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**COVENTRY
MYSTERY
PLAYS**

by
Pamela King





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'Coventry Mystery Plays'

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Pamela King



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Nor would my work have proceeded without the help and advice I have received over my many years of interest in the Coventry Cycle from the community of scholars and friends who work on medieval English theatre. Elizabeth Baldwin, Clifford Davidson and Richard Rastell gave me access to their unpublished work and pre-publication manuscripts. Peter Meredith, Margaret Rogerson and Meg Twycross, who also helped produce the illustrations, generously shared their insights into the material. Steve Longstaffe read and commented on the final manuscript. Alexandra Johnson, Director of Records of Early English Drama, let me go through R.W. Ingram's unpublished papers in Toronto. To all of these I owe thanks.

Anyone who wants to explore the history of the plays 'anciently performed at Coventry', however, necessarily treads in the footsteps of two true Coventrians, the late Reg Ingram, whom I knew, and Thomas Sharp, whom I wish I could have met. This booklet is, therefore, dedicated to the memory of both.

Pamela King.

Editor's Notes

The Coventry Branch of the Historical Association acknowledges with gratitude the very generous donation made by Mrs Eileen Gooder towards the cost of printing pamphlets in the Coventry and County Heritage Series. This donation has been given in memory of the late Dr. Arthur Gooder, a historian of distinction who did much to promote the study and enjoyment of history.

The Editor wishes to thank Mr. L. Hulton for the help and support he has given her in preparing the layout of this pamphlet for publication.

The format of the pamphlet follows the convention of previous pamphlets in the Coventry and County Heritage series.

The illustrations which refer exclusively to the staging of a pageant have been grouped in the middle pages and cross-referenced to the relevant text.

Paraphrases of archaic sources have been provided alongside some of the quoted texts to give better clarity.

Eileen Castle April 1997.

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COVENTRY MYSTERY PLAYS

Civic Drama in Medieval Coventry

Like the people of all England's commercial and manufacturing centres in the late Middle Ages, the Coventrian's working year was punctuated by holidays. A holiday for the medieval townsman or woman was not a time to travel away from home, but a holy-day, time when the normal week's pattern was interrupted by feasting and celebrations in which dramatic performances were a significant element. The majority of holidays were annual events, celebrations of the feasts in the church calendar and local saints' days, but they also included older traditional festivals, both universal like midsummer, and local, like the annual Hox Tuesday celebrations in Coventry when an ancient defeat of the Danes was re-enacted. There were also holidays which were truly occasional, particularly when the monarch chose to visit the city, which in Coventry happened relatively frequently. When it did, the easiest way to put on a show was to adapt elements of well-rehearsed annual festivals as vehicles both for paying extravagant compliments to the visitor and for showing off the wealth and sophistication of the community.

Work was not forgotten on holidays; many coincided with commercial fairs which drew people and their money to the city from an extensive hinterland and from other commercial centres. The trading and manufacturing guilds were the organs through which celebrations were organised, and the same celebrations became showcases for the prosperity and 'worship' of the members of an occupation. For it was his occupation, his skill or 'mystery', which gave the medieval city-dweller his identity: after a long apprenticeship he lived next to, worshipped with, and married into families whose line of work was the same as his own.

The Author.

Pamela King is Head of English at the University College of St. Martin in Lancaster where she holds a personal chair. She has published widely on medieval English theatre and is preparing an electronic facsimile of the Coventry Weavers' pageant as well as a new edition of both Coventry plays. She is also one of the directors of York Doomsday Project, a major project funded by the British Academy and supported by the British Library, which is assembling a multi-media electronic archive of materials relating to the York cycle. Her doctoral thesis was written on late medieval tomb-sculpture, in which she retains an interest. She has also worked on twentieth-century Catalan religious festivals, and is interested in research and teaching on many other aspects of late medieval and early modern culture.

So holiday celebrations and fairs were always accompanied by feasting, socialising, music and dancing, as well as by divine service, formal display, processions or ridings, and dramatic performance. In the last category, the mystery cycles which were performed by the guilds in many British cities in the late Middle Ages, were undoubtedly the most elaborate and ambitious. Mystery cycles, that is episodic dramatisations of the Christian story, were associated in most centres which performed them with the great early summer festival of Corpus Christi, at which the real presence of Christ in the host at mass was celebrated. In Coventry, Corpus Christi marked the beginning of a week-long fair: for the guilds, therefore, it was the climax of the year, followed swiftly in time and importance by the Midsummer Riding.

Coventry's cycle was well known outside the West Midlands. The Warwickshire antiquarian, Sir William Dugdale, writing in 1659, claims to have interviewed an old man who remembered that

"the yearly confluence of people to see that show was extraordinary great, and yielded no small advantage to this city."

