

**Item 'to the litle god xvj d.': Late Medieval Festivity and its Reform, 1450-1642**

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## Abstract

The larger part of the scholarship has concentrated on late medieval festivity in the rural environment and on position of this festivity in social relationships. The study of English rituals and entertainments in the urban environment has, however, been considerably neglected. In addition, the scholarship on the reform of traditional festivity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has for the most part been included in the study of the 'reformation of manners', has concentrated on the puritan element of the suppression of traditional festivity, or has focused on the countryside as well.

This study will therefore set out to redress this by comparing thirteen of the most populous English cities and will attempt to establish what the nature of traditional festivity was, and will consider the attitudes of the authorities towards this after the Reformation. It will endeavour to reveal the general pattern was of both issues in the English urban environment. The first chapter will deal with questions like: who organised and financed the festivities, who participated and who were involved in the events, what happened during the events, what may have been the function or larger meaning of the occasion, and what tells us this about urban culture? The second chapter would, then, consider questions like: when did festive drama decline, and what were the motivations of the authorities or people in authority to tolerate, regulate, or suppress popular festivity?

Largely based on the use of the *Records of Early English Drama*, this thesis will reveal that around mid-sixteenth century the main religious expressions of the borough were destroyed by the Edwardian and Elizabethan Reformations, and virtually removed communal celebrations from the calendar. At the end of the sixteenth-century and in the early seventeenth-century, in the so called second Reformation, a number of customs were primarily attacked by the Corporations, and some even totally suppressed. The civic elite seems to have been motivated by an incentive of good governance, local circumstances and a

godly conscience. This study has outlined the process of toleration, decline, and suppression of various custom, and encourages not to think not in linear processes of decline, but to pay attention to individual attitudes towards various customs.

## Introduction

### Historiography

Studies of late medieval calendar customs have largely concentrated on the position of these customs in social relationships, which has resulted in three different perspectives. The first, of which Charles Phythian-Adams is the main advocate, claims that festivity functioned to preserve and enhance 'the wholeness of the social order', by 'ensuring continuity within the structure, promoting cohesion and controlling some of its inherent conflicts'.<sup>1</sup> The second, influenced by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, holds that festivity could function as a medium for protest and deviance.<sup>2</sup> This view, however, may have been influenced by the fact that its source base mainly consists of court records, of which the episodes 'are always an instrument of dissent and subversion'.<sup>3</sup> The third approach, of which Mervyn James is the main protagonist, is to a certain extent a combination of the other two; festivity primarily served to uphold the traditional order, but by temporarily inverting the established social order.<sup>4</sup> Ronald Hutton, however, has underlined the lack of evidence to support the claims made above, and accordingly, has virtually withheld himself from the debate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles, Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen : the communal year at Coventry 1450-1550', in P. Clark, and P. Slack, (eds.), *Crisis and order in English towns 1500-1700: Essays in urban history* (1972)., p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington, 1984), Bakhtin has argued that carnival was the second life of the people, and temporarily liberated them from reality and the traditional social order.

<sup>3</sup> Meg Twycross, 'Some Approaches to Dramatic Festivity, especially Processions', in Meg Twycross (ed.), *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13-19 July, 1989* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 18-9; For example see Sheila Lindenbaum, 'Rituals of Exclusion: feasts and Plays of the English Religious Fraternities', in Meg Twycross (ed.), *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13-19 July, 1989* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 54-65; Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance: Mervyn James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval Town', *Past and Present*, xcvi (1983), pp. 3-29 and Sally-Beth Maclean, 'Hocktide: A Reassessment of a Popular Pre-Reformation Festival', in Meg Twycross (ed.), *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13-19 July, 1989* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 233-41.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), p. 301; Ronald Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England: Some Further Reflections', *English Historical Review*, 120:485 (2005), pp. 75-6; Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 206, 308.

Hutton's contribution to the field has nevertheless been very significant. In his *Rise and Fall of Merry England* and his *Stations of the Sun*, Hutton has successfully questioned the pagan origins of a number of customs, and has challenged the reverse Whig view of English calendar customs; the notion that they have a static core, by underling that continual invention and reinvention of them.<sup>6</sup> In addition, in *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, Hutton identifies two developments which, according to him, created 'Merry England'. The first is 'an apparent general increase in the quantity and complexity of seasonal ceremony in religious and lay life', and the second 'is a shift in official attitudes to popular calendar customs from on to condemnation or limitation to one of integration and adaption'.<sup>7</sup> The former process has been challenged by Clive Burgess, by questioning Hutton's the representativeness of Hutton's main source base, the churchwarden's accounts.<sup>8</sup> In defence, Hutton has demonstrated that thirteen customs developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> Part of the same argument has been challenged by Eamon Duffy, who has argued that it is not valid for the rite concerning the Easter sepulchre in Holy Week.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Hutton's extensive use of churchwarden's accounts presents the subject only from one-dimensional point of view, and gives 'the illusion of grassroots history while being largely detached from the local context'.<sup>11</sup>

Another scholar who has made a major contribution to the scholarship is Phythian-Adams. In his *Ceremony and the Citizen* he identifies the existence of a 'dichotomy of the year' in pre-Reformation Coventry; a division of the year in a secular half and a ritualistic half.<sup>12</sup> The ritualistic half contained, in opposition to the secular half, all the mayor public festivals and ran from Christmas to about the end of June.<sup>13</sup> This notion has survived for almost forty years

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<sup>6</sup> Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* (London, 1998), p. 162; Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*.

<sup>7</sup> Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England', p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Clive Burgess, 'Pre-Reformation Churchwarden's Accounts and Parish Government: Lessons from London And Bristol', *English Historical Review*, cxvii (2002), pp. 309-11.

<sup>9</sup> Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England', p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Eamon Duffy, 'Rites and Wrongs', *Times Literary Supplement*, (11 October 1996), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Reay, 'The Cultures of the People in Early Modern England', *The Journal of British Studies*, 36:4 (1997), p. 470.

<sup>12</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', pp. 71-7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 73-4.



nearly unchallenged, and Hutton has applied it in both his works.<sup>14</sup> Duffy has, however, questioned the whole concept, and has pointed out that ‘there is very little evidence’ that English men and women ‘were aware of the sharp dichotomy and not the “absolute contrast” perceived by modern social historians’, and no celebration was secular.<sup>15</sup> He has also drawn attention to the amount of important “religious” celebrations in the secular half.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the culmination of the ritual half, at least in a number of northern cities, was the performance of the cycle-plays, which have been studied to a great extent by theatre historians, who primarily used literary evidence. More recently, however, theatre historians have undertaken studies to study drama in its context, and it are those works that will be useful for the present study. The most important works are David Mills’s *Recycling the Cycle: the City of Chester and its Whitsun Plays*, and Alexandra Johnston’s ‘The city as patron: York’.<sup>17</sup>

Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England saw an increase in the prosecutions of moral offenses, in both the secular as well as the ecclesiastical courts.<sup>18</sup> Keith Wrightson and David Levine have suggested that this trend was in fact a crusade for moral reform, locally waged by the Puritan middling- and better sorts of the village, directed against the village poor, and was driven a combination of economic and religious factors.<sup>19</sup> This argument, however, has been controversial. Margaret Spufford has demonstrated that economic hardship produced comparable actions of moral reform in the thirteenth- century, and has

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick Collinson, ‘Merry England on the ropes: the contested culture of the early modern English town’ in Simon Ditchfield, *Christianity and community in the West: essays for John Bossy* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 135-6; Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 5; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, p.

<sup>15</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (London, 1992), pp. 46-7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47-8.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandra F. Johnston, ‘The city as patron: York’, in Paul Whitfield White, Suzanne R. Westfall (eds.), *Shakespeare and theatrical patronage in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 150-75.; David Mills, *Recycling the cycle: the city of Chester and its Whitsun plays* (Toronto, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Martin Ingram, ‘Reformation of Manners in Early Modern England’, in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox & Steve Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), p. 56; Margaret, Spufford, ‘Puritanism and Social Control?’, in Anthony Fletcher & John Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 198-220.

stressed the centrality of religion.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Martin Ingram has shown that Keevil in Wiltshire only witnessed a slight increase in prosecutions and in the absence of a godly oligarchy.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Cynthia Herrup's has shown that no reformation of manners took place in East Sussex at all, even as Puritanism was at work.<sup>22</sup> In defence, Wrightson has argued that 'Terling was witnessing a redrawing of the boundaries of permitted behaviour', and that although frequent prosecutions were not original, they took place with extra intensity and on a different scale.<sup>23</sup> In a more recent work, McIntosh argues that it cannot be upheld that 'Puritanism was responsible for social regulation in early modern England', and that the readiness to prosecute was fuelled by other causes.<sup>24</sup> Paul Slack has concentrated on this issue, the issue of social reform and 'speedy reformation', in the urban environment in his essay 'Godly Cities'. Slack argues that 'Puritanism was not necessary for all forms of reforming activity in all places [but that] it was essential in some places', that 'civic godliness had the capacity to produce a new set of determined drivers for the vehicle of social reform, and to accelerate its pace, even if it did not select an entirely new destination'.<sup>25</sup> The sustenance of urban godliness, however, depended to a great extent on individual characters. In response to Spufford, Slack makes clear that she is right in stressing 'the centrality of religion, although it was as much a matter of reforming lives as of saving souls'.<sup>26</sup> Steve Hindle has, however, claimed that all scholars have 'failed to see the wood for the trees'.<sup>27</sup> The reformation of manners was, according to him, an component of a greater scheme of good governance, and must not be seen in isolation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Spufford, 'Puritanism and Social Control?', pp. 44, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Ingram, 'Religion, Communities and Moral Discipline in Late Sixteenth- and Early-Seventeenth-Century England: Case Studies', in K. von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1984), pp. 185-8.

<sup>22</sup> Cynthia Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Wrightson, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 200-1.

<sup>24</sup> Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 210.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Slack, 'Godly Cities', in Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 33, 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 44, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Steve Hindle, *The state and social change in Early modern England* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 176-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 176-8.

The reform of popular culture has more than often been included in this debate. In his influential work *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* Patrick Collinson portrays the cultural change in the latter middle ages and early modern period as an hour-glass, with a fat upper half and a rich lower half. 'In between there was a narrow neck, through which the sand fell finely but with considerable force: the Protestant Reformation, which destroyed so much and limited and restricted what was left'.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Collinson has made a distinction between what he calls 'the first and second Reformations'.<sup>30</sup> This division came into being because of the '[s]ignificant cultural watershed', which occurred between the first and second generations of protestants, and caused the 'common cultural ground', which was up to that point shared between them and their Catholic adversaries, to disappear.<sup>31</sup> Until the second Reformation, 'much of the old cultural fabric remained intact'; 'Protestantism was capable with mirth', towards 1580, however, 'there was a sea change'.<sup>32</sup> Collinson ascribes the reason of this to 'the reception of Calvinism', and underlines that the 'unrelenting struggle against Catholicism must also be central to our understanding of the Protestant impact on culture'.<sup>33</sup> The 'death of Merry England', however, left a number of 'frayed ends'.<sup>34</sup> Collinson mentions secularisation, the survival of old customs, the coming into being of a new Protestant festive culture, the divergence between elite and popular culture (under influence by Burke), and 'the contestation and politicisation of culture' amongst other things.<sup>35</sup>

Collinson's 'frayed ends' bear a striking resemblance to Phythian-Adams's his argument, who as early as 1972 described the process of secularisation, the withdrawal of ceremony and religion indoors, the vanishing of communal processions, and the disappearance

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'From iconoclasm to iconophobia : the cultural impact of the second English reformation' in Peter Marshall (ed.), *The impact of the English reformation 1500-1640* (London, 1997), p. 283.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 283.

<sup>32</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', pp. 141-2.

<sup>33</sup> Collinson, 'From iconoclasm to iconophobia', p. 298.

<sup>34</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', p. 142.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 143-6; Patrick Collinson, 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture', in Christopher Durston & Jacqueline Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (London, 1996), p. 44.

of popular participation in public rituals.<sup>36</sup> Hutton continues in the spirit of Phythian-Adams as well. He describes process of the loss of the religious calendar customs around the mid-sixteenth century, and the attack on the secular or semi-secular customs that remained.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Hutton has suggested that the reform of popular culture possibly has to be considered separately from the general model of the reformation of manners, since places that witnessed no reformation of manners nevertheless witnessed a loss of calendar pastimes. In addition, Hutton stresses the 'very rapid and dramatic attack upon the festive culture' under Edward, and the fact that the 'rehabilitation of that culture under Mary' happened regardless of socio-economic developments.<sup>38</sup> What was happening, was that a 'cultural pendulum', that had swung forwards, was now swinging back.<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth's reign did have a similar impact on ritual as Edward's, and Tudor policy was strictly and swiftly enforced at the parish level. Furthermore, Hutton has argued that traditional festivity declined during Elizabeth's reign primarily because of evangelical Protestantism, but social anxieties played a part towards the end. These were mainly local initiatives, but in the under James and Charles, festive culture was turned into a national issue, and the culture shrunk each time it was criticized in Parliament.<sup>40</sup> Collinson has, however, criticized Hutton for the fact that he 'renders rather too simple, and simply antagonistic, the relation between the moral concerns and utterances of the complaint writers and Elizabethan and Jacobean society more generally'.<sup>41</sup>

In his *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* David Underdown has studied the causes and nature of the English civil war, and has suggested that the developments debated above in fact were two cultural positions in conflict. This were positions with different social values: 'one stressing tradition, custom, and the harmonious 'vertical' community; the other moral reformation,

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<sup>36</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', pp. 79-80.

<sup>37</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 110, 152.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 143-6, 198-9.

<sup>41</sup> Collinson, 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism', p. 57.

individualism, the ethic of work, and personal responsibility'.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Steve Hindle has stressed the difficulty of suppressing traditional festivity.<sup>43</sup>

Most popular pastimes took place on the Sabbath, and consequently offended Protestants. In the standard account on the *English Sabbath*, Kenneth Parker has argued that '[t]he Elizabethan Church restated the long-established sabbatarian teachings of the pre-Reformation era', and has described how sabbatarian complaints were not limited to Puritans.<sup>44</sup> Only after publication of the book of Sports, a strict observance of the Sabbath came to be identified with Puritanism.<sup>45</sup>

### **Methodology, Approaches, and the Problem of Genre**

My original research questions and hypothesis were considerably different from the ones pursued in the paper. I had done a long essay on the reform of popular culture for one of my modules, and became interested in the reform of traditional festivity in the city and county of Chester; where the Midsummer show was reformed and the mystery plays were suppressed. However, then I stumbled on David Mills's *Recycling the Cycle: the City of Chester and its Whitsun Plays*.<sup>46</sup> Mills had taken such a broad definition of drama that he had virtually covered everything I wanted to cover in my thesis. I then started to consider a comparative study, to compare a number of cities to reveal the general pattern of the suppression or reform of popular culture. I realised that in order to be able to make an analysis of this process, I first had to establish what was it that was under decline here, or what was it that was being reformed? This would therefore be a chapter on the nature of pre-Reformation or late medieval popular festivity in the urban environment. The city is a justifiable object of research in this context because boroughs were significant locations for several important rituals and

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<sup>42</sup> Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, p. 72

<sup>43</sup> Steve Hindle, 'Custom, Festival and Protest in Early Modern England: The Little Budworth Wakes, St Peter's Day, 1596', *Rural History*, 6 (1995), pp. 157, 161, 162, 167.

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: a Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge 1988), pp. 5, 133.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6,7, 133, 214, 216.

<sup>46</sup> Mills, *Recycling the cycle*.

festivities.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, since Hutton's *Rise and Fall of Merry England* and his *Stations of the Sun* are largely based on churchwardens' accounts and mainly focus on rural England, a study of popular festivity within the urban scenery would perhaps challenge or complement his work.<sup>48</sup> In order to achieve this, the chapter will deal with the following questions: who organised and financed the festivities, who participated and who were involved in the events, what happened during the events, what may have been the function or larger meaning of the occasion, and what tells us this about urban culture? The second chapter would, then, be a comparative study of the attitudes of the authorities towards the post-Reformation popular festivity. It will therefore consider questions like: when did festive drama decline, and what were the motivations of the authorities or people in authority to tolerate, regulate, or suppress popular festivity?

The main body of source material that will be used in order to answer the questions listed above are the volumes of the *Records of Early English Drama*. They consist for the larger part of civic records and guild accounts, which will first be used to recreate civic ritual and entertainment in the late medieval period, and subsequently will be used to trace what happened to those customs in the post-Reformation period. Secondary literature will be used to complement the findings, and used to contextualise the findings. The use of the *REED* volumes does have limitations; its editors, often historians of theatre, operate with a specific, but not consistent definition of drama, which sometimes includes or excludes certain customs. For instance, most liturgical customs and church ales, when not accompanied by minstrels or secular entertainments, are often excluded.<sup>49</sup> Certain customs, like Hocktide, which are only covered by a single editor, have accordingly been excluded in this study.<sup>50</sup> Limiting the present study to the use of the *REED* volumes only, will hence result in revealing only a part of the

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<sup>47</sup> Reay, *Popular Cultures in England*, p. 165.

<sup>48</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, p. 307.

<sup>49</sup> See for example: *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire (including Chester)*, eds. Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, David Mills (Toronto, 2007), p. cxci, cxci; *Records of Early English Drama: York*, eds. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson (Toronto, 1979), p. xv.

<sup>50</sup> Hocktide has been excluded, along with college drama, and also the occasional reference to church ales.

whole spectrum of ceremonial and entertainment. The picture is further complicated and distorted by the partial survival of records, the loss of most of the records of the abbeys and priories, and habits of record taking. Scribes, for example, often summarized the expenses in the account books and wrote down an itemised bill on a separate piece of paper. In addition, they tended to record the unusual more often rather than the commonplace. Despite of these limitations, the *REED* volumes are nevertheless a extremely valuable and rich source for the social historian.

