

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

**TN**  
TEACHER'S NOTES

### TITLE SLIDE

In this lesson you will find out about a play which features the miller who lived at the ancient King's Mill over 900 years ago. The play was actually written about 300 years ago and was seen by thousands of people in the theatre in London, as well as being performed around Europe. The play was frequently performed in Mansfield. Its first known performance was in a converted barn on Toothill Lane, but further performances were in a specially built theatre, which was next door to the Swan Inn<sup>1</sup>. We will find out about the theatre during Georgian times and have a go at staging our own performance.

<sup>1</sup> Historic Mansfield Volumes 1&2 by AS Buxton



### SLIDE 2 ROBERT DODSLEY

*The King and the Miller of Mansfield* was written by Robert Dodsley, who came from Mansfield. Robert was born on 13 February 1703 and died on 23 September 1764.

His father was master of the free school near Mansfield. He was apprenticed to a stocking-weaver in Mansfield, but he ran away and got a job as a footman (a type of servant who would answer the door and wait at tables).

As a young man Dodsley began to make some money from writing and became friends with the famous 18th century poet Alexander Pope who gave him £100 to set himself up as a book seller.

As well as being a successful poet and playwright, Dodsley became one of the biggest publishers of the day.

He wrote many plays and poems including the satirical farce *Toy Story* (1735) about a toymaker who imagines that his toys have real personalities.

He wrote *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* in 1737. It was produced at Drury Lane Theatre in London and was very popular. It spawned a sequel called 'Sir John Cockle at Court'.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### SLIDE 3 GEORGIAN THEATRE

The play was written in the Georgian period (so called because there were four kings between 1714 - 1830 called George).

The 18th century was known as the great age of theatre.

In London, and other important cities, large purpose-built auditoriums were built to house the huge crowds that flocked every night to see plays and musical performances. People watched plays, the ballet, as well as tight-rope walkers and acrobats.

Women were employed as actresses for the first time; before then, men had played both male and female roles. This alone brought in lots of theatre goers at the time as it was considered novel and maybe, a bit naughty.

By the end of the 18th century there were seven theatres in London: Theatre Royal, Drury Lane; Lincoln's Inn Fields; The Queens Theatre, Haymarket; The Little Haymarket Theatre; Goodman's Fields; Sadler's Wells; and The Royalty.

Extensions to Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields meant that they could hold three thousand people.

### SLIDE 4 WHO WENT TO THE THEATRE?

Theatre was enjoyed by people of all social classes, but the poor people sat at the back of the gallery in the 'cheap seats'. The wealthiest people sat in boxes so that they could see the stage easily - and also be seen themselves. The pit, at the front, was where the intelligentsia (the people with new ideas), professionals and critics sat.

Theatre goers could often be rude and noisy. They would eat and drink during performances, chat amongst themselves and sometimes throw rotten fruit and vegetables at the actors.

Around the time that the King and the Miller of Mansfield was on stage there were many riots in theatres, as a reaction to a new law which stated that plays could only be shown in licenced theatres. The common people did not think it fair that going to the theatre should only be for the privilege of those who could afford it and were determined to have a good time when they were there.

### SLIDE 5 STAGE SETS AND PRODUCTION

Auditoriums were designed with a space at the front for the orchestra (people playing musical instruments and in charge of sound effects).

Stunning background scenery was painted on flat pieces of wood which could be wheeled in from the side - known as wings. The wings were placed in front of one another so that scenes could be changed quickly, by moving the front flat behind the one at the back.

Painted fabric above the stage was called the drop, or shutters. There were also strips of cloth hung horizontally across the top of the wings, called borders. This type of scenery was typical across Europe until the late 19th century.

One of the best scenery painters was Phillip de Louthembourg who worked at Drury Lane. Louthembourg created elaborate sets that gave the entire stage the illusion of being three-dimensional.

Louthembourg also used lights to give the effect of moonlight, flames and other natural elements. He also used scrim - a stage gauze which can appear either solid or transparent depending on the direction of light shining on it.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### SLIDE 6 THE AGE OF REASON

The 18th century is sometimes called the 'Age of Reason' or the 'Enlightenment' reflecting a time of great social and cultural change when people were starting to think and debate about how society was run.

The Industrial Revolution meant that lots of people moved from the countryside to the towns and cities to work in the mills and other factories.

The population of Britain was growing rapidly from about 5 million people in 1700 to nearly 9 million by 1801.

The poor people had had enough of being treated unfairly by the upper classes who held all the power. The French Revolution ended in the King being killed in 1789 and the old way of running country (the 'Ancien Régime') being overturned. Clever people across Europe published books and other documents to promote new ideas about the right of every man to have freedom and their own property – a key theme in *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*.

### SLIDE 7 *THE KING AND THE MILLER OF MANSFIELD*

The play is a dramatic tale about King Henry II and his encounter with the Miller of Mansfield, John Cockles. Robert Dodsley, the playwright, is said to have based the play on a legend. Perhaps there's some truth in it?

