

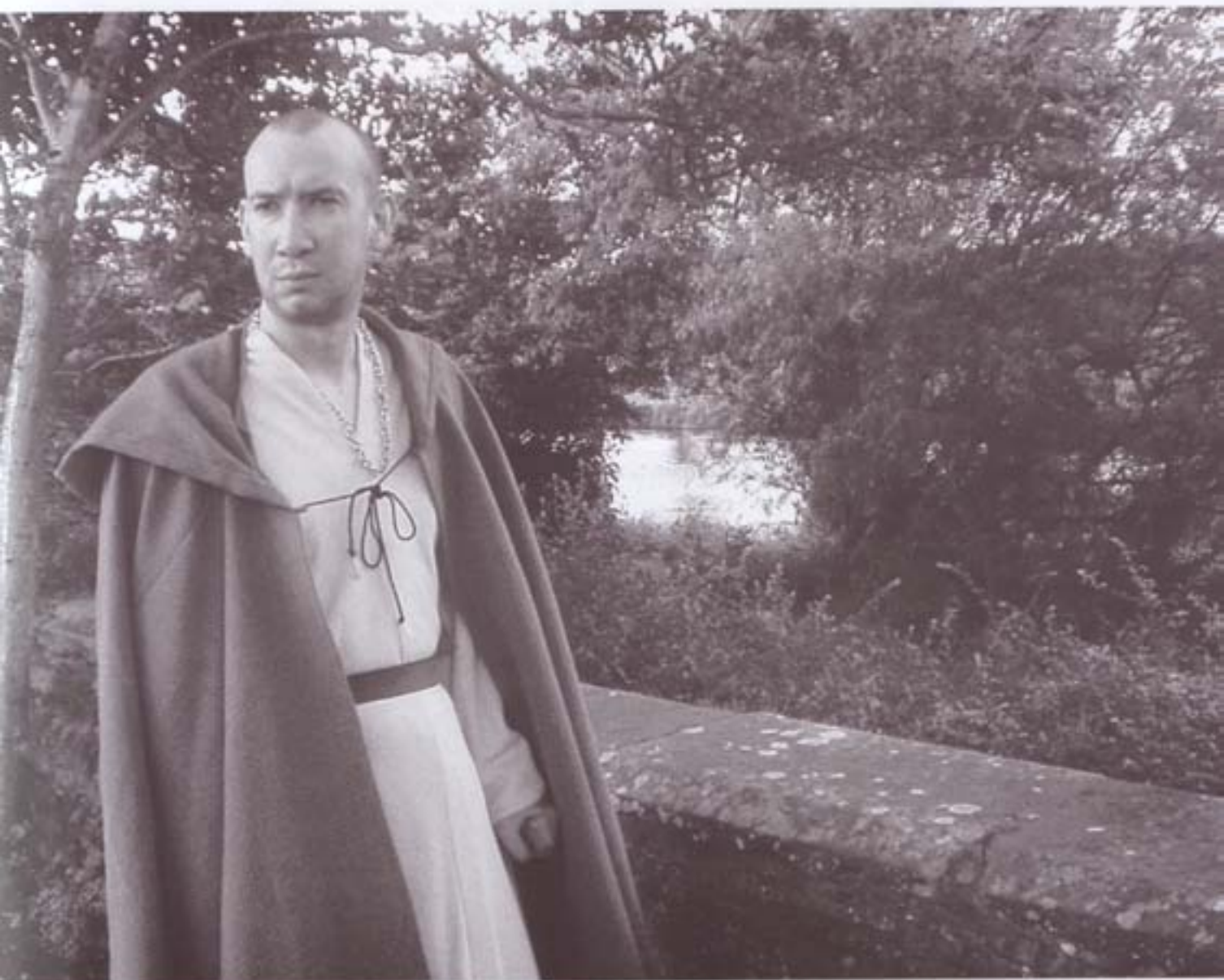
## Foreword

As an historian by profession, I am delighted to write this foreword.

There is an old saying that if we ignore the past we are likely to make the same mistakes in the future. That is why it is so important to record our Cumbrian heritage not only for that reason, but because it is such a rich and varied history and one that future generations will come to know and love.

I know that you will enjoy reading this report as much as I have and I wish the Cumbrian Story Project continued success.

Tomy Cunningham MP



## CURWEN HERITAGE THEATRE

The Curwen Heritage Theatre under the chairmanship of Tony Cunningham MP, one of its founders has now been in existence for over nine years. Within that time Curwen Heritage Theatre has worked/performed for English Heritage, Historic Scotland and Tyne & Wear Museum Services, to name a few. The Company have 15 plus heritage productions, 11 major Shakespearean productions and over 20 high profile heritage venues to their credit. This programme has included school projects and many premieres.

Well known throughout the Borders and the North West, Curwen Heritage Theatre has always regarded Workington as home base and the atmospheric and beautiful courtyard of Workington Hall as a favourite venue.

Summer 2002 onwards heralded another innovative first:

### "THE CUMBRIAN STORY PROJECT"

This project has been designed to gather and record traditional material and story fragments which will then be turned into plays and performed throughout the area. One of the prime aims is to access and engage the public and to generate deserved excitement and interest in our rich and diverse cultural heritage which is in danger of being lost.