The *REED* volumes present, however, yet more limitations. First of all, they only cover documents until 1642, until the closing of the London theatres. This will be, then, one end of the period under consideration here. The other end has to be artificially chosen, and to go as far back as the 1450 will be enough to characterise late medieval festivity. The next division is more easily chosen, and although still artificial, the English Reformation is a legitimate choice to divide up the two chapters. Secondly, the volumes only cover a number of cities. When the most populous towns in England are considered, it appears that *REED* volumes are available for thirteen out of the eighteen towns with a population over 4000, which have consequently been selected for this study to represent the most accurate sample of the English urban environment as possible.<sup>51</sup>

The different approaches to popular culture have mainly been formed under influence of Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Burke, influenced by social anthropology, adopts a bi-polar model to the culture of early modern Europe, that is, he identifies a great and little tradition in early modern European history. The upper-class, however, did participate in the popular culture, in the little tradition, but the non-elite did not partake in the great tradition.<sup>52</sup> This model however, has limited value; 'it encourages us to think of the culture of those below the elite as if it were a coherent whole', and as a

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Slack, 'Great and Good Towns', in P. Clark, *Cambridge Urban History of Britain vol 2. 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 347-76.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), pp. 23-29.

consequence glosses over the 'diversities within popular culture itself'.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, 'formulating the question in terms of a conflict between elite and popular culture', diverts our attention from taking the extent of interaction between the great and little tradition into account.<sup>54</sup> In opposition to Burke's bi-polar model, and against his 'strict correspondences between cultural cleavages and social hierarchies', Roger Chartier has encouraged historians to think in terms of 'fluid circulation, practices shared by various groups, and blurred distinctions'.<sup>55</sup> Instead of a societal divide between the elite and the people, Chartier stresses 'the many cleavages that divided prerevolutionary society', which 'functioned in deference to several principles (not necessarily superposable) to manifest oppositions or gaps that existed not only between men and women, city dwellers and rural folk, Catholics and Protestants, or masters and workers, but also between generations, crafts and trades, or city neighborhoods and country districts'.<sup>56</sup> The model advocated by Chartier, the appropriation model, does not assume social classification beforehand, unlike the bi-polar model which takes the elite non-elite divide for granted.<sup>57</sup>

This study will approach the subject more in line of the appropriation model, and will not approach customs with the assumption of an elite/non-elite divide in mind beforehand. Notions like popular festivity, or popular culture will be employed throughout this thesis as generic terms, but they are not meant to suggest a dichotomy between the upper sorts and the people. Moreover, this study will start off by considering the local, and will, by considering all the local evidence, proceed to construct the national. In addition, because of the gaps in the historical records and the haphazardly survival of sources, it is necessary to extrapolate evidence from the known to the unknown, but with careful consideration and within limits.

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<sup>53</sup> Tim Harris, 'Problematising popular culture', in Tim Harris (ed.), *Popular culture in England, c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 4-5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>55</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Reay, *Popular Cultures in England*, p. 201.



The object of study is, however, problematical. Historians of theatre have come to realize that they were imposing categories from the present on the past, which the rise of professional theatre had brought upon them. They have recognized the fact that drama had a wider meaning in the late medieval context, and that late medieval festivity, ceremony, and customs had an 'odd fluidity'.<sup>58</sup> For example, for contemporaries the word pageant could mean various things: it could range from a play to a large candle they carried in procession.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Pettitt has suggested a category to encompass all these customs "Customary Drama", performance as or part of a custom.<sup>60</sup>

Another way to look at the subject is to outline the ceremonial year. In his work, David Mills has solved this problem by grouping 'the activities in a broadly generic way', which is more appropriate to describe the 'process of change and its implications for the significance and survival of the various activities'. Additionally, he fitted Chester's customs in a spectrum, with the 'official' customs on one end, and popular one on the other. A division like this has got limited value, and the distinctions made between the customs are artificial, but every distinction would be artificial and would not be able to grasp the true fluidity of late medieval customs and reality. Therefore, for the sake of analytical clarity, divisions have to be made, and Mills's spectrum will be a useful approach to take here.<sup>61</sup> A further addition will be made as well; the customs will be divided up between religious and secular customs; a distinction which is evidently artificial, since religion impregnated medieval society.

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<sup>58</sup> Twycross, 'Some Approaches to Dramatic Festivity', pp. 1-4; William Tydeman, 'An introduction to medieval English theatre', in Richard Beadle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Pettitt, 'Customary Drama: Social and Spatial Patterning in Traditional Encounters', *Folk Music Journal*, 7 :1, (1995), pp. 27-42.

<sup>61</sup> Mills, *Recycling the cycle*, pp. 57-8.

## Chapter I: Late Medieval Traditional Festivity

This chapter will look at late medieval festive entertainment and ritual, and will attempt to establish what the range and texture of this was. The following questions will be under consideration here: who organised and financed the events, who participated and who were involved in the festivities, what happened during the events, what may have been the function or larger meaning of the occasion, and what tells us this about urban culture?

### Religious Feasts and Festivals

#### Corpus Christi Processions

The feast of Corpus Christi was announced in a papal bull in 1317, and spread rapidly across Europe in the following year. At the start of the fifteenth-century, processions can be detected in virtually every city in England.<sup>62</sup> On Corpus Christi Day, after the mass was celebrated, the congregation would, in front of the Eucharist, process through the streets to the place where the feast would take place.<sup>63</sup> After the procession, informal celebrations often followed, and guilds, fraternities, and the civic elite would have dinners.<sup>64</sup>

Evidence concerning the nature of the procession survives from Bristol, York, Coventry, Newcastle, Chester, Hereford, Lincoln, Exeter, and Shrewsbury; all which, with the exception of Exeter, had processions in which the crafts of the city took part.<sup>65</sup> The crafts would carry a certain amount of torches before the sacrament, which would occasionally accompanied by minstrels. Other attributes were carried in the procession as well, the Drapers and the company of the Mercers, Ironmongers, and Goldsmiths of Shrewsbury carried banners for example. Additionally, the members of the latter also bore a large amount of candles on pewter dishes. Every craft would collect a certain amount of money from its members to fund

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<sup>62</sup> Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 304-5.

<sup>63</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Shropshire*, ed. J. Alan B. Somerset (Toronto, 1994), pp. 147, 171, 157-8, 165, 167; *REED: York*, pp. 78-8, 145, 180-181, 211-212, 223.

<sup>65</sup> The craft guilds of Exeter probably took part, but there is no evidence for this in the Pre-Reformation period.

all of this.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, it is plausible that all craft guilds attended in their liveries, as becomes clear from two orders from 1452 and 1460 from Newcastle, which required the Slaters and Saddlers to do just this. From a later ordinance of the Newcastle Walkers', it can be derived that attendance for its members was mandatory, on pain of two pounds of wax. The Newcastle pattern is confirmed by evidence from other boroughs. For example, the oath of the brothers and sisters of the Lincoln Cordwainers required that each of them 'shalbe redy yeerly to goo in *procession*', and the members of the company of Mercers, Ironmongers, and Goldsmiths were regularly fined for going to Coventry and for not going in procession.<sup>67</sup> Besides the compulsory attendance of individuals, the crafts as a body were required to be present and to bear torches too.<sup>68</sup>

In a number of cities, pageants were carried in the procession by the crafts. For instance, in Bristol the Wire drawers and Pinmakers bore their fairly simple pageant, which they carried in the Midsummer watch as well (see above), and dressed it up with candles, roses and flowers. On the other hand, the crafts of Hereford and Lincoln carried more sophisticated pageants on Corpus Christi Day and St. Anne's day. Hereford's Mayor's Books contains a list of craft guilds and the pageant which were assigned to them; all are scenes from stories from the old or new testament, except for one Tanners' pageant, which was 'the story of Shore Thursday'.<sup>69</sup> Lincoln's pageants were probably similar in nature. However, the records only reveal the character of the Cordwainers' pageant, which portrayed the story of visit of the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem, and was according to Craig Hardin, 'a mere pageant or float ... [that was] drawn through the streets'.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, ed. David N. Klausner (Toronto, 1990), pp. 117-8; *Records of Early English Drama: Lincolnshire*, ed. James Stokes (Toronto, 2009), pp. 153-4.

<sup>67</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Bristol*, ed. Mark C. Pilkinton (Toronto, 1997), p. 20; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 52-6; *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry*, ed. R.W. Ingram (Toronto, 1981), pp. 19, 66, 19-21, 87-8, 111, 115-6, 121-7; *REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 117-8; *REED: Lincolnshire*, pp. 156-8; *Records of Early English Drama: Newcastle upon Tyne*, ed. J.J. Anderson (Toronto, 1982), pp. 6-9; *REED: Shropshire*, pp. 147, 151-2, 156-8, 163, 171, 181, 188; *REED: York*, pp. 81-2, 249.

<sup>68</sup> *REED: Coventry*, pp. 56-7; *REED: York*, pp. 109-10, 125-6, 164-8.

<sup>69</sup> *REED: Bristol*, pp. 20, 25, 39; *REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 117-8; *REED: Lincolnshire*, pp. 140, 152-4, 157.

<sup>70</sup> Hardin, 'The Lincoln Cordwainers' Pageant', pp. 611-2; *REED: Lincolnshire*, pp. 140, 152-4, 157.

Corpus Christi processions were extremely hierarchical; the closer a position was to sacrament, i.e., the body of Christ, the more prominent it was. The place in the procession thus reflected the status in the community of each participating unit.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, within the individual unit there was also a hierarchy, the ones that were made brothers most recently had to go in front.<sup>72</sup> Conflicts between craft guilds over their places in the procession arose frequently. In York for instance, a dispute between the Cordwainers and the Weavers lingered on for eleven years, and required the intervention of the of the king to make an end to it. Although this case is exceptional, it does illustrate how central the position in the Corpus Christi procession was to a crafts' status. Comparable, though less extensive cases, can be found in the records of Shrewsbury, Chester, York, and Newcastle. In all these disputes the Corporation acted as mediator and had the final word in the conflict.<sup>73</sup> Hence it was the city which decided which place a craft would occupy in the procession, and consequently its status. A 1501 order from York's House Books survives, in which the order of the procession is laid out, together with the number of torches each craft was expected to carry. A similar order from around 1500 can be found in Chester's Mayor Books.<sup>74</sup>

The civic elite, i.e. the mayor and the aldermen, themselves occupied the place at the back of the procession which was the closest to the sacrament, the most significant place in the procession. This was almost invariably the case, except in York after 1476 when the Corpus Christi Guild had taken over this position.<sup>75</sup> In addition, each aldermen, and member of the twenty-four were to go into the procession, and have one or more torches carried in it. It appears that, at least in Newcastle, the sheriffs, ex-mayors, and ex-aldermen were to join the mayor and his brethren at the sacrament, in the order as they had been chosen to the office. The immediate effect of this was that the whole urban elite would be present at the back of

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<sup>71</sup> Johnston, 'The Guild of Corpus Christi', pp. 375-6.

<sup>72</sup> REED; *Newcastle*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>73</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, pp. 59, 68-9; REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 6-7; REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 141-3; REED: *York*, pp. 125-6, 162, 164-8, 169-174.

<sup>74</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, pp. 65-6; REED: *York*, pp. 186.

<sup>75</sup> Johnston, 'The Guild of Corpus Christi', pp. 375-6, 380-1; REED: *Lincolnshire*, pp. 142, 148; REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 8-9.

the procession. However, there might have been reluctance on the part of the aldermen, since regulations concerning their presence were issued regularly in the late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century.<sup>76</sup>

Considering the evidence presented above, it is possible to conclude that it was the Corporation which was responsible for the regulation of the participation of the craft guilds in this civic ritual. However, it was another institution which was in charge of the religious aspect of the procession, this was the Corpus Christi Guild (St. Anne's Guild in Lincoln), which was responsible for the clergy amongst other things.<sup>77</sup> More importantly, they were responsible for the carrying of the shrine. Most of the evidence of how this part of the procession probably would have looked like comes from York and to a lesser extent from Coventry; it seems that the shrine was carried on a bier, lying on eight white cushions. Above the shrine a baudekin was carried by four clerks. Furthermore, the shrine was guarded by two wardens, carrying two white rods; four other wardens managed the procession, and a number of singing brothers walked near them. The master of the guild, accompanied by two of his predecessors led the procession. They would most likely have worn the valuable ornamental clothing found in the inventory of the Coventry Corpus Christi Guild of 1502, which lists for instance a mitre wrought with gold, furred hoods, and a cross staff of silver.<sup>78</sup> Some of these Guilds were exclusive and powerful institutions.<sup>79</sup> In Coventry for example, forty per cent of the masters was member of the guild, and in Lincoln, every man and woman who was resident in the city had to be a member of the St. Anne's Guild, as well as contribute a certain amount of money to it. In York, the Guild rose to a place of prominence within the urban community, as Johnston has shown.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Orders were issued in York in 1476, 1482, 1492, 1501; in Lincoln in 1517-18, 1520-1, 1522-3, 1523-4, 1524-5, 1525-6; *REED: Lincolnshire*, pp. 139, 142, 146-8, 151; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 8-9; *REED: York*, pp. 109-110, 125-126, 164-168, 186.

<sup>77</sup> Johnston, 'The Guild of Corpus Christi', pp. 382; Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> *REED: Coventry*, pp. 80-1, 92, 97-8; *REED: York*, pp. 97-98, 116-7, 161, 201-202, 204, 210-3, 223.

<sup>79</sup> Lindenbaum, 'Rituals of Exclusion', p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The Guild of Corpus Christi and the procession of Corpus Christi in York', *Mediaeval Studies*, 38 (1976), pp. 378-81; Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 119-20; *REED: Lincolnshire*, p. 140.

Exeter and Newcastle also had Corpus Christi Guilds, though evidence concerning them is scarce.<sup>81</sup>

The procession would, then, according to the evidence presented above, have been the community on display, with the civic elite, the craft guilds, and the clergy assembled in one whole. '[T]he shared element', as Miri Rubin has argued, 'was the eucharist in whose virtue the orderings and hierarchies were being negotiated and displayed'.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, Phythian-Adams seems to have been correct to argue that 'the community in its entirety was literally defining itself for all to see'.<sup>83</sup> By their partaking, the participants expressed a sense of unity, and communicate their shared values to the audience.<sup>84</sup> For the audience, however, the 'socially' excluded, this would be a reminder of predominance of one part of the urban community.<sup>85</sup> In addition, since the Corporation was responsible for the regulation of the participation of the craft guilds, James seems to have been right that the procession of 'Corpus Christi could function as the symbol of the principle of magisterial authority'.<sup>86</sup> His key argument, however, that the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi was an reaffirmation and recreation of the body of urban society, is hard to challenge or to prove. Nevertheless, his attempt to place the notion of the communal body at the centre, has recently been decentred by Rubin. She argues that the 'Christian theological tradition .. held different views in the degree of cohesion which the body implied', and that '[b]odies cannot be taken as possessing an essential meaning; like all meaningful signs they are culturally constructed'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Devon*, ed. John Wasson (Toronto, 1986), pp. 107-11; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 11-15.

<sup>82</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 245.

<sup>83</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 58.

<sup>84</sup> Twycross, 'Some Approaches to Dramatic Festivity', pp. 17-9.

<sup>85</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', pp. 58-9.

<sup>86</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', pp. 11-12.

<sup>87</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', p. 8-12; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 270-1.

### Processions and Feasts on Saint days

Besides the procession on the feast of Corpus Christi, the urban communities of late Medieval England processed through the streets on other occasions as well. From the records, the impression arises that the cities went in procession on the feast days of important saints. These processions may have been less elaborate than the Corpus Christi procession, because less payments survive from the civic records, although this might not necessarily have been the case, given that they were organised by the religious fraternities, whose records have in most cases not survived. However, it is clear that the Corporation was involved to a lesser extent, as no orders and few traces survive from the civic records. In addition, it is likely that the processions would start or end at the guild chapel of the saint whose feast day it was.<sup>88</sup>

St. George's Day processions were observed in Coventry, Bristol, and almost certainly in Newcastle and Lincoln too. In Coventry, an late-fifteenth century account of a visit by black monks in the Leet Book mentions that it was custom to have a procession on the day, which is substantiated by an entry in the Holy Trinity Guild Accounts, which states that in 1518 the guild carried a cross in the procession. From the former entry it becomes apparent that the mayor and his brethren, together with the crafts participated. In addition, from a conflict between the sheriffs and the mayor in early sixteenth-century Bristol, it becomes clear that there was a procession and festivities on St. George's Day. The sheriffs organised the celebrations, and the corporation paid for torches, drink, and the waits. Moreover, Newcastle had a dragon built in 1510, which may have been carried in a procession, or alternatively could have been figured in a St. George play. From the Lincoln evidence it becomes apparent that the procession was organised by the St. George Guild and that it was a yearly event, for the Corporation ordered that the 'Saint George gild Shalbe Mayntened & brought yeerly'.<sup>89</sup>

Occasional references to other processions can be found in the Coventry records. The Leet Book mentions that the people of the city, together with the mayor and his brethren,

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<sup>88</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 76-7; James Stokes, 'The lost playing places of Lincolnshire', *Comparative Drama*, 37:3-4 (2004), p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> *REED: Bristol*, pp. 6-7, 25-33; *REED: Coventry*, pp. 88, 113-14; *REED: Lincolnshire*, p.

were accustomed to go in procession on Whitsunday, in which the Holy Trinity participated as well. The accounts of the Holy Trinity Guild also record payments for the carrying of torches on Trinity Sunday in 1458, and for the bearing of the cross in 1518.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, according to Robert Ricart of Bristol, the mayor, the sheriff, and their brethren would walk to St. Clement's Chapel on St. Clement's eve. A similar, but more elaborate event took place on St. Katherine's eve, when the civic oligarchy would walk to St. Katherine's Chapel in Temple Church, they would socialise, drink and eat with the brothers and wardens of the chapel, and afterwards receive so called St. Katherine's players at their doors, which they offered drink and rewards. The next morning, the same group would assemble at Temple Church, go in the procession through the town, and return to the church to hear the mass. Sacks has suggested that the festivals of St. Clement and St. Katherine 'recognize the fact of territorial, jurisdictional and social cohesion within the divided city and reaffirm its ideals of harmony, uniformity and solidarity', and that they 'emphasized the social limitation on authority, not the sovereignty of those who exercised it'.<sup>91</sup>

When considering the evidence presented above, it looks as if in the processions of St. George, Whitsun, and St. Katherine, the hierarchical structure of the community was, just like in the Corpus Christi processions, constantly on display. Therefore, the processions must have served to convey the hierarchy of the community to the rest of the of the populace, but also to the people partaking in the procession. In addition, it seems plausible that the processions also functioned to advertise the offices of the city and the (craft) guilds; most officeholders were elected yearly, and since medieval culture was to a large extent oral and visual, these processions provided 'the visible means of relating individuals to the social structure'.<sup>92</sup> According to Phythian-Adams the latter was only true for those inside the community (which

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<sup>90</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 35-8, 113-14;

<sup>91</sup> Robert Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.) (London, 1872), p. 80; Sacks, 'The Demise of the Martyrs', p. 150-60.

