest police forces in the country.

GUARD1: You obviously never saw the first version of the script. Still, you're all under arrest.

ROBIN: I don't think so. This is a rather poor parody of a story set in a time of knights, chivalry and Kings, hardly the time you expect to find a couple of policemen.

GUARD1: What about the snooker take off in scene two?

MED. JOHN: That was just done for comic effect, have you said a funny line yet?

GUARD1: Er. No

LITTLE JOHN: Sorry then, get out of the way. *(pushes them off the stage. Guards look a bit bemused)*

ROBIN: Right, we must find Maid Marshall. Fryer, you and the others, stay here. John, John, John, follow me. We must find the Sheriff's quarters.

SCENE 3

(Enter Sheriff, Gisbourne, Al, Piers with Maid Marshall tied up nearby)

GISBOURNE: *(To guards)*....So I've got no idea how they all manage to keep warm wearing only green tights all winter.

GUARD1: I didn't even know it was winter until the middle of this act.

GUARD2: No, no-one else had mentioned it had they. It's probably just a continuity error.

(Knock on the door)
(Robin and three Johns enter)

SHERIFF: So, Robin Flood, we meet at last. Guards, seize them !

(Big fight scene to "Everything I Do")
(Gisbourne+two guards attack Robin+three Johns)
(Gisbourne and guards are killed)

ROBIN: Sheriff, release Maid Marshall or you shall receive another rendition of "Everything I Do"

SHERIFF: No, wait ! You have fallen for my cunning trap.
(door slams behind them)
Piers has forecast strong winds for tonight and as you can see Robin, the walls of this room are attached by an ingenious mechanism to a large anemometer on the roof and as the wind blows stronger and stronger the anemometer will spin faster and faster and the walls of the room will move closer and closer and crush you all in a slow and painful death !

ROBIN: I don't think so.

SHERIFF: And why not?

MED. JOHN: Firstly, we don't have the budget for those special effects.

BIG JOHN: And second, the current synoptic pattern is a blocking high, so, Oh crumbs, there isn't a breath of wind in the air.

SHERIFF: *(To Piers)* Damn and blast, I knew I should never have trusted your pathetic forecasts.

(Piers cowers in a corner)

SHERIFF: So I have failed. The students will now have all the CASE's they need.

ROBIN: *(untying Maid Marshall)* Yes, and I shall have my beloved's hand in marriage.

(King Hoskins the Brianheart enters carrying cricket bat, wearing cricket pads, crown, three brians? and a pink tutu. A flamboyant stroke is played each time a cricketing pun is made, the cast spent much time jumping out of the way of these) (Other Merry Mets enter at the same time)

KING: Not without my permission you shall not.

(All kneel)

ROBIN: King Hoskins the Brianheart. You have returned for a *second innings*.

KING: Indeed, I have returned from the WMO conference victorious.

MED. JOHN: You didn't get *caught out* in foreign lands then?

KING: No, My army and I travelled for many weeks, sometimes going for days without seeing a *Dickey Bird*. When we reached our goal we took guard before several *slips* by the enemy allowed us to *hit them for six*.

MERRY MET2: Was the march between the Oval and Bracknell a *long leg* ?

KING: No, quite a *short leg* actually, but there was a *deep gully* near Slough.

LITTLE JOHN: So your expedition was not a *test* ?

KING: No, what a *sill point* to make.

ROBIN: My Liege, I have been bowled over by the beauty of this fair maiden. May I take her hand in marriage?.

KING: Of course, Good Fryer, will you perform the ceremony ?

FRYER FISH: I will.

MARSHALL: Who's getting married here?

BIG JOHN: Oh Crumbs, just get on with it.

(everyone enters whilst the fryer performs the ceremony)

FRYER FISH: Will you, Robin Archibald Flood take Maid Perdita Marshall to be your wedded wife, to love and to cherish, for richer for poorer, in sunshine or in rain, 'til government cutbacks do you part.

ROBIN: I will.

FRYER FISH: And Maid Marshall, do you take.....

MARSHALL: *(cuts in excitedly)* I will ! I will !

FRYER FISH: Well then, I now pronounce you husband and wife, you may stage-kiss the bride.

(cheers, censored sign?)

ROBIN: Thank you all for fighting with me and maintaining the state of scientific funding until the return of the King. Before the party can begin I must know two things, King Hoskins, what are we to do with Al Scarpered?

KING: He shall remain detained here for two years and shall only be freed on Thursday afternoon.

AL: When I shall most likely be detained elsewhere.

ROBIN: The other thing is, why are you wearing a pink tutu?

KING: Being so desperate to play this part I volunteered to take the role before the script had been written. A lesson to us all. But for all my follies I still know how to have a good time and I have a special song for us to sing now.

(song is sung)

NARRATOR: And so our tale draws to a close, the truth is now out and the history books can be rewritten. As the more observant of you will have noticed, the cast have cunningly left by the rear exit and are probably already making a start on the food and drink. Therefore, all that remains for me to do is to keep you here as long as possible for their benefit. We would like to thank you for viewing our show and we hope you have enjoyed the evening. This lovely location has allowed us a little more freedom to let our imaginations work, including giving us an access at the rear of the room. (Ad. Lib. To allow the cast as much time as possible to masticate and imbibe, or at least let the audience think they are.)

(cast return, drinks in hand for the final bow)

THE END

(drink)

(eat)

(dance badly)