The "Story Project" consists of short plays based on traditional local stories, performed in Cumbrian dialect and full period costumes, bringing local history to life. The "Storyteller" will/is normally played by a professional actor. We see our "gatherings" as informal story-sharing sessions, arranged by people and organisations for local communities, in either indoor or outdoor venues. We hope that those who are entertained by our plays are reminded of stories, or scraps of folk memory, which they can share with us, to be turned into other plays, performed, perhaps, in the very place from which they originated.

### THE FIRST PHASES CONSISTED OF THREE GROUPS OF GATHERINGS



Cumbria Community Foundation at Reghed

# *Sea Wives* *Ghost Horses* *Wraith*

Haunting stories told for hundreds of years, from our local past; tales of hardship, love and obsession....tales where the line between real and supernatural is crossed and recrossed...who knows truth? What is certain?

In Phase 1 of this innovative project, we intrigued locals and visitors alike with our representations of aural history: or superstition? In dialect, in period costume, in real settings on Cumbria's west coastal plane

In Phase 2, we are planning to record material collected on film, and use scraps of stories found, to put together an anthology of these local tales using local writers. This will begin to form an accessible, permanent record of our unrecorded, emotional history.

We are still keen to collect more scraps of local legends, myths and superstitions.

K. IRVING - SECRETARY & TRUSTEE

## *The Cumbrian Story Project 2003* *"Ghost Horses"*

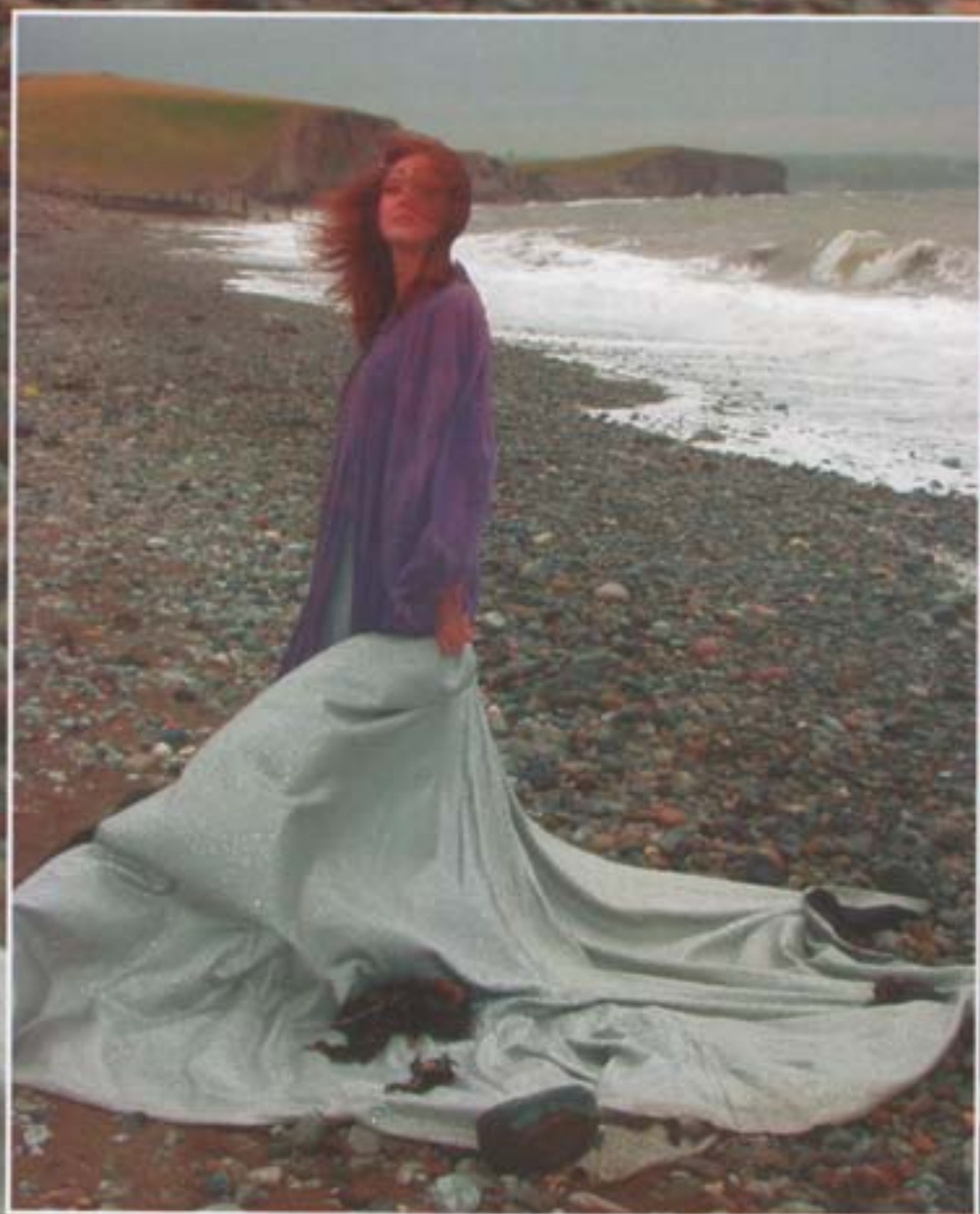
In my opinion the performance of "Ghost Horses", and the following story gatherings were a valuable contribution to the cultural and artistic life of Cumbria and Maryport in particular. The dramatisation and performance of a local folk tale brought to life an aspect of local heritage in a form accessible to all generations and social groups.