<sup>92</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 59.



he defines as the members of the craft fellowships), but I would argue that it also did so for the people outside this community.

### **Cycle plays**

The origins of the so called late medieval “mystery cycles” of Coventry, York, and Chester and Newcastle are shrouded in mystery; scholars have suggested that they evolved from the Corpus Christi procession, but the truth is, we just don’t know.<sup>93</sup> It is clear however, that they were generally staged on Corpus Christi Day (although the Chester cycle was later put on at Whitsun), and that in the eyes of contemporaries, the plays were perceived as acts of charity and devotion; they were brought forth ‘to the [worship] pleasure of god worship of Mayster Maire & this Citie’.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the plays were religious celebrations and Mervyn James has argued that they expressed the ‘communal piety of the community’.<sup>95</sup> However, the plays were also meant to educate; the contents was entirely biblical, and Clifford Davidson has suggested that they served as mnemonic aids of biblical history for the public.<sup>96</sup>

Although the subjects of the cycles were religious in nature, the church was never in control of them. Staged by the crafts guilds of the cities, the plays were in fact organised by the urban oligarchy, which assigned plays to individual crafts, and therefore authorised, organised, regulated, and strictly controlled the event. In addition, it was the Corporation that made sure that pageants were staged. For example, when the Skinners of York were impoverished in 1517, the city charged the Vest makers to contribute to the Skinners’ pageant. This is not exceptional; similar episodes can be found throughout both the York and Coventry records, and occasionally, even whole crafts were merged and were to bring forth a pageant

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<sup>93</sup> Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 307; Peter Meredith, 'The City of York and its "Play of Pageants"', *Early Theatre*, 3 (2000), pp. 25; David Mills, 'The Chester Cycle', in Richard Beadle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 111-3.

<sup>94</sup> Clifford Davidson, 'York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays : Unwilling Participants?', *Early Theatre* 9:2 (2006), p. 19; Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 307; Mills, 'Recycling the Cycle', pp. 11405; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>95</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', p. 13

<sup>96</sup> Davidson, 'York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays', p. 17; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 69-70; *REED: Newcastle*, p. 6; *REED: York*, pp. 112-3.

together.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, it becomes clear from the records that participation did not happen on a voluntary basis. In Coventry, Chester, and in York, guilds were charged to bring forth a pageant, charged to contribute to the pageant of another craft, and charged to bear all the costs made by the performance.<sup>98</sup>

It was thus the Corporation who was in charge of the whole event, but individual crafts guilds were each responsible for part of a sequence or a whole sequence of the cycle, which would be a part or a whole scene from salvation history. For instance, the Bricklayers and Plasterers of Newcastle were in charge of the Creation of Adam, and the Fleeing of our Lady into Egypt. Furthermore, each craft had to organise and finance their play or their part of a play. They collected pageant money from the masters and the journeymen to pay for the attributes necessary for their players, to pay the actors, for material for their pageant, and to rehearse. The money was collected by stewards or pageant masters, who were elected yearly by the members of the guild. Moreover, it appears that attendance for the guild members was compulsory; the Coventry Smiths and Tanners were required to be present and make a contribution to the plays, and would be fined if they were not.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, according to James and Davidson, the plays were important for the craft guilds' identity. They became a part of the crafts' self-identity, they came to define it, formed their perception of their participation in the larger whole, and enhanced the prestige of the individual craft.<sup>100</sup>

How the crafts guilds produced the plays is in many cases not certain. The guilds of Chester had their pageants stalled in carriage houses, for which they yearly paid an amount of money to the city, so it seems likely that their pageants were moving vehicles, which were able to ride through the city.<sup>101</sup> The mode of production in York provides a sharp contrast to this;

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<sup>97</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 176-7, 202, 205, 214-5; REED: *York*, pp. 77, 82-4, 102-3, 104, 125.

<sup>98</sup> REED: *Chester*, pp. 68-70; REED: *Coventry*, pp. 40, 82-4; REED: *York*, pp. 112-3, 127.

<sup>99</sup> Johnston, 'The city as patron : York', p. 154; REED: *Coventry*, pp. 72, 84-5, 87-8; REED: *Cheshire*, pp. 52-4; REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 6-8; REED: *York*, pp. 87, 90-2, 95-6, 99-100, 218.

<sup>100</sup> Davidson, 'York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays', p. 21; James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', p. 17.

<sup>101</sup> Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, pp. 117-120; REED: *Cheshire*, pp. 51, 61-2.

the Corporation would sell licenses for a number of stations, where the plays would be staged. This method then, appears to have been more fixed.<sup>102</sup>

From this evidence the plays emerge as vast spectacles, which were valued by the communities whose productions they were. Influenced by Phythian-Adams, Hutton has argued that 'the prevailing mood in most of the plays was one of celebration, a triumphant review of Christian belief provided at the end of the 'ritual half''.<sup>103</sup> However, in addition to a religious celebration, the Cycles were also perceived as celebrating the fame and name of the city. Records often mention that they were thought to be produced for the worship of the city, and worshiped the mayor.<sup>104</sup> As head of the Corporation and prime representative of the city, the plays would have without doubt enhanced his status. Additionally, the Coventry Leet Book records that contributing to the pageant was perceived to be 'for the welth & worship of the hole body'.<sup>105</sup> All of this seems to support James's argument that 'the Corpus Christi play cycle ... helped to make Corpus Christi an occasion on which the urban community could effectively present and define itself in relation to the outside world', and that it 'promoted the prestige of community'.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, James's suggestion that the cycles provided informal means by which status was redistributed and distributed amongst the craft fellowships does not hold up in light the evidence present above. It was the municipality which organised and structured the cycles, and consequently distributed and redistributed status.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that that the Cycle plays were enterprises which not only celebrated the civic community, but it also seems to have been a event that partly defined the status of its craft guilds, mayor, and the urban community as a whole.

### **The Boy-Bishop**

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<sup>102</sup> Meredith, 'The City of York and its "Play of Pageants"', p. 33; *REED: York*, pp. 84-6.

<sup>103</sup> Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, p. 307.

<sup>104</sup> Mills, David, 'The Chester mystery plays', p. 19; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 69-70, *REED: Coventry*, pp. 78-80, 87-8; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>105</sup> *REED: Coventry*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>106</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', p. 12-3.

<sup>107</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body', pp. 13-18.

The custom of the boy-bishop was observed in Bristol, Exeter, Canterbury, and Hereford. From the records it became apparent that the custom normally took place on the feast of St. Nicholas, except in Hereford, where it would be observed on the feast of the Holy Innocents. It is notable that both feasts are in some way connected to children; St. Nicholas is the patron saint of children, and on the feast of the Holy Innocents the massacred children of Bethlehem were remembered. From this perspective, it seems understandable that a boy-bishop would be in charge on one of those days. From most of the records it is not clear what the bishop exactly did, but it appears that the boy-bishop was dressed up like a real bishop. According to Sacks, the boy-bishop would do everything what a genuine bishop would do, except the mass. In Bristol, the boy-bishop would be present when a game of dice would be played on the mayor's counter, which in Sacks' view, symbolized the complete abandonment of the Common Council's responsibilities. By putting a child in charge, they would subject themselves to the laws of chance. Therefore, the festivity criticized the mayor and the aldermen, but at the same time cleaned them from their official sins. In addition, Sacks argues that the custom in Bristol 'stressed the social limitations on authority, not the sovereignty and power of those who exercised it'.<sup>108</sup>

## **Civic Ceremonial, and Secular Feasts and Festivals**

### **Royal Entries**

The royal entry in the English borough was to a large degree similar in every city and throughout the whole period; it had several distinctive features which recurred in every entry. First of all, as in London, royalty was met at the boundaries of the city. Most of the time, this was between one and five miles outside the city, there the king was received by the urban elite on horseback with a large amount of mounted men. They had to attend in their gowns, which were

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<sup>108</sup> REED: *Bristol*, p. 9; REED: *Devon*, p. 129; REED: *Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 112-13; *Records of Early English Drama: Kent: Diocese of Canterbury*, ed. James M. Gibson (Toronto, 2002). pp. 75, 94; Sacks, 'Celebrating Authority in Bristol', pp. 198-201.

often scarlet or crimson coloured.<sup>109</sup> The monarch was often accompanied by many nobles, lords, important clergymen, and servants, which was, according to Malcolm R. Smuts, a direct reflection of the monarch's status; it demonstrated rule over others.<sup>110</sup>

Secondly, a legal officer of the city welcomed the visitors with a welcome speech on behalf of the city, which was intended to appease the royal guest(s) or to recommend the city and its inhabitants to its ruler.<sup>111</sup> The mayor would offer a mace to the ruler, who would hand it back to the mayor, ritually acting out the mayor's function as the monarch's representative. Subsequently, the mayor would carry the mace before the king on their way to the town.<sup>112</sup> Closer to the town, or in the town, the royal visitor was at times met by a procession of the friars of the town, and by a procession 'after the parish churches'.<sup>113</sup> The people would then rejoice, call the sovereign's name and bless him.<sup>114</sup> The ruler would also be welcomed by the guilds, which stood on the sides of the streets, and which were compelled to attend as becomes clear by an order from 1474 of the Coventry Smiths.<sup>115</sup>

At the monarch's entry in the town, often, but not always, there would be pageants of characters from the bible, allegorical figures, or kings from England's actual or perceived historical past. For example, in 1485 in Bristol Henry VII was received by king Bremmuis, the legendary king of Britain and founder of Bristol. According to David Harris Sacks, the figure of king Bremmuis emphasised Bristol's antiquity, its autonomy, and because Henry asserted to be a descendant of the old British kings, the city was, in way stressing the relation of kinship

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<sup>109</sup> REED: Coventry, pp. 21-3; REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire, pp. 113-115; REED: Newcastle, pp. 9-11; REED: Shropshire, p. 162; REED: York, pp. 117-8, 130-1, 137-42, 193-9; R.M. Smuts, 'Public ceremony and royal charisma: the English royal entry in London, 1485-1642', A.L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James M. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 68.

<sup>110</sup> REED: Kent, pp. 120-1; REED: Shropshire, p. 159; REED: York, pp. 117-8, 132-3; Smuts, 'Public ceremony and royal charisma', p. 70.

<sup>111</sup> REED: Bristol, pp. 10-4; REED: York, pp. 146-56, 154-5, 193-9;

<sup>112</sup> REED: Coventry, pp. 21-3; REED: Newcastle, pp. 9-11; REED: York, pp. 193-9; Smuts, 'Public ceremony and royal charisma', p. 72-3.

<sup>113</sup> REED: Bristol, pp. 10-4; REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire, pp. 113-15; REED: York, pp. 146-156.

<sup>114</sup> REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire, pp. 113-15; REED: York, pp. 146-156.

<sup>115</sup> REED: Coventry, p. 52; REED: York, pp. 154-5, 193-9; Smuts, 'Public ceremony and royal charisma', p. 72.

between it and the monarch. This made it easier and less painful to ask Henry for assistance.<sup>116</sup> York did something similar in 1486; their alleged ancient founder, king Ebraucus, figured in a pageant and made a speech in which he too stressed the city's independence and underlined the connection between the city and Henry, but at the same time he also appealed to Henry for help. A comparable pageant was set up in Hereford in 1486.<sup>117</sup>

Another type of character that figured prominently in these pageants was the saint or king who bore the same name as the visiting royalty. For instance, in the pageant of 1486 in York, was an act of six Henries. In addition, when prince Edward visited Coventry in 1474, the Corporation put up a pageant of St. Edward, who called the prince his child and was called the prince's godfather by St. John. When in 1474 a more mature Edward visited Coventry, the pageant was put up again, but St. Edward now addressed him as his cousin. Likewise, in 1498 when prince Arthur visited Coventry, the Corporation had a show set up of king Arthur and his knights in Spon Street, of which the former charged the young Arthur to spread their name. It appears thus that the cities attempted to create a sense of continuity between the visitor and significant personages from the past. This is evidently an attempt to appease the royal guest by directly identifying and linking him to important individuals from England's history or legendary history.<sup>118</sup>

As patron of the English monarchy, St. George was also a personage who was frequently to be seen at the reception of royalty in late medieval England.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, biblical characters and figures from antiquity were also prominent. In their speeches they too would from time to time establish a bond of kinship between themselves and the visiting monarch, and after their speeches, all would submit to the ruler.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Sacks, 'Celebrating Authority in Bristol', pp. 196-7.

<sup>117</sup> Meredith, 'The City of York and its "Play of Pageants"', p. 24; *REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 113-15; *REED: York*, pp. 137-56.

<sup>118</sup> *REED: Coventry*, pp. 30-4, 53-5, 89-91; *REED: York*, pp. 137-56.

<sup>119</sup> *REED: Bristol*, pp. 7-8; *REED: Coventry*, pp. 30-4, 53-5, 89-91; *REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 113-115.

<sup>120</sup> *REED: Coventry*, pp. 30-4, 53-5; *REED: Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 113-115; *REED: York*, pp. 137-56.

Fourthly, the sovereign would be received by the (cathedral) clergy; the bishop, dean, abbot, and all the priests would go in procession in the vicinity of the church to meet the visitor. In 1503 when the queen of the Scots visited York, she also participated in various church rites, and visiting royalty frequently attend mass as well. Smuts has argued that English people expected an awareness of the fact that in God's eyes, people 'are both equal and interdependent', and that '[f]or all his grandeur, a King belonged to a Christian community of fallible men and women'.<sup>121</sup> By ritually submitting him or herself before God, the sovereign fulfilled this expectation.

Spectacle was thus one of the preeminent features of the royal entry. As a whole, it seems one vast effort of the city to please its leader or his relatives, which might have been necessary after certain political events like the War of the Roses. It was, however, also an opportunity for the city to show off its wealth and pride. Additionally, it was a presentation of the city community to its ruler. The city hierarchy was clearly exhibited during the visit as the civic elite, the city's crafts, and its clergy displayed themselves for its monarch. Moreover, it was the coming together of two different hierarchies. On the one hand there was the one just mentioned, but on the other was a hierarchy based on the customs of the court and the country's influential families. The royal entry was consequently a homage to the person who occupied a mediating role between these two hierarchies, and to the one who functioned as the source of all authority.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 10-14; REED: *Coventry*, pp. 21-3; REED: *Herefordshire, Worcestershire*, pp. 113-115; REED: *Kent*, pp. 121-2; REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 9-11; REED: *York*, pp. 132-3, 146-56, 193-9; Smuts, 'Public ceremony and royal charisma', p. 80.

<sup>122</sup> Smuts, 'Public ceremony and royal charisma', pp. 73-4.

## Ceremonies and customs related to public offices

According to Phythian-Adams:

'it was by the spectacular advertisement of specific status in general contexts that ceremony made its most vital contribution to the viability of the city's late medieval social structure. For office was otherwise unremunerative'.<sup>123</sup>

Inaugural procedures were therefore to a great extent focused on ceremony. Moreover, a number of other customs, like those that will be discussed below, served to advertise status through ceremony as well. Those customs were almost certainly fairly common in the latter Middle Ages, but because it involved no other payments than the sheriffs' personal expenses, it may have left little or no traces in the records.

The inaugural ceremony of the new mayor would usually take place at Michaelmas, this would also be the start of the mayoral year, but in Coventry it would take place at 2 February, as Phythian-Adams has shown.<sup>124</sup> From Bristol a description survives from an inaugural ceremony, written by Robert Ricart, the town clerk, between 1479 and 1506. According to Ricart, elections would take place on 15 September, and after the new mayor was elected, he would take his place next to the old mayor. On Michaelmas, his brethren and the sheriffs would collect him at his house, and would process to the Guildhall, where he would take his oath. The procession was, according to Sacks, 'well-suited to convey the structure of authority in a community'.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, it reminded the spectators of their own relationship with the civic elite, and advertised the mayoral office and the importance of it in 'Bristol's social and political structure'.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 62.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70; Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, pp. 70-7.

REED: *Lincolnshire*, pp. 134, 148, 151-2. -

<sup>125</sup> Sacks, 'Celebrating Authority in Bristol', p. 192.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.



In the Guildhall the old mayor would then hold a speech, take the oath of the new mayor, and hand over the attributes of the mayoral office to the new mayor; thereby symbolically transferring the authority to the new mayor. After this they would swap places, and be brought home with 'trompetts and clareners'.<sup>127</sup> Both the old and the new mayor would then receive a part of the council in their homes, with the larger and more important part of the council dining at the new mayor's house. Subsequently, the civic elite would assemble at the high cross, and go to the new mayor's house for cakebread and wine.<sup>128</sup> These informal customs the swapping of seats, the bringing home of the mayors, the dining, and the celebration afterwards 'were intended to promote the unity and internal solidarity of the civic body', but also seem to have functioned as a communal act of worship.<sup>129</sup>

In Coventry, just like in Bristol, the elite would dine at both the outgoing mayor's house and new mayor's house. Phythian-Adams has argued that this would make sure that 'the citizen's new official status was unquestionably established outside the confines of his specific group in his own neighbourhood', and that '[b]y making an officer's home a focus for his group, a man's social status outside it was also inevitably enhanced'.<sup>130</sup> This also seems to be the case in Bristol.