Its fame extended to London, as in John Heywood's 'The Playe called the Four PP', a pardoner boasts,

*"This deuyll and I were of olde acquaintance,
For oft in the play of Corpus Christi
He hath played the deuyll [devil] at Coventry."*

The play was published by John Rastell, Heywood's father-in-law, who also printed 'A Hundred Merry Tales' in 1526. In one of the tales a Warwickshire priest, preaching on the articles of the Creed said,

"yf you beleue [believe] not me, then for a more suerte and sufficyent auctoryte [authority], go your way to Couentre and there ye shall se them all pleyd in corpus christi playe."

Rastell, a dramatist himself, was entered by his father, Coventry's City Coroner, into the Corpus Christi guild in 1489. He succeeded his father as Coventry's coroner in 1506, resigning in 1509¹, after which

he moved in humanist court circles in London and was married to the sister of Sir Thomas More.

Special Occasions

Not only did the cycle attract crowds to the city at the time of the Corpus Christi fair; being only five miles from Kenilworth, ten from Warwick and next door to Caluden, the seat of the Berkeley-Mowbrays, it also attracted royal visitors. Royal visits to the cycle were not easy, however, because of the special arrangements which had to be made, and when Margaret of Anjou came "*privily*" to see them in 1457, the route they took had to be changed to pass a suitable viewing point, and unspecified delays meant that the Drapers' Doomsday was not played "*for lak of day*". However Richard III visited at Corpus Christi in 1485, a couple of months before Bosworth, and his successor Henry VII became an honorary member of the Corpus Christi and Trinity guilds.

It was on the whole easier to entertain royalty as a separate occasion, but even when this happened, mystery play staging and performers were redeployed. When Margaret of Anjou visited in 1456 she had seen six specially devised pageants or tableaux. Prince Arthur in 1498 and Henry VIII in 1511 were welcomed in similar style. Princess Mary (later Queen Mary Tudor) visited in 1526 and saw a special performance of the Mercers' pageant, probably because it featured the later life of the Virgin Mary. But the most spectacular of royal visits must be that paid by Elizabeth on 17, 18 and 19 August 1566². She came with a huge retinue, giving barely a month's warning, and lodged at Stephen Hales' house, formerly the Whitefriars. Of the guilds who volunteered to perform for her, four were chosen. Those who were not helped others, and the Weavers must have been grateful for the Cappers' support in producing their ambitious tableau of St John's vision in Revelations of the seven churches of Asia. The details of all these visits are fascinating in their own right, but for our purposes they emphasise in particular that whatever the occasion the guilds and their Corpus Christi wagons were the most celebrated and important theatrical resource in the city.

Records

Although only two late play-scripts now survive from the Coventry cycle itself, the record resources from which its detailed history can be pieced together are amongst the richest in the country. This is largely now thanks to the industry of Coventry's nineteenth-century antiquarians, particularly Thomas Sharp of whom more will be said later, who could not have anticipated the two major disasters which have deprived us of many of the originals. In 1878, the Birmingham Free Library in which much of Coventry's medieval records were stored, burnt down, and then in 1940 more was lost on the same night that the medieval church of St Michael, latterly Coventry cathedral, fell prey to Hitler's bombers. The massive job of compiling and publishing all these records from their various sources was then undertaken in the 1970s by the late Reg Ingram³, who has made the work of all who follow him immeasurably easier.

The Urban Economic Context

In the late Middle Ages there were two alternative ways of presenting the story of the world from Creation to Doomsday to a whole community. It was either played as a series of short episodes on pageant wagons at a number of 'stations' around the city, or it was performed on a huge set in the round in a playing place which contained audience and performers all together. Coventry's cycle, because we know it was parcelled out for performance to various craft and trade guilds, is commonly grouped with the processional productions of Chester and York, but from what we know of it in its full form, it differed distinctly. Whereas the York Cycle in its surviving form has forty-seven pageants, Coventry has no more than ten. The central management of the performance of the cycle in Coventry was controlled by the Leet, and the 'Leet Book' is full of injunctions to guilds who did not have responsibility for pageants to assist those who did. A long history of redactions which accommodate this combining of guilds in long pageants seems to be a distinguishing feature. Before looking at each sequence of episodes and its organising

guild, we need to put this major festival in context, considering how it might compare with other English cycles which survive in their entirety, and how it relates to the changing fortunes of the city in the later Middle Ages.