The story gatherings after the performances encouraged the exchange of folk history and social contact across the generations. The gatherings emphasised the rich and varied resource that still exists in the form of oral history in a time of high tech communications.

The project played a valuable contribution to the cultural and social life of Maryport and West Cumbria and was an opportunity to record local traditions and stories before they disappear. The performances introduced live theatre to a new audience in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

The performance by the Curwen Heritage Theatre, and the following story gatherings was a valuable activity for the museum in extending the range of services to our visitors, both local and those from further away. The whole project demonstrated how cultural organisations can co-operate and benefit the local community

JANE LASKEY - MANAGER SENHOUSE ROMAN MUSEUM





## Material Gathered

# *Boggles, Ghosts and Wraiths*

- March Boggle at Mawbray: Strange lights and something that looks like a "Scarecrow" with an overgrown head and large eyes.
- Salterbeck Boggle: Five versions collected – none complete. Basic theme, madness and death within days of sighting. Also said to be a murder victim returning for revenge on anniversary of death.
- A White Monk-like shape seen on the Moor Road above Workington, near the old cross roads and gallows site. First hand sighting collected, multiple witnesses. Could tie with several part legends.
- A ragged figure seen in the dungeons of Workington Hall, rumour of a victim being "walled-in". Versions include both male and female
- Several Grey Ladies between Brow Top and Hall Grounds and Park, Workington. Possibly part of the "walled-in" legend and/or suicides? Several part stories.
- Ghosts of children playing and singing, Workington Hall and grounds of the Helena Thompson Museum.
- Unidentified Church near Keswick; the Vicar saw a soldier complete with drawn sword walk down the aisle and through the altar.
- The Grey Lady of Isle Hall haunts one particular bedroom, but only when occupied by handsome young men.
- A large tree grows (or grew) outside Ewanrigg Hall. If, on certain nights, you dance around this tree three times, then knock on it's trunk, a white lady will appear.
- Part of Whitehaven is said to be haunted by a girl carrying a candle, who is desperately searching for her lover. The young couple had planned to elope, but she fell to her death whilst attempting to escape.
- A rag and bone man, Pias, hated children. It is said that he still haunts the area in which he lived, praying on children and teenage girls. He appears as a hooded figure with a low voice.
- Whitehaven: A modern house built, unknowingly, over what was reputed to be an ancient burial ground. Blood was seen to ooze through a tiled wall.
- Cookoo Arch, Workington (now destroyed). Several versions, whole and part, of a similar story. Lovers meeting, separation, lover returning, girl's death. They have a generic similarity, and appear to be tales of a "Wraith".
- The River Derwent, from the coast to Cockermouth is associated with tales of ghost monks and wraiths, of those collected, none are complete. In North West Cumbria, ghosts and wraiths are generally regarded as different entities.

## Conclusion

*"To collect, disseminate and generate interest in traditional local stories in a manner which is geographically, economically and socially inclusive."*

The above quote is a key paragraph from the mission statement.

We are in grave danger of loosing a vital part of our oral and cultural memory and heritage; this is a prime concern and driver behind the original concept of **"THE CUMBRIAN STORY PROJECT"**.

In practical terms, "PHASE ONE" of this project has translated as;

Three original plays based on "collected scraps", all three were written and performed in Cumbrian dialect. Plays and dialect attracted and fascinated our audience. A number of which returned to see us several times.

These plays were performed at eleven "Gatherings" plus "shop window" and publicity events.

Overall we collected over forty story scraps and part tyales.

Throughout we feel that we have gained an even stronger realisation of the strength and diversity of our folklore, also, a fuller sense of how quickly we could be and are loosing it. We have gained an even greater enthusiasm and determinations to record as much as we are able, whilst accessing and engaging the widest possible audience

## Future

Continue performing and collecting; engaging, enthusing and hopefully inspiring groups and individuals to begin collections/research of their own, to record or to pass on to us.

It was interesting to find that the larger audience were not always the richest source of material. But well worth pursuing because of the interest aroused.

Among the most richly diverse and enthusiastic of our audience's were those of local history/museum groups, whose events were open to, and welcomed, the general public. This is an area we would like to develop.

We believe it is vital that we record our "finds" in other permanent, widely accessibly, socially inclusive affordable formats.

To this end, we are discussing a possible partnership with a local writers group, with a view to researching some of the material we have collected and publishing the result in story form.

DVD Disk and Video are also widely accessible, affordable forms of permanent record. They offer an expanding interactive technology, which is openly available to children and adults, (schools, libraries etc). This would be an area we would wish to explore.

H. C. IVISON – VICE-CHAIR