In the early sixteenth century the sheriffs of York were accustomed to:

'ryde with yer mynysters & officers betwixt the feastes of seynt Mighell archangell & the Natyuyte of our lorde & make the kinges proclamacion accordyng to the auncyent Custome of the forseid Citie ffor the honour & worship of the same Citie'.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, pp. 70-7.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 61; David Harris Sacks, 'Celebrating Authority in Bristol, 1475-1640,' in Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (eds.), *Urban Life in the Renaissance* (Newark, 1989), p. 194.

<sup>130</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 62.

<sup>131</sup> REED: York, pp. 223-4.

Afterwards, the sheriffs were allowed to have a dinner or to have a celebration if they wished to. The king's proclamation was most likely the charter from 1396, which granted the city county status, and the riding was in all likelihood a celebration of civic pride and independence, as the last fragment of the quotation cited above indicates. However, the event was in addition also meant to emphasize and advertise the office of sheriff, since it was 'their Rydyng'.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, it may have been unpopular amongst the sheriffs, as orders for its adherence were issued in 1517, 1521, and in 1522. Moreover, in 1500 one of the sheriffs was fined for the fact that he did not have servants go after him in the riding.<sup>133</sup>

Chester had also a custom which 'served to focus attention upon the ... shrievalty'.<sup>134</sup> On Black Monday the sheriffs would lead each lead a team of archers, which would compete in a contest; the losers would pay for a breakfast of calves' heads and bacon, which they would enjoy in the common hall.<sup>135</sup> Thus, this event seems to have been an occasion on which the elite would socialise, and which could function as a harmless outlet for conflicts and rivalries in this group.

When the Lammas lands closed in Coventry on the 2 February, it was a custom that the chamberlain would have a riding. This practice was, in a similar way as the traditions discussed above, intended to celebrate the office of chamberlain. However, it could also be a time of disorder, as is becomes clear from entries in 1474 and 1495 in the Leet Book; a number of people were riding with the chamberlains undesirably, which caused 'dyuers riottes & offences & gret discordes'.<sup>136</sup>

Following from all of this, it appears that several urban customs were intended to promote a number of offices. This kind of ceremony was meant to present the officeholder to the community; make clear who occupied which office in the same way that processions did this, but they were also intended to provide the office with an aura of legitimacy, to enhance

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<sup>132</sup> Meredith, 'The City of York and its "Play of Pageants"', p. 23; *REED: York*, 182-4, 214-5, 228.

<sup>133</sup> *REED: York*, 182-4, 214-5, 223-4, 228.

<sup>134</sup> Mills, David, *Recycling the cycle*, p. 72.

<sup>135</sup> Mills, 'The Chester mystery plays', p. 19; *REED: Cheshire*, p. 66.

<sup>136</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 70; *REED: Coventry*, pp. 55, 82-4, 114.

the status of the person who was holding it and consequently make office remunerative for the officeholder. In addition, these customs functioned simultaneously as a societal safety vale, and provided the means to resolve conflicts, that undoubtedly occurred within the urban oligarchy, in a undisruptive way.

### **The Midsummer Celebrations**

According to Ronald Hutton Midsummer bonfires and festivities were in all likelihood widespread in late medieval England. The evidence that survives portrays Midsummer Eve, or the eve of the feast of St. John, as a time when the spirit of reconciliation and communality ruled the streets. It has been pointed out by Phythian-Adams and Hutton, however, that it could also be a time of disorder. In the urban environment these celebrations sometimes took the form of marching watches. The earliest of these watches was instituted in London in 1378, but at the start of our period it is known that both Bristol and Coventry had a marching watch around Midsummer.<sup>137</sup> Chester established one in 1498, and before 1529 a marching watch was a yearly custom in Canterbury.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, it appears that both Shrewsbury and Exeter developed them around the mid-fifteenth century too.<sup>139</sup>

In Coventry and Bristol the craft guilds took part in the watches on St. John's and St. Peter's Eve. In the early sixteenth century the Wire drawers and Pin makers of Bristol had minstrels and torch bearers going in the watch, and also carried a pageant, which consisted of a large torch, and was from 1519-20 onwards dressed up with flowers and roses. They Wire drawers and Pin makers enjoyed cakes, ale, and bread on both nights, and had (sometimes very elaborate) dinners around this time. In addition, the Bakers of Bristol also hired minstrels and paid for a dinner on a few occasions, but it is unsure if they participated in

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<sup>137</sup> Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and plays in late medieval Britain* (Aldershot, 2007); Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 312-315; Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 65; *REED: Bristol*, pp. 7-7; *REED: Coventry*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>138</sup> J.B. Sheppard, 'The Canterbury Marching Watch with Its Pageant of St. Thomas', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 12 (1878), pp. 32-3; Mills, 'The Chester mystery plays: truth and tradition', p. 20; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>139</sup> *REED: Devon*, pp. 100-1; *REED: Shropshire*, pp. 136-139.

the watch.<sup>140</sup> Several craft guilds of Coventry took part in the watches of Midsummer Eve and St. Peter's Eve as well. The Carpenters had minstrels going in the watch, and were bearing judases and cressets (different kinds of torches) in the watch.<sup>141</sup> The Smiths did the same, but also sponsored several spear bearers with hats, a number of men in white armour, standards, banners, a cross, and in 1489 they had children going in the procession carrying spears and torches. Furthermore, the journeymen of the Smiths were also required by oath to 'to goo upon the wache in myssomer ny3ght and sante peter ny3ght'. Besides the standard torches and other minstrels, the Dyers of Coventry had men in habergeons and skirts of mail, brigandines, white armour, men bearing streamers, and men carrying spears going in the watch. What is more, they possessed spears and banners with fringes and bells on them, armour coats, and surplices as well. Other crafts like the Cappers and the Weavers probably went in the watch as well, and it highly plausible that the religious guilds of Coventry also went in the watch, for in 1475 the Holy Trinity Guild paid for the waits and torch bearers on the Eve of St. John.<sup>142</sup> Hence, from the Coventry evidence it emerges that the watches could take the form of a ritualised expression of militarism of the urban community.

The Corporation was involved too, although civic records concerning the watches are rarer. From an order from the Canterbury Court of Burgmote around 1529-30 it becomes clear that the watch in Canterbury was not held consistently, and from that date onwards each individual mayor should keep it yearly. In the same order, the sheriff was charged to 'ryde in harnes, with an henchman after him'.<sup>143</sup> The mayor was left to choose if he wanted to wear his harness or his scarlet and crimson gown, but the aldermen were required to follow his example. In addition, virtually all persons who were enrolled in a civic office had to bring one or two cressets.<sup>144</sup> The Corporation of Shrewsbury was also involved in the watches on St.

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<sup>140</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 14-39.

<sup>141</sup> Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, p. 314; REED: *Coventry*, pp. 25, 39, 101, 113-8, 127.

<sup>142</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 19-21, 28, 42, 45-7, 50-1, 57-8, 71-2, 85-8, 96 100, 111-2, 115, 119-20, 115-6, 117, 126.

<sup>143</sup> Sheppard, 'The Canterbury Marching Watch with Its Pageant of St. Thomas', pp. 32-3.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

John's and St. Peter's Eve; they paid for minstrels and torch bearers to go before the bailiffs, and for wine for the bailiffs and the honourable men of the town.<sup>145</sup> In Bristol the sheriffs organised the watch, for which they were given a sum of money by the chamberlain to organise the event, but in addition to this, they were expected to make a contribution themselves, pay for the waits, and provide the guilds with wine.<sup>146</sup> It was also the Corporation which regulated the event, as becomes clear from a conflict in Exeter. Apparently, the Weavers & Tokers and the Cordwainers clashed in 1459-60, with 'manslaghter & other myschyves dedis' during the watch as a result.<sup>147</sup> The Corporation then ordered them to go two and two together and each man to behave himself.<sup>148</sup> Hence it was the municipality who had the final say, and it was by the mayor's command that the events were allowed to take place, as becomes clear from an order in 1475 from the Coventry Leet Book. This order required the craft guilds of the city to 'Come with their processions & Ridynges Also when the byn required by the Meire for the worship of this Cite'.<sup>149</sup>

The marching watch of Canterbury involved a pageant of St. Thomas the martyr, and was held on the sixth of July, on the feast of St. Thomas Becket. The pageant was build in 1504-5, and was a wheeled vehicle that was probably pulled by horses. It enacted out the martyrdom of St. Thomas, and involved St. Thomas's knights, a scene of St. Thomas's beheading with real blood, an angel, and images of Mary and St. Thomas. The knights were played by actors, and on one occasion by children. St. Thomas not seems to have been played by a real person, since his face was now and then painted. The Corporation paid for all this, and often had the waits of London come over to go into the watch. A new pageant was build 1520-1, but it went in the watch for the last time in 1521-2, and stood in a barn or in the palace hall until the Reformation.<sup>150</sup> The pageant seems to have been intended to honour St.

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<sup>145</sup> REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 136-139.

<sup>146</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 26-33.

<sup>147</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 100-1.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>150</sup> REED: *Kent*, pp. 98-136.

Thomas, but would have simultaneously provided entertainment for the spectators. The Canterbury watch was thus linked with the veneration of St. Thomas Becket; the city's ceremonial expression of its militarism, without doubt a source of pride, was in this way connected with another source of local pride.

The three elements discussed above: the marching watch of men in armour; the carnival element; and a procession of the craft guilds can more or less be found in the Chester Midsummer show too. Pre-Reformation references to the Show are rare, but David Mills has looked at the form of the Show in post-Reformation Chester. He argues that it was 'unmistakeably a civic event which celebrated the mayor and city'.<sup>151</sup> Considering the evidence presented above, it seems to have been a (largely) secular celebration of municipal independence and pride, with a universal core of a marching watch of men. It is likely that armoured men and craft participation were universal elements of the watch too. The custom was geographically widespread in late-Medieval England, and could be found as far up north as Kendal and Carlisle, and as far south as Canterbury and Exeter.<sup>152</sup>

## **Waits**

In the late medieval English city, waits originally served as civic guards, but over time their tasks became more concentrated on music, and in our period they were firmly established as minstrels.<sup>153</sup> They fulfilled a ceremonial function in the town, and almost certainly performed on important days in the ceremonial year. Nevertheless, since the waits were employed by the town for a set period (see below), their performances are not recorded in the chamberlain books of the cities under discussion. However, evidence from a conflict in Bristol between the sheriff and the mayor in 1518-19 confirms that they performed on those days. From the dispute it can be derived that the waits performed at Midsummer, Michaelmas, and St.

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<sup>151</sup> Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, pp. 85-95; Mills, 'The Chester mystery plays : truth and tradition', pp. 20-1.

<sup>152</sup> Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 313-315.

<sup>153</sup> Mark Brayshay, 'Waits musicians, bearwards and players : the inter-urban road travel and performances of itinerant entertainers in sixteenth and seventeenth century England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 31:3 (2005), p. 436.

George's day, and that the chamber ought to pay for their services.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, from guild records it becomes clear that they were hired by several guilds to perform on other holidays. The Coventry Smiths and the Shrewsbury Shearman employed them on Corpus Christi Day for example, and in Cambridge they were occasionally hired by King's Hall and King's College on the feast of the Holy Innocents and sometimes at Christmas.<sup>155</sup> In addition to the city and the crafts, the waits were sporadically employed by religious guilds.<sup>156</sup>

The town functioned as their patron, which according to W.L. Woodfill provided a stable source of protective power. James Stokes confirms this observation in his study of the waits of Lincolnshire, and adds that in Lincoln 'the immediate patron of the waits was the mayor'. Stokes points out that in 1516, the council agreed 'yat Master maier Schall haue iij weytes', and that in the year before the old mayor delivered the attributes of the waits to the new mayor.<sup>157</sup> Where available, the civic records testify of the role of the town as patron of the waits. However, the records of no other city besides Lincoln, mention the mayor as direct patron of the waits, but since the mayoral office often represented the town, it is possible that this was also the case in other cities.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, the waits also received their liveries and silver collars, called scutcheons, from the town. Their collars could be expensive pieces of silver, which becomes clear from a entry in the Canterbury City Jurats Accounts in 1461-2, which mentions that one of the waits had to pay fifteen pounds and had to function as guarantor for them. In the Assembly Minute Book of Shrewsbury and in the Mayors' Court Roll of Exeter can a similar cases be found. Their gowns, or liveries, are paid for by all the towns of which records are available. Most entries just record that the liveries if the towns entertainers are paid for, but from the Treasurers' Accounts of Cambridge it can be derived that the waits received blood-coloured woollen cloth in 1493-4, yellow (or orange) brown coloured cloth in

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<sup>154</sup> REED: *Bristol*, p. 31.

<sup>155</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Toronto, 1989), pp. 53-4, 58-9, 61-2, 89; REED: *Coventry*, pp. 45, 64; REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 147, 171.

<sup>156</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 57, 92.

<sup>157</sup> REED: *Lincolnshire*, p. 136; Stokes, 'The Waits of Lincolnshire', pp. 89, 92-3; Walter L. Woodfill, *Musicians in English Society from Elizabeth to Charles I* (New York, 1969), pp. 104.

<sup>158</sup> For example when royalty visited the town etc., see REED: *Coventry*, pp. 35-7.

1499-1500, and blue-coloured woollen cloth in 1500-1.<sup>159</sup> Both the scutcheons and liveries probably made the waits identifiable as servants of the town. Consequently, the office of wait was almost certainly intended to promote the town, which is backed up by evidence from Shrewsbury, where the entertainers received their gowns for the honour of the town.<sup>160</sup>

The town also supplied the entertainers with a stable income. However, the chamberlains' accounts or treasurers' accounts of virtually all cities do not record yearly payments to the city's entertainers; they can only be found in the accounts Canterbury and to a lesser extent in Newcastle. Canterbury paid the waits' fees yearly roughly throughout the whole period, and Newcastle made quarterly payments from 1508 until 1511.<sup>161</sup> It is likely that payments were so commonplace that they were often not recorded by the chamberlain. This impression is supported by an entry in York's House Books which orders that the minstrels of the city from henceforth will yearly receive a certain amount of money from every member, every ex-member of the urban oligarchy, and from every commoner.<sup>162</sup> A similar system has been identified by Stokes in Lincoln, there the 'waits were supposed to receive 12d from every alderman, 6d from every sheriff, and 4d from every chamberlain'.<sup>163</sup> It is likely that similar arrangements were the norm in the other cities as well. Moreover, it seems plausible that those who were expected to benefit from the advertisement of the town through the office of wait, were also expected to pay for their services. It is remarkable then, that the commoners and inn holders of York were also expected to pay for the waits' fees. This seems to challenge Phythian-Adams's argument that only the members of the craft fellowships were supposed to benefit from ceremony and plays.<sup>164</sup> In addition to pay, the waits of Exeter received a pensions from 1500-1 onwards. Furthermore, in 1486, Robert Sheyne, one of the waits of York, was

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<sup>159</sup> For collars see: *REED: Coventry*, p. 48; *REED: Devon*, pp. 102-5; *REED: Kent*, pp. 74, 79, 86-7; *REED: Lincolnshire*, p. 134; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 11-2; *REED: Shropshire*, pp. 144-5, 168, 188.

For liveries see for example *REED: Cambridge*, pp. 64, 70-1, 75, 76-7, 98; *REED: Devon*, pp. 98, 113; *REED: Kent*, pp. 72, 79, 135-6; *REED: Lincolnshire*, pp. 136-7, 185-6; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 11-2.

<sup>160</sup> *REED: Shropshire*, p. 141.

<sup>161</sup> *REED: Kent*, pp. 79, 135-6; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 11-7.

<sup>162</sup> *REED: York*, p. 134-5.

<sup>163</sup> James Stokes, 'The Waits of Lincolnshire,' *Early Theatre*, 1 (1998), pp. 89

<sup>164</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 58.



granted a pension and a house after forty years of service, because he was 'in so grete age and soo decrepid that he no may forther attend toccupacion of waite'. This might, of course, have been an exception considering the substantial number of years of service.<sup>165</sup>

Besides their ceremonial function in the town, waits also ventured outside the city. The entertainers of Exeter are known to have performed before Henry VII in 1497-8; the waits of Cambridge were requested to play Canterbury in 1505-6; and the waits of Chester visited Shrewsbury in 1509-10 and 1510-11. Apparently this travelling caused the entertainers of Coventry to neglect their duties in the city, since in 1467 it was ordered that they could only visit abbeys and priories within 10 miles of the city.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, Stokes has shown that the entertainers of Lincoln travelled far and wide outside the county, and that they were a company of highly skilled musicians.<sup>167</sup> The evidence presented above substantiates the same impression about the waits of Exeter and Cambridge.

The civic entertainers then, seem to have been an indispensable and valued attribute of the borough community. Furthermore, they would have enhanced the prestige of the city; as visibly identifiable servants of the municipality and in their ceremonial function on important festivals they promoted the town and added to its status. In addition, the entertainers' travels throughout the country, almost certainly spread the name and standing across it. In addition, waits helped to make the rule of the elite more legitimate and more acceptable for the urban community through ceremony; the town's officeholders, as representatives of the urban community, would have benefitted; it seemed therefore, perfectly natural that they should have paid for it.

### **Itinerant Entertainers**

Professional entertaining companies have been studied to significant extent by theatre historians. The greater part of this work, however, concentrates on the post-Reformation

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<sup>165</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 113, 128; REED: *York*, p. 143.

<sup>166</sup> REED: *Coventry*, p. 45; REED: *Devon*, p. 113; REED: *Kent*, pp. 102-3; REED: *Shropshire*, pp.168-70;.

<sup>167</sup> Stokes, 'The Waits of Lincolnshire', p. 91.

period because the larger part of the civic accounts begin in the sixteenth century. Additionally, the accounts of the cities that begin sufficiently early often summarize a number of performances under one entry. It is also probable that performers with influential patrons are recorded more often than companies with less powerful ones or without patron. However, this scholarship may prove to be still helpful in the analysis of the travelling entertainers in Pre-Reformation England.

