

Peterkin's Nine Daies' Wonder

In Spring 1599 Will Kemp—recently resigned comic actor from Shakespeare's company *The Chamberlains Men*—set off on a hundred mile jig from London to Norwich.

July 2006 will be the exact 407 $\frac{1}{3}$ anniversary of this event and to commemorate it the English Heritage National Jester, **Peterkin the Fool**, will embark on a a hundred mile jig along a completely different route. He will leave his home town of Bristol on 12th July and finish, after dancing for nine days, at the English Heritage Festival of History at Kelmarsh Hall (12th-13th August).

Kemp took four weeks to dance his 'nine daies wonder'. Accompanied by his musician, the Taberer Thomas Slye, he attracted a throng of people on his route, staying at inns and hostelries as well as enjoying the hospitalities of various local dignitaries and their families. Peterkin (along with the renowned pipe and tabor player Nicholas Perry) aims to dance nine days in a calendar month and shall endeavour to lay his head wherever a comfortable pillow is offered, gladly accepting the hospitality of any mortal whether a dignitary or not.



Peterkin has commissioned a costume based upon the frontispiece to Kemp's book (*Nine Daies' Wonder*) and shall be dancing to authentic sixteenth century music. He is, however, the first to admit, that he is not a dancer, 'I shall be interpreting the foolish jig with the emphasis on foolish' he says, 'Kemp was a master of Morris and renowned for his dancing, I have two left feet and both refuse to behave'. Hav-

ing said this, anyone wishing to learn his very individual style of jigging is welcome to come along and take lessons.

On the original dance, Kemp encountered snow, marshes and waterlogged quagmires over which he leapt leaving his followers behind gasping in amazement. Peterkin shall have the benefit of a fine British summer and his route takes him through some of the finest countryside in the South and midlands of England.

This spirited and seriously silly stunt starts on Wednesday 12th July at 10 am outside the Corn Exchange in the centre of Bristol. Wednesday is Farmers' Market Day so there will be a throng of bemused shoppers wondering what is going on. Join them in sending Peterkin on his way (possibly with the famed 'Agincourt Salute') and dance as far as you like with him as he heads off into the great unknown. Over the next four weeks he will travel approximately 110 miles. On 12th August he will arrive at Kelmarsh Hall where he will be met by the thousands of people attending the English Heritage Festival of History.

Peterkin aims to give affectionate tribute to one of the great characters of the end of the sixteenth century. Kemp was renowned for his antics having possibly left Shakespeare's company after improvising one too many fart gags. The jig was an acknowledged piece of blatant self publicity and apparently worked, for balladeers were making myth of it not twelve months after it's finish. (Thus enabling him to publish his own account of the escapade which was still in print well in to the twentieth century). The modern jig will also aim to attract as much attention as possible and people will be invited to track Peterkin's progress on the English Heritage website and to join him in dancing the route. For full details of the progress of the jig and to hear about incidents upon the way log on to: www.english-heritage.org.uk/festivalofhistory or call the update line on 07876 117 724

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