The story of the play starts with the King getting lost whilst hunting with his courtiers in Sherwood Forest. John Cockle, the Miller of Mansfield, comes across the King and asks him what he's doing and accuses him of poaching the King's deer.

The King pretends to be one of his own courtiers and offers the miller money to take him to Nottingham.

John Cockle informs the stranger that Nottingham is 12 miles away through thick forest, but as he takes him to be an honest man, he offers him lodgings for the night and promises to take him to Nottingham the following day.

At the miller's home, the strange 'nobleman' is offered the finest Mansfield ale and the Miller's wife, Margery, and daughter, Kate, prepare him supper. During the evening a Keeper of the Forest arrives with two courtiers who have been found in the Forest, assumed to have been poaching.

The King's true identity is revealed and the King makes the Miller a Knight for his honesty and hospitality.

There is a sub-plot (another story woven into the play) as we shall see in one of the learning activities.

There is a lot of irony in the play, as for most of it, the characters do not know that they are speaking in the presence of the King, although the character talk a lot about the King and his powers.

The play also explores the themes of morality and corruption and concludes that these are not always the characteristics of the upper classes, but those with virtue (who behave honestly) will always be protected by the King.

You can download a full copy of the script here: [archive.org/details/kingandmillerma01dodsgoog/page/n50/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/kingandmillerma01dodsgoog/page/n50/mode/2up). It is 57 pages long. You can also purchase the script from Amazon ([www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1407691635/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\\_encoding=UTF8&btcr=1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1407691635/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btcr=1)). Handout 4 which supports Learning Activity 4 - provides a summary of the play.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield



### SLIDE 8

#### KING HENRY AND THE ROYAL COURT

King Henry was King between 1154 and 1189. He became King at the age of 22 ruling England and France. He was a bulky man who commanded attention. He was a good speaker but had a reputation for getting angry very easily.

The King's court is a term that describes the King's council and household. The court travelled with the King wherever he went. The King would seek advice from the wise (hopefully) men of his court which would include relatives, barons, lords, and members of the church, such as bishops.

The word 'court' comes from the fact that most kings would make judgements – called 'holding court'. They would hear certain complaints and issues, especially issues between the most powerful barons and lords. Then they would make decisions with the help of their council.

It was common for the King to have a court jester (or comedian). King Henry employed Roland the Farter, a flautist, who played "one jump, one whistle, and one fart" for the Court each Christmas.

[mobius.wellesley.edu/detail.php?t=objects&type=all&f=&s=Laughing+Fool+Oostsanen&record=0](http://mobius.wellesley.edu/detail.php?t=objects&type=all&f=&s=Laughing+Fool+Oostsanen&record=0)

[mobius.wellesley.edu/browser.php?m=objects&kv=12940&i=17315](http://mobius.wellesley.edu/browser.php?m=objects&kv=12940&i=17315)

[commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8550227](http://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8550227)

### SLIDE 9

#### THE TRADITION OF HUNTING

King Henry II loved hunting and at the time, the royal family owned half the land in the country including about 70 Royal forests, of which Sherwood Forest was one. Only the King and members of the nobility (upper class people or people of rank) could hunt there.

Hunting was a popular sport for the nobility as it provided good training for going to war, requiring skill and courage. Hunting was done on foot or on horseback with bows and arrows, dogs were used to help track the wild animals.

The animals which would have been hunted were red deer, fallow deer, roe deer and wild boar, as well as foxes, rabbits, otters and a variety of game birds.

The Hunting Act 2004 made fox hunting with dogs illegal, although trail hunting (laying out a trail using the urine and body parts of foxes) is still allowed. You can be fined or jailed for the causing of unnecessary suffering to any animal.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Classroom discussion

**Read Scene 1 (Handout 1) and instigate a discussion with pupils about the opening scene. Some suggested prompts:**

*What was the King doing in Sherwood Forest?*

**ANSWER:**

He was hunting. Sherwood Forest would have been a royal forest so you would have needed special permission from the King to hunt there. As the King, he had every right to hunt there as he owns the Forest! However, the miller does not know that.

*What might the King have been hunting in the forest?*

**ANSWER:**

Deer (venison meat), wild boar, wild game (birds), rabbit, fox and otter.

*Is the Miller right to be suspicious of the stranger's presence in the woods?*

**ANSWER:**

Yes, as a Keeper of the Forest the miller was responsible for making sure nobody without permission entered the land without permission from the King.

*Would Sherwood Forest have been like it is today, with a Visitor Centre and picnic benches?*

**ANSWER:**

No, it would have been very dense and dangerous at night with the wild animals roaming around.

*Why is the Miller offended by the nobleman's offer of money?*

**ANSWER:**

His refusal to accept money is because he assumes it is a bribe (giving somebody money to pay them to do something, usually that is a bit unsafe or against the law). This is an indication of the Miller's strong morals. He will not do anything he does not want to, or which is wrong, even if he's offered money in exchange.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### 2. Comprehension writing task

**Read Scene 4 (Handout 2) – the scene where the King is welcomed in the Miller’s cottage. Now answer these questions – referring to the script to back up your answers.**

*What is the role of the women in the household?*

**ANSWER:**

The women are responsible for the domestic duties, primarily the preparation of food and fetching drinks.