Travelling performers are recorded in all the cities in this study for which chamberlains' accounts survive. Various kinds of entertainers toured the country, and these could range from a single minstrel to the king's camel keeper, whose camel could do tricks.<sup>168</sup> A substantial amount of the recorded performers had a patron, which was, as Peter Greenfield mentions in his summary of the scholarship on this subject, beneficial to both entertainers and patron. For the company, having a patron would be advantageous because it allowed them to play in guildhalls and in the households of the aristocracy. For the patron, the entertainers spread the influence of the patron. On the arrival in a town and by showing their license, they requested the city to acknowledge the influence of their patron, but by doing this they recognized the authority of the mayor and his brethren in the town.<sup>169</sup>

Although most accounts do not list anything more than the amount paid and the name of the company's patron, the entries that do reveal more about these performances support this argument. It is clear that all the performers received a reward by the authority of the mayor; he commanded the chamberlain to pay them.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, it is also apparent that at least some of the entertainers performed or played before the civic elite, and especially before the mayor and his brethren or the bailiffs, which is in itself an act of acknowledgement of the influence and status of the company's patron.<sup>171</sup> The entertainers performed in various places.

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<sup>168</sup> REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 182-4.

<sup>169</sup> Peter H. Greenfield, "'The Actors are Come Hither': Travelling Companies', Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), *A Companion to Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 2002, 2004), pp. 214-6.

<sup>170</sup> REED: *Cambridge*, pp. 86-7; REED: *Kent*, p. 79; REED: *York*, p. 203.

<sup>171</sup> Brayshay, 'Waits, musicians, bearwards and players', pp. 431-2; REED: *Coventry*, p. 115; REED: *Devon*, pp. 111-2, 127-8, 130; REED: *Kent*, pp. 81-2, 84, 102-3.

The common hall, or guildhall was frequently used, but occasionally they also played in the mayor's house or in a local tavern.<sup>172</sup> In Shrewsbury, some performances or bearbaitings, took place in a quarry behind the walls, which was a piece of common land and was, as Alan Somerset has suggested, probably the site for the larger part of the visiting performances in Shrewsbury.<sup>173</sup>

The records reveal that these were not just performances, but that they were social events as well. It appears that the entertainers were often given wine, and that the mayor and his brethren were also drinking whilst they were watching the show. In 1528-9, the king's players were even invited into the house of the mayor of Exeter. However, this seems not to have been an encounter between equals, since the scribes often use the formula, 'in the presence of' the mayor and his brethren, which signifies a certain distance between the two parties. This is confirmed by separate payments for wine, one for the entertainers and one for the civic elite. It is possible that they drank wines of different quality. In addition to a mutual recognition of influence and authority between the city and the patron, the encounter between the entertainers and the civic elite appears to have been an act of networking. By giving the performers wine and a reward, the city attempted to appease the patron. This is backed up by the fact that companies with powerful patrons were given larger rewards than ones with less influential patrons, or ones further away.<sup>174</sup> In 1489, York seems to have been in a position where it was no longer necessary to acknowledge the influence of aristocratic patrons besides the king, for an order was issued that 'no Rewardes yeven by yere from this day forward to eny minstralles bot to the kinges'.<sup>175</sup>

Travelling entertainers often gave more than one performance in a single town, and they probably performed where they could. This facilitated the spread of the patron's

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<sup>172</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 111-2, 127-8, 129-30; REED: *Kent*, pp. 81-2, 84; REED: *York*, pp. 243.

<sup>173</sup> Alan Somerset, 'Local Drama and Playing Places at Shrewsbury: New Findings from the Borough Records', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 2 (1985), pp. 6,-7, 25.

<sup>174</sup> Greenfield, "'The Actors are Come Hither'", pp. 214-6; REED: *Cambridge*, pp. 92-3; REED: *Devon*, pp. 129-30; REED: *Kent*, pp. 84; REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 148-9, 180-1.

<sup>175</sup> REED: *York*, p. 158.

influence, also in different kinds of institutions. Various companies are known to have performed before the clergy in Canterbury and Exeter, and they played often in the colleges in Oxford and Cambridge. In addition, from their patrons perspective, these companies were a good and inexpensive alternative to travelling around themselves. Their companies would function as a reminder of their authority and might have acted as informants.<sup>176</sup>

In light of the evidence presented above, it is possible to conclude that the practice of receiving itinerant entertainers in the town was widespread, and was consequently, almost certainly perceived as useful for both patron and city. The entertainers had a communicative function; they functioned as communication channel between their patron and the city. Moreover, the interaction between the civic elite and the performers was a act of mutual recognition of influence and authority between the city and the entertainers' patron, but as their patron's servants the performers were the junior party in the encounter with the civic elite. For the city, receiving and rewarding entertainers was a way of befriending patrons. For the patrons, the itinerant companies served to remind the urban community of their authority, and functioned to spread their name, status, and to befriend cities in their turn. The fact that they were often received in the centre of municipal government, or the mayors house, is telling.

### **The Popular Sports**

Bullbaiting was relatively popular in Bristol, Exeter, and Canterbury, and almost certainly too in other cities. Unfortunately, references to bullbaiting are rather rare, and records relating to it are not included in every REED volume. From Bristol, the only reference to bullbaiting that survives, is an 1455-6 order from the Great Red Book which charges butchers to have their bulls baited before they slaughter them, on pain of losing the hide.<sup>177</sup> A similar order survives

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<sup>176</sup> Greenfield, "The Actors are Come Hither", pp. 214; *REED: Cambridge*, pp. 34, 44, 73; *REED: Devon*, pp. 109, 129; *REED: Kent*, pp. 73-6, 76; *Records of Early English Drama: Oxford*, eds. John R. Elliott Jr., Alan H. Nelson, Alexandra F. Johnston, Diana Wyatt (Toronto, 2004), pp. 17, 21, 29, 30.

<sup>177</sup> *REED: Bristol*, p. 7.

from Canterbury from 1489-90, which demands the same from the Canterbury butchers.<sup>178</sup> From that year onwards, the chamberlain would collect 'dyuerse fynez for Bulles sleyn by dyuerse Bocheres vsing & occupyeng the markettes within the seid Citie not Bayted at the Bullstake &c'.<sup>179</sup> Canterbury thus had a bullstake, which was regularly repaired throughout the period.<sup>180</sup>

Bullbaiting was popular in Exeter up to the Reformation as well. The Corporation paid for regular baitings at the bullring, which, at least in some case, took place before the mayor and his brethren, and on his command. Furthermore, in the early 16th century the custom was became more elaborate. From 1504-5 onwards, the civic elite enjoyed pears and wine whilst watching the baiting, which were paid for by the city.<sup>181</sup>

Largely all boroughs were regularly visited by travelling bearwards, and payments to bearwards are recorded in most cities where of which chamberlains' accounts survive. Moreover, various members of the aristocracy were patrons of bearwards, including the king.<sup>182</sup> The urban oligarchy presumably attended the recorded baitings, since rewards were paid for by the city, plus in 1504-5 the mayor and the twenty-four of Exeter were watching a bearbait and drinking wine.<sup>183</sup> In addition, an eyewitness account from Oxford sheds light on what happened at a baiting. It mentions that around the year 1495:

'All the yonge folkes almoste of this towne dyde rune yesterday to the castell to se a bere batyde/ with fers dogges within the wallys. It was greatly to be wondred/ for he dyde defend hy[s]m selfe so/ with hys craftynes and his wyllynes from the cruell doggys/ me thought he sett not a whitt be their woodenes nor by their fersnes:'.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> REED: *Kent*, p. 87.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 86-7, 133-4, 135-6.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 96-7, 126, 135.

<sup>181</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 99, 101, 115, 119, 123-4, 130.

<sup>182</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 106, 110, 125-8; REED: *Kent*, pp. REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 11-7; REED: *Oxford*, p. 29; REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 185-6.

<sup>183</sup> REED: *Devon*, p. 116.

<sup>184</sup> REED: *Oxford*, p. 37.

In Bristol, bearbaitings yearly took place on St. James's Day, which happened before the mayor. The St. James's Day festivities took place in the marshes, and were organised (and before 1518-19 partly paid for) by the sheriffs, who hired the king's minstrels and wrestlers who would perform before the mayor. Similar events took place on St. Lawrence's Day, but on this day no bearwards were hired, and the mayor would enjoy pears and wine whilst he was watching the wrestling.<sup>185</sup> From the above it therefore follows that in the period between 1450 and 1529 bear and bullbaiting had the support of the civic authorities, and was actively encouraged, even enforced. Moreover, the cities' officials themselves seem to have enjoyed watching the sport frequently.

Christmas emerges from the evidence as a time of merry making and of disorder. In Lincoln, a civic document from around 1480 mentions that a proclamation would be made between St. Thomas's Day and Christmas that during the twelve days of Christmas every man in the city 'schall haue free liberte & sayffegarde in honeste mirthe & gam sportis to goo or doe what hym pleys' without fear of arrest.<sup>186</sup> Merrymaking and disorder was thus licensed by the authorities in Lincoln; the evidence suggests that people would normally be arrested. In Bristol, however, Ricart, writing in 1478-9, mentions that around Christmas time proclamations were made by the mayor for 'gode rule and governaunce'. In addition, no one was allowed to wear a weapon and neither allowed to go mumming or to walk around wearing a mask at this time.<sup>187</sup> It thus appears that Christmas time was a time of severe disorder in Bristol, and that the authorities were determined to keep the peace. The impression that Christmas was a time of merrymaking is substantiated by the references to Lords of Misrule; in Coventry, for example, the mayor kept an open house during the twelve days of Christmas in 1518, and one

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<sup>185</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 26-33.

<sup>186</sup> REED: *Lincolnshire*, pp. 123-4.

<sup>187</sup> Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, pp. 85-6.

of his sergeants was Lord of Misrule.<sup>188</sup> Accordingly, the official support for these customs could vary locally.

## Discussion and Conclusion Chapter I

Insofar, this discussion of late Medieval customs has to a great extent treated the period between 1450-1529 as a whole, and subsequently ignored change. Hutton has argued that between the late fourteenth and fifteenth century 'an apparent general increase in the quantity and complexity of seasonal ceremony in religious and lay life' took place.<sup>189</sup> In the present study, however, most of this argument is hard to prove or to disprove. Most accounts are fairly late, methods of record taking are also changing from giving summaries of the costs to itemised accounts, and the period under consideration is in all likelihood too short to record change.<sup>190</sup> However, there is support for the an increase in the complexity of seasonal ceremony. The York Corpus Christi procession was, for example, becoming more elaborate in the early sixteenth century, which becomes clear when the entries in the Corpus Christi Account Rolls from 1449-51 and 1520 are compared. In addition to the stuff they paid for in 1449-51, the guild pays for the carrying of an extra shrine, two boys with candelabras, cantors, and a number of singing clerks in 1520.<sup>191</sup>

Part of Hutton's second argument, the identification of 'a shift in attitudes to popular calendar customs from one of condemnation or limitation to one of integration and adaption', is also clearly apparent in the records studies in the present study.<sup>192</sup> Seasonal merrymaking seems to have been an integral part of the towns' ceremonial life when considering the customs around Christmas time, the ritual of the boy-bishops, and the official participation in

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<sup>188</sup> REED: *Coventry*, p. 19; for another reference to a Lord of Misrule see Sacks, 'Celebrating Authority in Bristol', p. 198.

<sup>189</sup> Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England', p. 69.

<sup>190</sup> The accounts of most craft guilds begin in the late fifteenth-century/early sixteenth-century or are totally absent. There are virtually no guild records in Exeter, Canterbury, Cambridge, Chester, Hereford, and Oxford. Most accounts of Bristol, Shrewsbury, and Lincoln begin late. See for instance: REED: *Bristol*, p. 14; REED: *Lincolnshire*, p. 152; REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>191</sup> REED: *York*, pp. 135, 223.

<sup>192</sup> Hutton, Ronald, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England', p. 69.

customs like bear and bullbaiting. Furthermore, it is remarkable that with the exception of the customs mentioned above, the festivities discussed here all received substantial official backing and in most cases financial support. It seems less remarkable, however, when the intentions and functions of these customs are considered. Nearly all, visually promoted and celebrated the city and its officeholders, and provided legitimization and prestige for the latter, and as a result made office remunerative for them.

To conclude, in the procession of Corpus Christi and on other important feast days, a part of the urban community assembled in one whole, with its hierarchy on display. This religious expression, then, was part of a 'system of symbols by means of which Society becomes conscious of itself; it is the way of thinking characteristic of collective existence', and part of 'a system of ideas with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it'.<sup>193</sup> In short, it was a consensual Durkheimian declaration of harmony. However, the processions not only served as a means for the individual to represent itself to society, but also served to convey its position and its status to others in the society. Consequently, it functioned as a way to advertise the public offices and the offices of the guilds. The cycle plays were vast spectacles which celebrated civic pride and independence. In addition, the status of the mayor was enhanced by them, and the plays were just like the processions, a 'way of thinking characteristic of collective existence', but also served to define the urban community in relation to the outside world. The Royal entry in the late medieval borough was a spectacular ceremony with similar features in every city. It was the presentation of the city community to its ruler, and consequently, it was the coming together of two hierarchies. The Royal entry, was an homage to the person from who was the ultimate source of authority, and it was an attempt to please him. Ceremonial customs and customs related to public offices promoted the status the office holder. It provided legitimacy, made office remunerative, and could

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<sup>193</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (London, 1976), p. 225.



function as a societal safety valve within the urban elite. The Midsummer marching watches consisted of a carnival element, a watch of armoured men, and a contribution of the craft fellowships. It seems to have been a secular ritualistic expression of the municipality's militarism, which also expressed and communicated the community's independence and pride. The city's entertainers had a similar function, they enhanced the town's status, spread the name and fame of the city, and legitimated the rule of the elite. The borough communicated with its surroundings, and the nobility who controlled it, through itinerant entertainers. It was a way of mutually recognizing authority for both the company's patron and urban elite. On the other end of the spectrum we find customs like bullbaiting and customs around Christmas. It is remarkable, however, that baitings were sanctioned by the authorities and even forced upon the populace. Other customs often allowed temporarily misrule and merrymaking.

It is worth to underline the degree of popular participation in the rituals discussed above, although in most rituals and ceremonies active participation would be limited to the upper sorts of the community. For the spectators, the events discussed above could function as reminders of authority, although it would probably have been an enjoyable reminder. It appears therefore that Phythian-Adams's argument seems valid. This may well, however, have been considerably influenced by the nature of the sources used here, and this study does reveal traces of customs which may have functioned as a societal safety valve. It appears that the position advocated by James, that festivity primarily served to uphold the traditional order, but by temporarily inverting the established social order, cannot be proven from the available evidence.

Phythian-Adams's division of the year in ritual and secular parts, however, seems too inflexible and Duffy seems to have been right in underlining this rigidity.<sup>194</sup> It appears to be valid for the larger part of the cities, but does not leave room for irregularities. The most important events of the year, Corpus Christi and the Midsummer festivities, did take place around May-June, but the marching watch in Canterbury took place on 6 July, the procession

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<sup>194</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 46-8.

on St. Katherine's Day in Bristol on 25 November, and the major procession of Lincoln on 26 July; all fell outside the ritualistic half. Phythian-Adams's argument that 'the ritualistic half embraced every major public ceremony', and that 'all the festival days on which the aldermen were to wear their scarlet fell in this period', maybe valid for Coventry, but not for Canterbury, Lincoln, and Bristol. Additionally, it would have been interesting to see how the ceremonial year in Coventry would have looked like if the records from all the fraternities and ecclesiastical institutions had survived.

## **Chapter II: ‘the olde frantyeck supersticyons of papistrye’: The Reform of Traditional Festivity in Early Modern England 1529-1642.<sup>195</sup>**

This chapter will set out to explore the attitudes of the post-Reformation authorities towards festive drama. The position of central government, the ecclesiastical authorities, and the municipalities will be under consideration here. The following discussion will attempt to answer questions like; When did festive drama decline? What were the motivations of the authorities or people in authority to tolerate, regulate, or suppress popular festivity? Furthermore, the chapter will essentially deal with the set of forms of festive culture discussed in the previous chapter, but the parts on the processions of Corpus Christi and on other feast days have been merged because they largely deal with the same issues.

### **Religious Feasts and Festivals**

#### **Corpus Christi and other Processions**

Under Henry VIII, as Eamon Duffy has shown, ‘the fabric of medieval religion, torn and faded as it was by fifteen years of attrition, held’.<sup>196</sup> Many guilds were still intact and more importantly, they were still officially permitted. This was all to change with the reign of Edward VI and Protector Somerset; between 1547 and 1549, the regime abolished all processions, dissolved the religious fraternities, and suppressed the feast of Corpus Christi. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, the fraternities often had a central function in organizing the festivities on Corpus Christi day, St. George day, and other feast days. Therefore, the injunctions had ‘virtually demolished the seasonal rituals of the English Church and the ornaments and institutions which had underpinned them’.<sup>197</sup> The Marian regime proceeded to reverse much of this; parliament revoked the reforming statutes issued under

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<sup>195</sup> REED: Kent, p. 188.

<sup>196</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the*, p. 449.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 449-62; Hutton, Ronald, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 85.

Edward, and the regime ensued to restore the ritual year as it had been under Henry VIII.<sup>198</sup> With the ascension of Elizabeth in 1558, and the return of many committed protestant from exile upon who the Queen relied, Catholic ritual was again outlawed.<sup>199</sup>

The municipal records testify of a remarkable adherence to royal and ecclesiastical policy. No city under consideration here processed on the feast of Corpus Christi after Edward's injunctions in 1548, and St. George day processions too seem to have been largely abandoned. The Great Black Book of Hereford notes that the feast and the pageants of Corpus Christi 'nowe ys & Are omytted and Surseassed'.<sup>200</sup> In Lincoln the Corporation decided that the stuff lately belonging to the Guild of St. Anne would be sold. Under Mary, a revival took place of the same, and within a few years the accounts of all cities again record payments for torches and minstrels for the feast of Corpus Christi. In York the council ordered that St. George shall be brought forth, and covered all the expenses for the festivities. Whitsun and Palm Sunday processions too appear to have been revived in York, but after 1558, all of this suffered a similar fate as it had done under Edward's reign. Subsequently, the St. George day festivities in Norwich, which apparently had survived the uproar of the previous years, were to be without 'George nor Margett But for pastynne the dragon to com In and shew hym self as in other yeares'.<sup>201</sup>

Edward's Reformation from above had destroyed the Catholic religious year, which was temporarily revived under Mary, but with the ascension of Elizabeth the 'old religious year had gone for ever' indeed.<sup>202</sup> With the suppression of all processions except the rogationtide procession, the urban communities of early modern England no longer made a 'consensual,

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<sup>198</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 526; Hutton, Ronald, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 95.

