



WILD SWAN & ST HUGH

By Margaret Crompton & John Crompton

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WILD SWAN AND SAINT HUGH

by Margaret Crompton © and John Crompton ©

*A legend in 8 scenes presented by spoken narrative and mime
(plus background note, questions, and a poem)*

*Designed for schools/drama groups/children's organisations and clubs/
junior wildlife groups*

CHARACTERS *in order of appearance*

Solo roles: any age; male or female

Other roles: children

GERALD OF WALES PRIEST/WRITER: *solo role: speaker/reader*

MUTE SWANS *any number:mime*

WILD SWAN *solo role: mime*

MANOR SERVANTS *any number:mime*

HUGH BISHOP/MONK, SAINT: *solo role: non-speaking*

GATE [optional] *2 tall actors: mime*

SYNOPSIS

GERALD of Wales tells the story, reading from a book he has written. Children mime action to illustrate each scene. They may make sounds – eg. MUTE SWANS hiss, MANOR SERVANTS chatter with one another, call out, greet HUGH.

THE STORY focusses on communication between people and other creatures. It takes place between 1186, when HUGH became Bishop of Lincoln, and a few years after his death in 1200, when WILD SWAN died. HUGH sometimes lived at the manor of Stow Park, his country retreat. The moat there was home to many MUTE SWANS. But one day, a large stranger arrived. WILD SWAN was a Whooper Swan, and had probably migrated from the far north (eg. Siberia). However, it didn't leave Stow Park to return home in the Spring. MANOR SERVANTS brought WILD SWAN to HUGH because they knew he loved all birds and animals. WILD SWAN could be fierce and they were afraid. But HUGH and WILD SWAN made instant contact. When HUGH had been away and was returning home, WILD SWAN would go to the GATE to greet him. And when HUGH was ill, and died, WILD SWAN expressed great sorrow, and became – well – depressed.

ACTION

Directors (teachers/leaders) are free to adapt script as appropriate.

MUTE SWANS: agitated when GERALD says that they're on the moat because they'll be eaten for dinner [*eg. flap wings*];

angry/hostile when stranger WILD SWAN arrives [*eg. flap wings, hiss*]

MANOR SERVANTS: busy with various occupations [*eg. cooking, cleaning, gardening*];

respond to WILD SWAN [*eg. when HUGH is approaching*]

GATE: 2 children hold hands high to form arch for WILD SWAN and HUGH

SCENE 1

GERALD [*sits down with large book; speaks to children*]

Good day to you and welcome. Now, all good stories begin 'Once upon a time.' And all the best stories come to life. You're going to help bring this story to life. So all you Mute Swans, begin swanning around while I begin.

Once upon a time, in the county of Lincolnshire, there was a beautiful house called Stow Park. This was a Manor which had its own farm. The house was built on a little island with a deep ditch all round. The ditch was full of water called a moat. And the moat was full of fish for the people in the house to eat. And I have to tell you, that the swans were often eaten by the people too. But don't worry. No-one's going to eat you today.

[*MUTE SWANS waddle/sit/swim/dive for fish - and when he says the swans were eaten - they all shudder and make a fuss*]

One day, in the winter when it was very cold, a stranger arrived at the moat. The stranger was another swan. Very large. But also, very, very tired. The stranger landed on the water and soon showed that it intended to stay.

[*WILD SWAN slowly flies in and lands, very tired. MUTE SWANS flutter around in dismay but don't make it welcome*]

The Mute Swans were not happy. Although the stranger was another swan, it looked different from them. Mute Swans have orangey-red beaks and a big black bump on their foreheads. You may have seen Mute Swans on rivers or lakes near where you live. The stranger had a yellow beak with a black tip. The Mute Swans hissed like snakes and tried to make the stranger go away.

[*MUTE SWANS hiss and look threatening*]

But the stranger wasn't a coward. If I'm honest it probably frightened the smaller swans who weren't used to

unexpected visitors. The stranger fought them and killed them all, except one female.

[MUTE SWANS fight, hissing; WILD SWAN wins]

That's what I wrote about it, although I didn't actually see the fight. Now I come to think about it, perhaps not all the Mute Swans were killed. Maybe only one or two.

How do I know about all this? That's the next part of the story. All you Mute Swans, have a rest and dry off your feathers. We're going indoors for a few minutes. Into the Manor House on the little island.

[MUTE SWANS sit together. WILD SWAN alone]

SCENE 2

GERALD The Manor belonged to the other most important person in this story. Hugh. He was the Bishop of Lincoln. Being a Bishop means that you have to be responsible for churches in an enormous area called a diocese. And in those days, the diocese of Lincoln ran all the way from the Humber Estuary on the edge of Yorkshire, in the North, to the River Thames in the South. Bishop Hugh had to travel many miles every year.

What's more, he had to advise the King. And that could be a tricky matter. If the King didn't like you, he could order you to be punished. Even killed.

Hugh had really wanted to stay as a monk in France, near his home country, Burgundy. But first he'd been sent to England to look after an abbey in Somerset. And then he'd been told to be Bishop in this faraway place, Lincoln, where he didn't know anyone. But of course, he had to obey the order, because he was a servant of God above everything else.

As you can imagine, Hugh often felt very weary. Being a Bishop, and advising the King in London, or other places in England, or even abroad, was very different from living peacefully in a monastery and worshipping God through prayer and work. When he could, he went to Stow Park to rest and enjoy the farmland and beautiful countryside.

I've been thinking that the Manor Servants might have felt like the Mute Swans on the moat. They looked after the farm, gardens and orchards. I expect they were used to being busy, just getting on with everyday life.

When Hugh came home to Stow Park, they looked after him. But remember. He was a monk. He didn't want special rich