*Do the King and the Miller have anything in common despite their obvious difference in social standing?*

**ANSWER:**

They also both respect the laws of the Kingdom and they both appreciate a drink of good ale...

*Is Dick impressed by the wealthy people he has met in London?*

**ANSWER:**

Dick’s opinion is that the courtiers have got their jobs through flattery and bribery. He also remarks that he has seen large houses with small hospitality and fine ladies who do nothing at all. It must be a contrast to the hard-working people of Mansfield who work on the land and in the flour mills.

*Imagine you are writing a speech bubble describing what the King is thinking during this scene. There are a couple of ‘asides’ from the King which will help you. In your answer consider his opinion of the Miller.*

**ANSWER:**

The King might feel worried without his courtiers to protect him.

He thinks that the Miller is honest and welcoming. He may also have a view on the Miller’s affection for his family.

The experience is a rare opportunity to see how poorer people live and also to get to know someone new without them feeling intimidated about being in the presence of royalty.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### 2. Comprehension writing task

**Read Scene 4 (Handout 2) – the scene where the King is welcomed in the Miller's cottage. Now answer these questions – referring to the script to back up your answers.**

*What is the role of the women in the household?*

**ANSWER:**

The women are responsible for the domestic duties, primarily the preparation of food and fetching drinks.

*Do the King and the Miller have anything in common despite their obvious difference in social standing?*

**ANSWER:**

They also both respect the laws of the Kingdom and they both appreciate a drink of good ale...

*Is Dick impressed by the wealthy people he has met in London?*

**ANSWER:**

Dick's opinion is that the courtiers have got their jobs through flattery and bribery. He also remarks that he has seen large houses with small hospitality and fine ladies who do nothing at all. It must be a contrast to the hard-working people of Mansfield who work on the land and in the flour mills.

*Imagine you are writing a speech bubble describing what the King is thinking during this scene. There are a couple of 'asides' from the King which will help you. In your answer consider his opinion of the Miller.*

**ANSWER:**

The King might feel worried without his courtiers to protect him.

He thinks that the Miller is honest and welcoming. He may also notice the Miller's affection for his family.

The experience is a rare opportunity to see how poorer people live and also to get to know someone new without them feeling intimidated by being in the presence of royalty.

# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### 3. Put on a performance

**Brief your class about the exciting performance they are going to put on which is part of The King and the Miller of Mansfield play - Scene 6 b).**

Review the script (Handout 3) together and begin by auditioning actors to play the four roles:

- Peggy
- Dick
- The King
- The Miller

Give your actors their script with their sections highlighted.

Actors should prepare for their role. They need to be able to read / or memorise their lines. They should also consider the different social background, personality and mood of their character.

Following are some hints:

The King is well spoken and confident, perhaps using bold flourishes. Although he is concealing his true identity, is a large and powerful man and his guise is as a member of the Royal Court so he may well adopt a slightly pompous attitude.

The Miller is a moral character and is proud to act as a guardian of the King's land. He is likely to speak with a local dialect and will have formed strong opinions on the rights of men to be free and own property which he will share with anyone who will listen.

Peggy is a beauty, but her reputation is in tatters. She is ashamed and tearful.

Dick is angry and in the mood for revenge. He will deliver his lines with great passion.

#### Set design

Select a team of theatre designers and stagehands responsible for designing the stage set, lighting and any props.

They might consider:

- Is there a view out of a window... perhaps a glimpse of the mill?
- Is there a fireplace?
- Might the ladies knitting be visible?
- Is there a table on the stage given that the group will shortly have dinner?
- How might they create the effect of moonlight?

\*You could ask actors to consider their costume or provide items to help them get into their role (a neck-tie for the Miller, an ornate belt for the King, etc.)

#### The audience

The rest of the class are to play the audience at Drury Lane.

Allocate the rabble to sit in the cheap seats at the back of the auditorium.

- Who are the wealthy people who can afford to sit in the boxes and at the front of the gallery?
- Could the ladies have fans and gentlemen have eyeglasses to give the impression of superiority?
- Might any of the audience heckle?
- Might some of the common folk have rotten fruit or vegetables that they pelt at the actors at the end of the scene?
- Could everyone "boo" when the name Lord Lurewell is mentioned?



# History of the key mills

## The King and the Miller of Mansfield

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### 3. Theatre critic writing task

#### Read Handout 4 – a summary of *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* play.

Based on the performance you have seen (Act 6b) write a review for the Mansfield Chad or other publication of your choice. Decide how many stars to give the play (1 for rubbish and 5 for outstanding).

Describe what the play is about – summarise the main plot (the story).

What message(s) does the playwright want us to take away after watching the play?

Say if it was well performed and who your favourite character was and why.

If you decided to give the play a good review, say what you particularly like about the story, the characters or the performance.

If it is a critical review, then explain what you did not like.

You might mention how you feel about seeing a play which reflects Mansfield's milling history.