<sup>199</sup> Ronald, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, pp. 104-8.

<sup>200</sup> *Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, pp. 119-21.

<sup>201</sup> *REED: Bristol*, pp. 57, 60-4; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 89-90, 97-101, 104, 112-3; *REED: Coventry*, pp. 174, 198, 201-5; *REED: Devon*, pp. 183; *REED: Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, pp. 119-21; *REED: Kent*, pp. 231-3; *REED: Lincolnshire*, pp. 175, 180-1, 194; *REED: Newcastle*, pp. 23, 26; *Records of Early English Drama: Norwich 1540-1642*, ed. David Galloway (Toronto, 1984), pp. 20, 37, 43-4, 47, 63, 184; *REED: Shropshire*, pp. 200, 204, 206; *REED: York*, pp. 289-92, 292-3, 310-21, 324-34.

<sup>202</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 110.

Durkheimian statement of harmony', and consequently the Reformation represented the 'obliteration of the established rhythm of life itself'.<sup>203</sup>

### **Cycle and other Plays**

The cycles of York, Coventry, Chester, Norwich, and Newcastle appear to have survived the turmoil of the first half of the sixteenth-century, and purge from the parts which were offensive to protestants, they continued in the second half. Harold C. Gardiner's standard description of the demise of the cycle plays ascribes their decline to pressure from above, and notes: 'the fact ... that the cycles continued in parts of the country ... by no means proves that they did so with the approval or even whole-hearted tolerance of authority'.<sup>204</sup> No direct pressure, however, was exerted by central government, and no legislation was passed to suppress the cycles. Indirectly, the state policy did affect the cycle plays. In late medieval England, the monasteries had not only occupied 'a central place in popular religious practice', but 'the people who inhabited them were part of the social and ceremonial fabric'.<sup>205</sup> With the dissolution of the monasteries in the early sixteenth-century, their contribution to ceremony, including the cycles, vanished.<sup>206</sup>

The evidence suggests that the attitudes of the ecclesiastical authorities were much more important than the attitude of central government in the cycles' closing stages. After the Rising in 1569, the northern magnates were replaced by staunch protestants, whose agenda was to firmly establish Protestantism in the region.<sup>207</sup> Accordingly, after the arrival of archbishop Edmund Grindal in 1570 the York plays were not performed anymore. No evidence of conflict survives, but it is clear that the archbishop and his allies, the dean of York minster,

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<sup>203</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', p. 139; Steve Hindle, 'Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory, and Identity in the English Local Community, c. 1500–1700', in Michael Halvorson, Karen E. Spierling (eds.), *Defining community in early modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 205-28; Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 79.

<sup>204</sup> Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End* (New Haven, 1967), pp. 48, 70-2; Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 115.

<sup>205</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 385; Johnston, 'The city as patron', p. 164.

<sup>206</sup> Johnston, 'The city as patron', p. 163-4.

<sup>207</sup> Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal 1519-1583 : the struggle for a reformed Church* (London, 1979), pp. 187-193.

Matthew Hutton, and the Lord President of the Council of the North, the earl of Huntingdon, would not allow the continuance of those relics of the Catholic past. The fact that Hutton had suppressed York's Creed play one year before Grindal's arrival, as it was not plausible anymore according to him and it contained many things Hutton could not allow 'because they be Disagreinge from the senceritie of the gospell', confirms this view.<sup>208</sup> The Corporation attempted to have the plays staged for the last time in 1579. The House Books note that 'first the booke shalbe caried to my Lord Archebisshop and Mr Deane to correcte, if that my *Lord* Archebisshop doo well like theron', but the plays do not seem to have been performed that year.<sup>209</sup>

Evidence from Chester reveals more about the possible motives of the archbishop and his allies in suppressing the plays. In Chester, when in 1572 the puritan divine Christopher Goodman notified Grindal that the council intended to have the plays staged that year, the archbishop wrote the mayor a firm letter. Grindal explained that he had been informed of the mayor's intentions to have the plays performed, which, according to him contained 'sundry absurd & gross errors & heresies joyned with profanation & great abuse of god's holy word', and in name of the Ecclesiastical Commission charged him to stop their endeavours until they were reformed.<sup>210</sup> The mayor claimed that the letter came too late, and Chester's plays were staged nevertheless. Three years later, the decision was made to stage the plays again, and once more Goodman mobilized his allies; both the earl of Huntingdon and the archbishop sent letters to the mayor and told him not to proceed.<sup>211</sup> Gardiner and Ronald Hutton thus seem to have been wrong in asserting that the Privy Council was responsible for the suppression of the Chester cycle.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, it appears that the archbishop and his allies did not object to playing as such, but that they only had objections to certain elements in the plays. It is likely that this was the case in Coventry, Norwich, and Newcastle too, since a few years after the

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<sup>208</sup> Johnston, 'The city as patron', pp. 169-171; *REED: York*, pp.390-1.

<sup>209</sup> *REED: York*, p. 390.

<sup>210</sup> *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 143-4.

<sup>211</sup> Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, pp. 145-52; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>212</sup> Gardiner, *Mysteries' End*, pp. 79-83; Hutton, Ronald, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 125.

cessation of the Coventry cycle in 1580, the Corporation had a new play staged called 'the Destruction of Jerusalem'.<sup>213</sup> Little evidence survives from Newcastle and Norwich; the Norwich plays seem to have been performed for the last time in the 1560s, and the Newcastle plays probably a little later.<sup>214</sup>

So it looks like that the demise of the cycle plays was largely the result of pressure from above. The civic records of York and Chester confirm this. In York, the municipality remained conservative, and expressed a positive attitude towards the cycle plays when allowed by the circumstances, until Grindal, Hutton, and Huntingdon helped a strongly committed protestant in the saddle as mayor. The story is similar in Chester; the Corporation was largely in favour of the cycle, but pressure from the Ecclesiastical Commission curtailed their endeavours. So when the mayor of Chester, Sir John Savage, disobeyed the archbishop and Huntingdon and had the plays performed in 1575, he was called before the Privy Council. On the other hand, the municipality of Chester was also pressured from below, in the form of Goodman and his colleagues. In Coventry, however, the Corporation might have been involved in the decline of its religious drama. The Corporation had already suppressed the Hock Tuesday play in 1561, and after a temporary revival had put it down again a few years later. When the play was again revived for queen Elizabeth, it becomes clear that the play was suppressed because of 'the zeal of certain their Preacherz'.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, Gardiner has suggested that because of the town's large proportion of Puritans, there was less conservatism in Coventry, and subsequently less support for the play cycle.<sup>216</sup>

The guilds continued to pay for their pageant houses and elect pageant masters, and the mercers of Coventry still paid for their pageant house in 1634.<sup>217</sup> Therefore, the impression arises that late medieval religious drama ended against the expectations and probably the

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<sup>213</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 294, 303, 332; REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>214</sup> REED: *Newcastle*, pp. 57-72; REED: *Norwich*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>215</sup> REED: *Coventry*, pp. 215, 233, 244, 271, 272-6.

<sup>216</sup> Gardiner, *Mysteries' End*, pp. 85.

<sup>217</sup> Johnston, 'The city as patron', p. 171; REED: *Cheshire*, p. 247; REED: *Coventry*, p. 435; REED: *York*, p. 574.

wishes of the guilds and probably of the population at large, but because of different circumstances, the old plays had become for some, as Meredith has pointed out, 'aesthetically and doctrinally, an embarrassment'.<sup>218</sup> The Corporation did try to fill the gaping hole left behind by the cycle plays. The performance of new community drama was relatively widespread; plays, often performed by the local grammar school appear in the records of Bristol, York, Norwich, Lincoln, Shrewsbury, and Coventry staged, as mentioned above, 'the destruction of Jerusalem'.<sup>219</sup>

*Mysteries' End* was thus indeed caused by pressure from above, although in the case of Chester and Coventry also by pressure from below. The Ecclesiastical commission and the zealous protestants in the north had a paramount significance in the decline of the religious drama in the region, and were hostile towards the plays because they took offence at the doctrine professed in the plays. Close to the power-base of the reformers, in York, the archbishop and his allies could interfere immediately and directly, whereas in more remote areas like Chester, they had to depend on local informants like Goodman. Johnston has pointed out that the plays needed 'a commonality of purpose, both doctrinal and civic', and that with the disappearance of the former, the plays could not survive.<sup>220</sup>

### **The Boy-Bishop**

The custom of the little-bishop was abrogated by Henry VIII in 1541 and left no trace of conflict. Hutton suggests that this was the end of it, but he is wrong since the canons of the Hereford Cathedral were still paying for wine for little-bishop in 1542-3. The custom was temporarily revived under Mary, but suppressed again under Elizabeth. Most civic records do not mention the custom in the post-Reformation period at all, with the exception aforementioned, and the Lincoln Cathedral Statutes in 1527, which contain regulations

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<sup>218</sup> Meredith, 'The City of York and its "Play of Pageants"', p. 29.

<sup>219</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 84-5; REED: *Lincolnshire*, pp. 198, 203; REED: *Norwich*, pp. 53-4; REED: *Shropshire*, p. 220; Johnston, 'The city as patron', pp. 173-4.

<sup>220</sup> Gardiner, *Mysteries' End*, p. 48; Johnston, 'The city as patron', pp. 173-5.



concerning the boy-bishop.<sup>221</sup> When considering the lack of references to little-bishops after the Reformation, and the material presented by Hutton, it seems almost certainly that the custom was largely abandoned, with few exceptions.<sup>222</sup>

## **Civic Ceremonial, and Secular Feasts and Festivals**

### **Royal Entries**

Royal progresses continued up until 1642, until the end of our period. Queen Elizabeth in particular travelled frequently, and her progresses were especially rich.<sup>223</sup> For the present purposes, however, it seems of little use to deal with royal entries, since it is likely that the study of them will reveal very little about the attitude of the authorities towards traditional festivity, and will in all probability be very time consuming.<sup>224</sup>

### **Ceremonies and customs related to public offices**

Some towns had extensive ceremonies around election days and the swearing-in of the public offices. The records mention the 'Mayors Crye', or the making of the king's proclamation, perambulation day, and the customs treated in the previous chapter.<sup>225</sup> References are, however, relatively rare and customs are seldom fully described, and no evidence of conflict, attempts to reformation, or suppression survives, with the exception of a Chester annal from 1599-1600, which states that the Sheriffs' Breakfast was altered by Henry Hardware.<sup>226</sup> The lack of references might result from the fact that these customs served to make office remunerative for the civic elite, and subsequently were rarely altered or suppressed.

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<sup>221</sup> REED: *Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, p. 119; REED: *Lincolnshire*, p. 155.

<sup>222</sup> Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, p. 103.

<sup>223</sup> Mary Hill Cole, 'Monarchy in Motion: An Overview of Elizabethan Progresses', in Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (eds.), *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 27-45.

<sup>224</sup> For Royal progresses see for example: Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (eds.), *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>225</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 139-40, 166-170; REED: *Lincolnshire*, pp. 175, 184; REED: *Norwich*, pp. 61, 63, 77; REED: *Oxford*, pp. 405-6, 409, 466, 471, 572; REED: *York*, pp. 228, 367, 392-3.

<sup>226</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, p. 272.

## The Midsummer Celebrations

Most of the Midsummer watches appear to have continued until 1642; the ecclesiastical authorities and central government do not seem to have expressed any dislike of them. The dissolution of the religious fraternities around mid-sixteenth century, however, did mean that they could no longer make a contribution to the watches wherever they did so. One of the few victims of the Reformation was the Canterbury marching watch, which was dedicated to St. Thomas Becket, and consequently discontinued the carrying of its pageant when the cult of the saint was abolished.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, the Chester watch temporarily lost its devil, naked boys, dragon, and its giants, because of the efforts of a puritan mayor. The following year, however, those elements were restored by the new mayor.<sup>228</sup>

No orders survive against the making of bonfires, but John Bale, one of the first generation reformers and a prebend of Canterbury Cathedral, criticized the mayor and aldermen of Canterbury for not reforming them. He also records clerical disapproval of the St. John and St. Peter bonfires, and when a minister preached against the custom after St. John's eve, the people of Canterbury, including the sheriff, made twice as many bonfires on St. Peter's eve.<sup>229</sup> The attitudes of individual officers towards Midsummer festivities thus made a significant difference, and could determine the municipality's stance on particular issues of the celebrations.

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<sup>227</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 74; *REED: Canterbury*, pp. 138, 152-4, 171-7, 192-3.

<sup>228</sup> *REED: Bristol*, pp. 125-6, 231; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 272-3, 277, 606-7; *REED: Coventry*, pp. 174, 198, 201-5; *REED: Devon*, p. 192; *REED: Kent*, pp. 231-3; *REED: Lincolnshire*, p. 193; *Norwich*, p. 127; *REED: York*, pp. 520.

<sup>229</sup> John N. King, 'Bale, John (1495–1563)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004), online available at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1175>> (18 August 2010); *REED: Canterbury*, pp. 187-9.

## Waits

Cities continued to employ waits, on the condition that they behaved themselves. There is no evidence of any negative attitudes towards them or their activities, or the suppression of them. Consequently, it is of little use to discuss the topic in this chapter.

## Itinerant Entertainers

'The Humble peticion of David lones and David voys boy remaining in the howse of Correction

Humble sheweth that *your* said peticioners were both comitted to the howse of Correction ysterdaye being both taken by *your* worships wandering in towne and having noe iuste cause of excuse but confessing that [they] [wee] are minstrels by profession which wee confesse is against the law [they] wee hauinge noe passe vnder 2 lustices of the peace there handes

ffor which offence they are very hartely sorrye and desire *your* worships to graunte them a passe to travel to Monmorth'.<sup>230</sup>

This extract from David lones's and David Williams's petition, made to the bailiffs of Shrewsbury in 1632, exemplifies the type of behaviour which became illegal by statute in 1572, when parliament issued an act in which it was established that 'all Fencers Bearewardes Comon Players in Enterludes & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable Personage of greater Degree ... shalbee taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars'.<sup>231</sup> This redefinition of vagrancy, and the inclusion of the professions mentioned above in this definition, meant that from that year onwards, minstrels, bearwards and players without patron were essentially outlawed and

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<sup>230</sup> REED: *Shropshire*, p. 319.

<sup>231</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 269-71.

liable to the same punishments as vagabonds. Moreover, as early as 1559, queen Elizabeth had proclaimed that common interludes were not fit for any good Christian Commonwealth. Interludes were therefore forbidden, unless they contained no matters of religion or state, and were licensed by the town magistrates.<sup>232</sup> Interludes had temporarily severely been restricted under Mary in 1553, and had consequently led to a complete stop in travelling, which can be seen in figure 1 and 2.<sup>233</sup> Central government took another step to regulate the activities of travelling entertainers in 1581, when the Master of Revels was empowered 'to order and to reforme, auctourise and put downe' all plays, players, playmakers, and playing places.<sup>234</sup> Then, in 1604, parliament revised the Act for Vagabonds. Accordingly, barons and other members of the nobility, were, from that moment onwards, no longer given the authority to function as patron of itinerant entertainers; thus in theory, patronage was limited to the royal family.<sup>235</sup> In practice, the alteration had little short term consequences, as can be seen in figure 2. However, from 1610 onwards, the number of entertainers with royal patrons rose relatively and absolutely.

As of 1575-6, the Privy Council charged the University and the town of Cambridge not to suffer any open shows within five miles of the town and university, in order to prevent disorder, the spread of infection, and the distraction of students from their studies.<sup>236</sup> Less than 15 years later, both the university of Oxford and Cambridge were sent letters for the same reasons. The vice-chancellors of both universities were told to suffer 'no playes or interluds of common players' in the town or within five miles of it, and to redress the disorders.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, in 1615, the mayor and justices of the peace of Coventry were sent a letter by Lord Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke. Coke prohibited the performance of any common players, since this would 'lead to the hindrance of devotion, and drawing of the

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 263-4

<sup>233</sup> Gardiner, *Mysteries' End*, p. 63.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, p. 286.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 336-7.

<sup>236</sup> *REED: Cambridge*, pp. 276-7.

<sup>237</sup> *REED: Cambridge*, pp. 348-9; *REED: Oxford*, pp. 230-1.

artificers and Common people from their labours.<sup>238</sup> Interludes and common plays on the Sabbath had already been declared forbidden by royal proclamation in 1603, but in 1622-3, the Privy Council charged the Corporation of Norwich not to suffer any entertainers and shows within the city and its liberties, since they draw people from work, and because 'that sort of Vagrant and Licentious Rabble by whose means & deuses the purses of pore seruantes and apprentizes and of the meaner sort of people are drayed and emtied'.<sup>239</sup> The mayor of Canterbury was vested with the authority to send entertainers away by the authority of the Archbishop.<sup>240</sup> In addition, the Privy council further attempted to restrict and regulate number of itinerant entertainers through the Master of Revels; the Lord Chamberlain circulated a letter in which he urged magistrates only to allow performances of companies whose warrant was signed by the current Master of Revels, and to seize licenses which were not. The impression that the letter conveys, is that the Lord Chamberlain was primarily motivated by the disorders committed by the companies, and the offences their plays contained against church and state.<sup>241</sup>

In contrast to the attitudes of central government, the ecclesiastical authorities were, as becomes clear from the visitation articles, not really concerned with wandering entertainers, as long as they stayed out of the church, chapel, and church-yard.<sup>242</sup> The Corporations, however, became increasingly unreceptive to the players, who apparently, caused many inconveniences.<sup>243</sup> The complaints are similar in every borough; the players were 'people of the leeke nature & disposition', were a cause of many disorders, played at unseasonable times, and were thought to lead the apprentices and servants astray.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Allen D. Boyer, 'Coke, Sir Edward (1552–1634)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004), online available at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5826>> (18 August 2010); *REED: Coventry*, p. 394-5.

<sup>239</sup> Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, p. 335; *REED: Norwich*, pp. 177-8.

<sup>240</sup> *REED: Kent*, pp. 293-4.

<sup>241</sup> *REED: Norwich*, pp. 187-9.

<sup>242</sup> See visitation articles for the Province of Canterbury and the Province of York in: *REED: Kent*, pp. 933-4; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>243</sup> *REED: Cheshire*, p. 259; *REED: Devon*, p. 183.

<sup>244</sup> *REED: Cheshire*, p. 407; *REED: Devon*, p. 183; *REED: Kent*, pp. 231-3; *REED: Norwich*, pp. 91, 140; *REED: York*, pp.530-1.

Moreover, according to the council of Exeter the aforementioned grievances were 'to the greate displeasure of god Almighte'.<sup>245</sup> Another thing that displeased God was, according to the magistrates of Canterbury and Norwich, the fact that entertainers profaned the Sabbath.<sup>246</sup>

Between 1578 and 1635 many cities were accordingly trying restrain the frequent coming of entertainers. The interferences of the Privy Council in the affairs of Norwich and Canterbury mentioned above, for instance, were requested by the Corporations. Furthermore, the magistrates of York first tried to regulate performances in the guild hall in 1578 and 1582, but because the shows caused much damage to the hall, entertainers were banned from it in 1592.<sup>247</sup> The Corporation of Chester was outraged over the same issue in 1615-16. They spoke of a 'Comon Brute and Scandall', for stage players were allowed to act their obscene and unlawful plays in the common hall, which was a place for judicial hearing and determining criminal offences.<sup>248</sup> Similar complaints come from Bristol in 1585-6 and 1595-6, and players were consequently expelled from the guild halls of both cities.<sup>249</sup> Further attempts for regulation were attempted in York, Exeter, Chester, Bristol, Canterbury and Shrewsbury, where players were barred from playing in the night, and, in the case of Shrewsbury and Canterbury, also from playing on the Sabbath. The municipality of Canterbury only allowed companies to perform two days out of thirty.<sup>250</sup> It seems that things really got out of hand in Chester and Norwich, as endeavours were made to severely restrict, or completely ban, itinerant entertainers, and since citizens were fined for attending performances.<sup>251</sup> Even in Coventry, which had received the by far the largest part of the entertainers, fewer payments were made to players, as can be seen in figure 1. This in opposition to what Collinson's claim

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<sup>245</sup> REED: *Devon*, pp. 183.

<sup>246</sup> REED: *Kent*, pp. 231; REED: *Norwich*, p. 91.

<sup>247</sup> REED: *York*, pp. 384-5, 399-401, 499.

<sup>248</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, p. 407.

<sup>249</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 128-9, 148.

<sup>250</sup> REED: *Bristol*, p. 148; REED: *Cheshire*, p. 407; REED: *Devon*, pp. 183; REED: *Kent*, pp. 231-3; REED: *Shropshire*, p. 381; REED: *York*, pp. 592-3.

<sup>251</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, p. 259; REED: *Norwich*, p. 91.

that the city did not close its gates.<sup>252</sup> Additionally, towns were increasingly dismissing companies; about 91 per cent of the dismissals took place after 1580, and were even paying them not to play and to go away, so 'to bee ridd of them'.<sup>253</sup> By paying them to not play, municipalities were effectively depriving the entertainers from their income, since the official payments did not cover their expenses.<sup>254</sup>

Central and local government became thus more and more anxious about the enterprises of itinerant entertainers. The Tudor regime attempted to restrict and regulate a type of behavior that was perceived as idle, harmful, and unwanted. This attitude allowed the Corporations, motivated by an incentive of good governance and occasionally by godliness, to regulate and even suppress the coming of players to their towns. The fact that companies with royal patrons continued to travel supports this argument; figure 2 demonstrates that municipalities were making less and less payments to companies without royal patrons, up to the point where payments to them almost disappeared. However, entertainers with royal patrons were continued to be paid by Corporation far into the 1620s and 1630s. It seems, therefore, reasonable to suggest that companies with royal patrons continued to travel because towns could not refuse them on legal grounds. As a consequence of the 1604 revision of the Act for Vagabonds, space was created for towns to reject entertainers without royal patrons, which explains their demise and is visible in figure 1 and 2. It has to be noted, however, that orders do not necessarily imply adherence, and that repeated orders are a sign of their failure in itself. Andrew Gurr has suggested that the trend of declining payments was caused by the fact that the government changed its system of control. Under James I, the responsibility for the regulation of itinerant entertainers shifted from the towns, to the Master of Revels, which caused companies to exchange the guildhall for the inn. However, James Gibson has shown that entertainment was 'far from flourishing in Kent during the Stuart years', and considering the hostility of both local and central government towards travelling

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<sup>252</sup> Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, p. 101.

<sup>253</sup> REED: *Bristol*, p. 235.

<sup>254</sup> Greenfield, "'The Actors are Come Hither'", p. 220.

entertainers and the evidence presented above, it appears that Gurr's argument does not hold up.<sup>255</sup> This does raise an interesting question, for this means that a change in mentality towards travelling entertainers must have taken place in Tudor England, since, as shown in chapter I, they were perceived as beneficial and were paid for the honour of the town.

### **The Popular Sports**

As Hutton has shown in his *Rise and Fall of Merry England*, the impact of the reign of Edward virtually destroyed the old ritual year, and '[w]hat remained was the complex of calendar customs which were partly or wholly secular in inspiration and which none that less had been woven into the communal life and finances of parishes'.<sup>256</sup> Those customs were increasingly frowned upon in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century, and this process will be under consideration here.

The attitude of the English monarchy towards revels and sports in the late sixteenth-century was to a great extent ambiguous, for the laws of the realm neither approved nor disapproved traditional pastimes.<sup>257</sup> With the ascension of James I in 1603, a slightly tougher line towards those customs was adopted, when he proclaimed 'that no Beare-baying, Bulbaying, Enterludes, Common Playes, or other like disordered or unlawful Exercises, or Pastimes, be frequented, kept, or used at any time hereafter upon the Sabbath-day'.<sup>258</sup> The proclamation was imprecise in what those disordered or unlawful actually were, and thus left considerable space for interpretation by local magistrates. This ambiguity was partly cleared up by the Declaration of Sports in 1618, which allowed people to enjoy dancing, archery, may-games, Morris dances, Whitsun ales, and the setting up of maypoles after divine service on Sundays and holidays. Sports such as bear and bullbaitings, interludes, and bowling were not to be practiced on Sundays. Under Charles I, parliament, concerned with the observance of the

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<sup>255</sup> James M. Gibson, 'Stuart Players in Kent: Fact of Fiction?', *REED Newsletter*, 20:1 (1995), p. 2; Andrew Gurr, 'The loss of records for the travelling companies in Stuart times,' *REED Newsletter*, 19:2 (1994).

<sup>256</sup> Hutton, Ronald, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 110.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 123-2.

<sup>258</sup> Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, p. 335.



Sabbath and the neglect of divine service, passed a sabbatarian bill; the sports banned on Sundays by James were now forbidden by statutory law. Moreover, Charles reissued his father's declaration in 1633, and added wakes to the list of lawful recreations.<sup>259</sup> Hence, the monarchy had declared to be in favour of Sunday revelry, with the exception of two places; Oxford and Cambridge. In 1569-70, Elizabeth issued a royal injunction which essentially banned all sports within the town of Cambridge, which was reaffirmed by letters from James and Charles in 1603-4 and 1631-2. The Privy Council shared the monarchy's concerns, and denounced all sorts of entertainments together with the stage players mentioned above in 1575-6.<sup>260</sup> The Privy Council's attitude towards revelry and entertainments was, however, very much ambiguous, '[i]ts rulings were always pragmatic responses to local difficulties, to which attention had been drawn', which is supported by the evidence regarding travelling entertainers presented above.<sup>261</sup> The council appears only to have been concerned with traditional pastimes when they disturbed divine service, as becomes clear from a letter to the Earl of Derby in 1592. On other occasions, it showed a willingness to protect them.<sup>262</sup>

Until the 1630s, before the regime of archbishop Laud and his colleagues and its relaxed attitude towards Sunday pastimes, the larger part of the ecclesiastical authorities did not have a strong opinion on revelry and popular festivity. From the visitation articles it becomes clear that they were largely concerned with church attendance and proper use of church property. Accordingly, they would not suffer any kind of revelry nor sports in the church and churchyard and neither during divine service. This in opposition to pre-Reformation practice, as Collinson has pointed out.<sup>263</sup> The observance of the Sabbath and holidays, the days

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<sup>259</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, pp. 168-99; *The King's Maiesties Declaration to his Subjects Concerning Lawful Sports to be Used*, ed. Benjamin Ashworth (Philadelphia, 1866); *King Charles the First's Declaration to his Subjects Concerning Lawful Sports to be Used on Sundays, 1633*, ed. Bernard Quaritch (London, 1862); *The Statutes*, Eyre and Spottiswoode (eds.), pp. 710-11.

<sup>260</sup> *REED: Cambridge*, pp. 259, 276-7, 395-6, 399-400, 645-7; *REED: Oxford*, pp. 230-1, 529-30

<sup>261</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 125.

<sup>262</sup> Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, p. 311; Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 125.

<sup>263</sup> Collinson, 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism', p. 37; Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, pp. 125-8, 155; Ronald A. Marchant, *The Church under the law : justice, administration and discipline in the diocese of York, 1560-1640* (London, 1969), p. 218; See visitation articles for the Province of Canterbury and the Province of York in: *REED: Kent*, pp. 933-4; *REED: Cheshire*, pp. 6-7.

on which most revelry took place, was a concern of the episcopacy, but most bishops allowed 'lawful' activities, as Kenneth Parker has demonstrated.<sup>264</sup> In the North, however, it was a complete different story. Under the leadership of archbishop Grindal, the Ecclesiastical Commission suppressed the annual riding of Yule and Yule's wife on St. Thomas day in 1572 in York, which was in their words a 'rude and barbarouse custome' which drew people from divine service and profaned 'that day appoynted to holy vses'.<sup>265</sup> Twenty years later, the commission prohibited a range of 'unlawfull or ungodlye pastimes' such as wakes, may festivities, bull and bearbaitings, and Morris dances, for the same reasons.<sup>266</sup> Accordingly, Hutton appears to have been wrong in asserting that '[e]ven in the north , the reforming clerics were not concerned to wipe out any species of seasonal celebration except the religious drama'.<sup>267</sup> This kind of interference was, however, much rarer elsewhere.

Ecclesiastical injunctions and secular legislation thus left considerable space for municipalities to either condemn or encourage popular sports, and it is to the cities that we now turn. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, eager to use their royal privileges, cracked down on most popular pastimes in the towns, and virtually no proof of repression by the municipalities exists.<sup>268</sup> More evidence survives from other towns. As early as 1564-6, the Corporation of Canterbury prohibited dancing by youths in inns and taverns.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, because of 'many greate Inconveniencies and disorders', Bristol's council decided to ban "unlawful" games in 1586-7, and took down a maypole in 1627-8.<sup>270</sup> Prohibitions were also issued in Canterbury in 1588, and in Coventry more maypoles had been ordered to be taken down in 1591. Additionally, between 1588 and 1605 the puritan council prohibited a number

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<sup>264</sup> Parker, *The English Sabbath*, pp. 63, 121.

<sup>265</sup> REED: *York*, pp. 367-70.

<sup>266</sup> Richard W. Hoyle, 'Advancing the Reformation in the north: orders from York High Commission, 1583 and 1592', *Northern History*, 28 (1992), pp. 225-6.

<sup>267</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 126.

<sup>268</sup> REED: *Cambridge*, pp. 295-304, 362-3, 570-2, 680-1; REED: *Oxford*, pp. 230-1, 246-9.

<sup>269</sup> REED: *Kent*, p. 194.

<sup>270</sup> REED: *Bristol*, pp. 128-9, 228.

of Sunday recreations, including playing games and football.<sup>271</sup> In the same period, the magistracy of Shrewsbury, persuaded by the public preacher, moved to ban the setting up of the shearmen's 'maypole-like Tree' in 'superstycus order', but was hindered in its attempt by the interference of central government.<sup>272</sup> From Collinson's analysis of the episode it becomes clear that the municipality might have been motivated by factional politics, or by a mix between Protestantism and fear of disorder.<sup>273</sup> In 1594-5, about four years after the incident and almost certainly motivated by a murder in a local cudgel game, the Corporation prohibited 'any playinge at foot-ball, or at hiltes, or wastrells, or beare baytinge, within the walles of this towne'.<sup>274</sup> Concerns about order also might have been on the mind of Henry Hardware, the 'godly zealous' mayor of Chester who had the 'bull ringe at the high crosse to be taken vp' in 1599-1600.<sup>275</sup> However, Hardware might have been motivated by a godly conscience, but as Robert Tittler has shown, in times of distress, 'forceful government, and a system of beliefs which justified forceful government, must have seemed ever more attractive' to his fellow rulers.<sup>276</sup> In addition to anxieties about the observance of the Sabbath, disorder certainly was one of the incentives for the Corporation of Norwich to ban cudgel games and the custom of having Sunday picnics, of which the former was 'to the dishonor of God, breach of his maiesties laws & contempt of gouernement'.<sup>277</sup>

Thus, suppression of popular pastimes by municipal authorities did take place. However, on the other hand there is the evidence of the persistence of popular sports. The Shearmen of Shrewsbury still adhered to their annual custom of setting up the Tree in 1619-20, maypoles were still present in Chester in 1641-2, and the chamberlains of Newcastle were

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<sup>271</sup> REED: Coventry, p. 332; Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 138; W.B. Stephens, *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 8: The City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick* (London, 1969), pp. 208-221.

<sup>272</sup> Patrick, Collinson 'The shearmen's tree and the preacher : the strange death of merry England in Shrewsbury and beyond', Patrick Collinson and John Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English towns, 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 208-9.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 208, 219-20.

<sup>274</sup> REED: *Shropshire*, p. 381; Collinson, 'The shearmen's tree and the preacher', p. 206.

<sup>275</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, pp. 272-3.

<sup>276</sup> Robert, Tittler, 'Henry Hardware and the face of Puritan reform in Chester' in Robert Tittler, *Townsppeople and nation: English urban experiences, 1540-1640* (Stanford, 2001), p. 154.

<sup>277</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', p. 132; REED: *Norwich*, pp. 198-9.

still paying for the 'keepinge hogmagogge kot' in 1596.<sup>278</sup> Moreover, the 1594-5 order specifies that entertainments were banned within the walls of the town. Most of Shrewsbury's entertainment, however, would most likely have taken place in an old quarry outside the walls of the town, as Alan Somerset has pointed out.<sup>279</sup> The 1628-9 Norwich order against the picnics mentions that one sheriff refused to give his consent to it, which testifies of division within the municipality.<sup>280</sup> In addition, when university officials clashed with the citizens of Oxford over May festivities which involved citizens 'with drome and shott ... men atyred in woemens apparrell', and a May Queen, the Corporation exonerated that larger part of the people involved and told the High Steward that 'At all tymes it is our dutie to be Careful that some of our Citizens be trayned and made fitt soldyers'.<sup>281</sup> Furthermore, regardless of the universities' policy regarding popular pastimes, municipal sponsored bullbaiting still appears to have been taking place in Cambridge in the 1630s, and most likely too in Oxford.<sup>282</sup> In 1596-7 and 1599-1600 the Corporations of Lincoln and Exeter both still insisted that bulls had to be baited before they were killed.<sup>283</sup> Moreover, despite Hardware's removal of the bull ring, bulls were still being baited in Chester in 1619-20 'for Master mayors fare well out of his office'.<sup>284</sup> Bulls were being baited in Canterbury up 1642 as well.<sup>285</sup>

So it begins to look like there was no general and sustained campaign against popular pastimes. With the exception of the north, the ecclesiastical authorities did not engage in the suppression of Sunday pastimes, and neither did central government. However, Hutton has suggested that the state may indirectly have been responsible for the "decline of popular festivity" in the seventeenth-century, since each 'demonstration of feeling within Parliament against 'profanation' of the Sabbath seems to have had an impact upon merry-making in

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<sup>278</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, p. 606; REED: *Newcastle*, p. 113; REED: *Shropshire*, pp. 312-3.

<sup>279</sup> Somerset, 'Local Drama and Playing Places at Shrewsbury', pp. 6,-7, 25

<sup>280</sup> REED: *Norwich*, pp. 198-9.

<sup>281</sup> REED: *Oxford*, pp. 246-9.

<sup>282</sup> REED: *Cambridge*, p. 651; REED: *Oxford*, pp. 535.

<sup>283</sup> REED: *Devon*, p. 176; REED: *Lincolnshire*, p. 204.

<sup>284</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, pp. 443-4.

<sup>285</sup> REED: *Kent*, p. 300.

general'.<sup>286</sup> The evidence presented above, however, does not bear witness to this. After the order Hutton mentions, only the 1628-9 Norwich order was issued; the bulk of the orders were made between the mid-1580s and 1600. Moreover, in the north of England, the Ecclesiastical Commission seem to have been primarily committed to advancing the "true religion", and subsequently with church attendance and the residue of the old religion. However, no defence of traditional festivity was made before the 1630s either, which left room for urban magistracies to tolerate or condemn popular sports, which consequently happened from the 1580s onwards. The grounds for suppression by the civic authorities are similar to the reasons for the regulation and suppression of travelling entertainers; godly Protestantism seems to have played a part, as well as sabbatarian concerns together with a concern with order and the keeping of the peace. These measures against popular pastimes, and the support for the people who advocated them, could however, as the cases from Shrewsbury, Chester, and Norwich show, particularly appeal to local elites during times of distress, be motivated by factional politics, and were not always wholeheartedly supported by the whole civic elite.

The complex of customs which were integral to the old religion seems to have been out of context with the fading of the latter, and the process described above seems to have been a 'complex pattern of individual and communal reactions to activities which changes in religious and social attitudes had called into question'.<sup>287</sup> Hence, 'a redrawing of the boundaries of permitted behaviour' was taking place, in particular cities, at particular times.<sup>288</sup> Nevertheless, urban popular festivity proved to be resilient, and at least a part continued, and continued to be sponsored by municipal authorities, until the end of our period.

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<sup>286</sup> Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, p. 189.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>288</sup> Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 289-334; Wrightson, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village*, p. 200.

## Discussion and Conclusion Chapter II

To conclude, the Edwardian and Elizabethan reformations destroyed the old religious year in the English city, together with the communal celebrations on important feast days. Consequently, the early modern urban community lost one of the key expressions of religious and communal life, and rhythm of life itself changed. The policies seem to have been adhered to everywhere, accordingly, Phythian-Adams's appears to be correct in stressing the disappearance of communal processions, and the removal of popular participation in public ceremony. With the suppression of the cycle plays about two decades later, this process was complete. They were, however, not attacked by royal government, but were suppressed by the ecclesiastical authorities. Where evidence survives, it appears that the Ecclesiastical Commission and its godly members occupied a key role in the putting down of the plays, which were empowered after the Rising in the North. Close to its power hub, in York, religious drama was swiftly abandoned, but further away, as in Chester for instance, friction of distanced diminished their reach, and the Commission had to depend on local informants.

From the mid-1570s onwards towns and central government grew more hostile towards itinerant entertainers, and were from the late 1570s onwards increasingly held off by the municipalities, up to the point where travelling by companies without royal patrons almost stopped. This was made possible by the fact the monarchy was attempting to restrict patronage and by central government's hostility towards players. In addition, popular pastimes were attacked by a number of local governments from the 1580s onwards, but, with the exception of the north, no universal and sustained campaign took place to suppress them. So it look as if Hutton was right in suggesting that the regulation or suppression of popular festivity under Elizabeth was dependent upon local initiatives. Considerable doubt can, however, be raised about his argument that the popular culture shrunk each time it was criticized in Parliament. Hutton misses the point as well, when he suggests that the reform of popular culture may have to be considered separately from the general model, from the reformation of manners. He gives a number of reasons for this. Firstly, because Edward's reign had a dramatic

and swift effect on festive culture, and secondly, because that culture was rehabilitated under Mary regardless of socio-economic developments. Hutton misses the point here, since the reformation of manners, and its chronology run from the 1580 onwards.

The chronology of the attack on itinerant entertainers and popular pastime matches Collinson's second Reformation, and supports his argument that the 'common cultural ground' between the Protestant reformers and the Catholics 'ceased to exist round about 1580'.<sup>289</sup> He is, however, wrong in arguing that 'much of the old cultural fabric remained intact' until the second Reformation.<sup>290</sup> The most important religious and cultural expressions were after all, as has been shown above, destroyed during the first Reformation. Furthermore, Hutton's notion of a 'cultural pendulum' that swung back is in all probability correct. The negative attitudes of the authorities towards travelling players and popular pastimes are prevalent, are recorded in towns that have left good records, and were geographically widespread. This in contrast to the pre-Reformation period. Collinson is, however, as becomes clear from the previous chapter, incorrect in claiming that the travelling entertainers 'had begun to replace the traditional and indigenous plays', and renders too simple when he suggests that 'it was soon standard practice to pay them to go away'.<sup>291</sup> There are, however, also signs of the persistence of popular pastimes. Local authorities did indeed attack or attempted to regulate a number of pastimes, but it is clear that others survived. Additionally, we should not equate orders with enforcement.

The motivations for the regulation and suppression of traditional festivity are diverse. The stimulus of the new protestant government to suppress the Catholic customs in the first Reformation seems apparent. During the second Reformation the cycle plays were suppressed because of the doctrine they professed, which they had become offensive to second generation protestants. A change in mentality towards itinerant entertainers had taken place since the late middle ages, since entertainers were now perceived as unwanted by

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<sup>289</sup> Collinson, 'From iconoclasm to iconophobia', p. 283.

<sup>290</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', pp. 141-2.

<sup>291</sup> Collinson, 'From iconoclasm to iconophobia', p. 285; Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', 142

contemporaries. The same may be true of the late medieval popular pastimes, which were out of place in the new protestant environment. Reinvention became impossible. Collinson ascribes the reason for the decline to the 'reception of Calvinism', and underlines that the 'unrelenting struggle against Catholicism must also be central to our understanding of the Protestant impact on culture'.<sup>292</sup> The attitudes of the northern authorities, and especially the Ecclesiastical Commission, must therefore be seen in this light. Furthermore, one of the characteristics Burke has identified in the campaign against popular culture, 'the triumph of Lent', was that it was often led by the learned, and in particular the clergy. This appears to be valid for England as well.<sup>293</sup>

Moreover, a number of orders concerning popular pastimes and itinerant entertainers were most likely inspired by a godly conscience, but the role of Puritanism is, however, problematical. It is impossible to ascribe all measures regarding the popular pastimes and travelling entertainers to the godly. Concerns with order seem to have been extremely prominent, accordingly, Hindle is almost certainly right in asserting that the reformation of manners, including the reform of popular culture, was a 'part of a larger project of good governance'.<sup>294</sup> So concerns with order were in all likelihood shared those in authority, godly or not. Factional politics, hard times or local events could (temporarily) help the godly (individual) in positions of power, or help them to pursue their objectives, as becomes clear from Shrewsbury in 1590-1 and 1594-5, and from Chester in 1599-1600. Additionally, sabbatarian anxieties were, as Kenneth Parker has shown, not limited to Puritans before the 1630s. They were the 'legitimate expression of godly churchmen who witnessed every Sunday the transgression of a doctrine preached from the pulpit'.<sup>295</sup> It therefore seems that Puritanism was not 'necessary for all forms of reforming activity in all places', but 'essential some

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<sup>292</sup> Collinson, 'From iconoclasm to iconophobia', p. 298.

<sup>293</sup> Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 289-334;

<sup>294</sup> Hindle, *The state and social change*, p. 178

<sup>295</sup> Parker, *The English Sabbath*, p. 46.



places'.<sup>296</sup> Accordingly, it is therefore hard to identify a general pattern, or the primary reasons for the decline. It appears to have been a complex pattern of local attitudes, politics, motivations, and reactions, whose complexity can only be truly revealed in microstudies.

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<sup>296</sup> Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*, p. 33.

### Chapter III: Discussion and Conclusion

People of the English late medieval urban community were always on the move; in the processions one the middle and uppers sorts of the city came together and visually expressed solidarity, hierarchy, authority, wholeness and religious values. After the Edwardian and Elizabethan Reformations this did not happen anymore; these communal celebrations belonged to the Catholic past. With the demise of the northern cycle plays, communal and public religious celebrations had practically disappeared from the calendar, which was a profound change in culture and practice in urban society. This was a vast and swift Reformation from above, which practically destroyed the old ritual year, and consequently was a move towards (public) secularisation.

In the latter middle ages, the attitudes of the authorities were for the larger part positive towards different forms of traditional festivity, and actively supported and financed various customs. These attitudes changed, however, during the second Reformation at the end of the sixteenth-century. Itinerant entertainers were despised by central and local government, and the late medieval pastimes were frowned upon by a part of society, and accordingly attacked by the municipalities and banned from church property. This was the slow second Reformation, primarily waged by the town governments. It would be wrong, however, to equate orders for reformation with enforcement, and it is debateable if early modern Corporations had the capacity to enforce its will upon the population at large. The evidence from late medieval England suggests that it did, but this might be an issue which could be covered by further research. On the other hand there is the evidence which testifies of the persistence of a number of popular pastimes, and the continuation of the (financial) support for some late medieval customs. Therefore, Collinson was certainly right in arguing that the Protestant Reformation 'destroyed so much', but if it 'limited and restricted what was left' is questionable.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, p. 59.

So did 'Merry England' really die? This depends on how 'Merry England' is defined. Hutton has identified two processes which according to him created 'Merry England'; they are, in short, a positive attitude of the authorities towards merry making, and a general increase in the quantity and complexity of customs. If we take this as a starting point, then 'Merry England' did die, the latter process came to an end during the first Reformation, and the former matter died in the second Reformation. 'Merry England', was thus not, as Collinson has suggested, 'a double myth of both life and death'.<sup>298</sup> In my opinion, however, the notion of 'Merry England' has little value. It encourages us to think in linear processes of a *Rise and Fall* of the same, and leaves little space for the consideration of various governmental attitudes towards different forms of festivity.

Besides all the negative effects of the Reformation, there were also positive developments, as becomes apparent from the work of David Cressy. He draws attention to a new Protestant national calendar, celebrating events like the defeat of the Spanish armada and the Queen's accession.<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, Collinson has argued that '[o]ut of the detritus of remnant of the old pastimes, there emerged in the towns a new slimmed-down, secular and increasingly civic-cum-martial festive culture'.<sup>300</sup> This seems to be largely correct, but it has to be pointed out that the Midsummer watches were already 'civic-cum-martial', and the various other customs were definitely celebrations of civic pride and independence, as has been shown in chapter I. So with the elimination of the larger part of religious celebrations of the festive culture, the civic and martial element took a more prominent place in the ritual year. An example from Chester illustrates this. In 1606, the mayor compiled a list on which days the civic elite had to wear their gowns, and out of sixteen days, seven were secular feasts.<sup>301</sup> This still leaves nine religious celebrations, and for that reason Phythian-Adams is wrong in

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<sup>298</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', pp. 147.

<sup>299</sup> David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London, 1989), pp. Xi-xii.

<sup>300</sup> Collinson, 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism', p. 44.

<sup>301</sup> REED: *Cheshire*, p. 308.

underlining the 'triumph of the secular half over its ritualistic counterpart'.<sup>302</sup> He may be right, however, in suggesting that religion and festivity withdrew indoors; the Protestant region was en is more personal and private than the principally communal Catholic religion, and festivity might have developed along similar lines.

The image sketched out above in, as mentioned in the introduction, is just a part of the larger picture of reality, and might need to be corrected by exploring the customs excluded by the *REED* editors. It is certainly guilty in neglecting important parts of the larger image, of which some have inevitably been lost throughout the centuries. We do not know, for instance, what most customs sounded like.<sup>303</sup> In addition, the pre-Reformation ritual year might have looked very different if more fraternity records and records from abbeys and priories were available; we might have ascribed an even greater destructive impact to the Reformation. The picture also needs to be corrected with a study of the resistance to the second Reformation, although Underdown's *Riot and Rebellion* comes in useful. Finally, this study has mainly focused on the urban environment; correction by the inclusion of rural sources might prove fruitful.

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<sup>302</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', p. 79.

<sup>303</sup> Collinson, 'Merry England on the ropes', p. 135.

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## Appendix

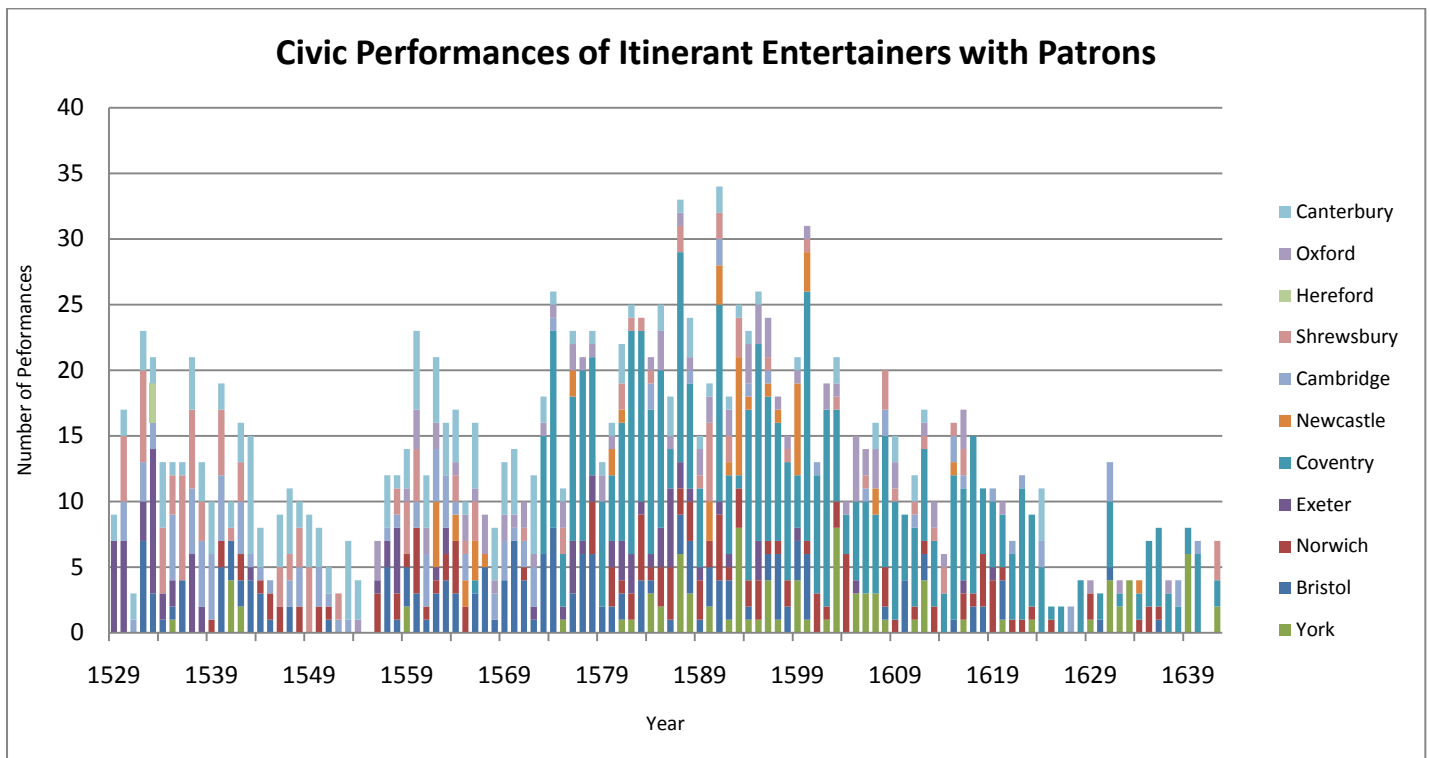


Fig. 1. Diagram compiled from the *REED* volumes and from *The Patrons and Performances Website*, Sally-Beth MacLean and Alan Somerset (eds.), April 2007. <<http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/reed/index.cfm>> (5 August 2010).<sup>1</sup>

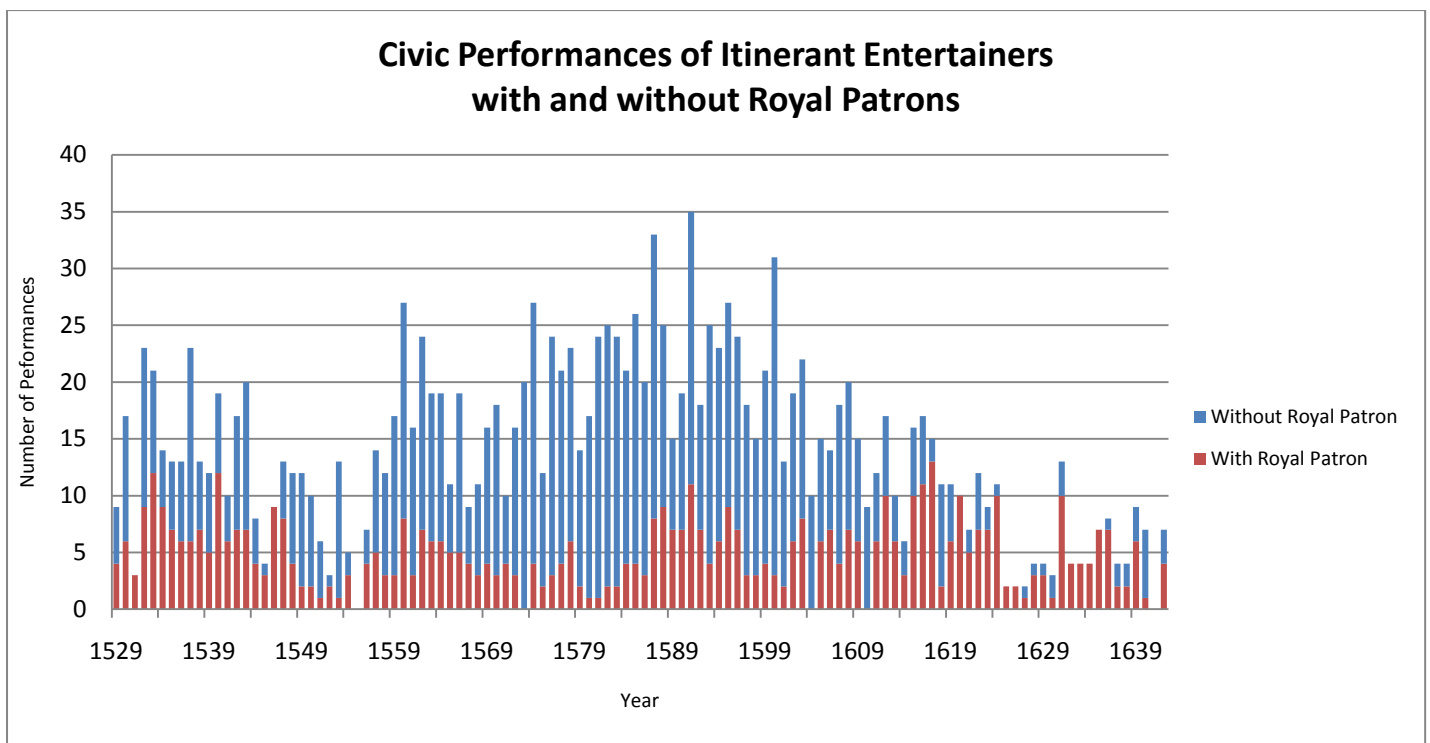


Fig. 2. Diagram compiled from the *REED* volumes and from *The Patrons and Performances Website*, Sally-Beth MacLean and Alan Somerset (eds.), April 2007. <<http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/reed/index.cfm>> (5 August 2010).

<sup>1</sup> Note: performances which were entered in the *Reed volumes* as for example 1529-30, have been entered as 1529 in the diagrams. Moreover, the Cheshire and Lincolnshire volumes have not been used for they both contained only one reference. Moreover, performances of waits have also not been included.