The retrievable sequence of pageants in Coventry begins with the Shearmen and Tailors' Nativity play, followed by the Weavers' play of the 'Purification and Christ before the Doctors in the Temple', the Smiths' Passion play, the Cappers' play of the 'Harrowing of Hell' and the Resurrection, the Mercers' play which probably dealt with the end of the life of the Virgin Mary, and the Drapers' 'Doomsday'. The balance of New Testament events illustrated by this sequence is not unusual in mystery cycles and in contemporary non-dramatic narratives of the life of Jesus Christ. It focuses on events surrounding the two major feasts of the church year, Christmas and Easter, ending with an imaginative leap into the future, the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. Unlike the other cycles, in Coventry there is no record of Old Testament pageants, although we do also know of four groups of participating guilds for whom we have no record of a subject.

We should be careful, however, in assuming likeness between the York play, often taken as the paradigm, or any other of the surviving cycles, and Coventry's. The earliest definitive record of how the York cycle was organised is the 1415 'Ordo Paginarum', the list of the order in which the pageants were to proceed. The surviving version of the plays themselves was compiled by the city clerk as a register of what was performed some time between 1463 and 1477⁴. In Coventry, although we know that pageants of some kind were in existence when the 'Leet Book' begins in 1421, the extant playbooks and the preponderance of detailed records come from a century later. What the totality of records from both cities make clear is that a mystery cycle was a constantly evolving event. Crucially, the date of the York 'Ordo Paginarum' which lists over fifty participating guilds, coincides with a period of notable affluence, whereas the date of the known Coventry pageants coincides with severe national and local economic crisis.

At the close of the fourteenth century, Bristol and Coventry were the largest centres of urban population after London⁵. Yet there were differences which rendered York more resilient, Coventry more vulnerable in times of economic decline, including access to navigable

waterways, ecclesiastical and constitutional importance. Above all, Coventry is well known to have been a single product economy, the hub of a rural network, based on the manufacture of textiles, particularly the famous Coventry 'blue', broadcloth dyed with woad. The story of a cycle of mystery plays is not so much the description of a fixed entity as the tracking of an evolution in civic celebrations, closely related to changes in the economic climate.

Manufacture and trade in a medieval city was organised as a system of independent but related monopolies, the guilds. All had the common interest in protecting themselves from the operation of drastic market forces by maintaining artificially high prices at times when food was cheap, in order to see themselves through periods of sluggish trading. They did this by controlling the labour supply, one of the major functions of the guilds, by means of levies, long apprenticeships, and strictly controlled access to permission to manufacture and trade.

An organisational system such as this does not cut prices at times of prolonged hardship; it limits expenditure. When the city went into economic decline popular festivals were not cancelled, as they had a very important role to play in validating and sanctifying the economic activity of the city, but they did have to adapt to changed circumstances. The cost of producing a festive event would remain largely the same, as members of one guild would be buying the products of the other guilds (cloth, wood, ironwork, leather, nails etc.), so room for manoeuvre lay in combining and rationalising the material of formerly distinct pageants. It seems likely that Coventry's long composite plays of the 1530s are evidence of a direct response to hard economic conditions, details of which have been influentially charted by Charles Phythian-Adams. The general problem from the mid fifteenth century was a decline in the textile industry, a significant element being the collapse of supplies of woad⁶, vital for Coventry's distinctive product. The surviving guilds which had the economic power to carry what may be a radically remodelled cycle – Drapers, Smiths, Mercers – are those most capable of protecting themselves from impoverishment by diversifying and by operating cartels, illustrated by, for example, the Drapers' successful attack on the Dyers' monopoly. What records there are relating to early sixteenth-century York⁷ demonstrate problems similar to, but not as extreme as, those

which may be observed in Coventry, with guilds having to amalgamate and co-operate in order to continue producing particular pageants.

On 10 April, 1494, the 'Leet Book' includes an entry which captures a significant moment in the cycle's evolution:

*"ffor asmoche as þe
vnyte & amyte of all
citeez & cominalteez
is principally
atteyned &
contynued be due
Ministracion of
Iustice & pollytyk
guydyng of þe same
forseyng pat no
persone be
oppressed nor put to
ferther charge then
he conuenyently may
bere and þat euery
persone withoute
fauour be
contributory after his
substance &
faculteez þat he vseth
to euery charge had
& growyng for the
welth & worship of
the hole body and
where so it is in þis
Cite of Couentre that
dyuers charges haue
be continues tyme
oute of mynde for the
worship of the same
as pagantes & such
other whch haue be
born be dyuers*

because the unity and good relations of cities and local Authorities are largely attained and perpetuated by the Administration of Justice and the judicious handling of these matters to ensure that no one is oppressed nor charged more than he can readily afford and that everyone without discrimination contributes according to his means and ability - for every immediate or potential charge to the well being and respect of the whole community - so it is that in this City of Coventry that different charges have been made from time immemorial for the support of the pageants and other similar things

*Craftes whch
craftes at þe
begynnyng of such
charges were more
welthy rich and moo
in nombre then now
be as openly
appereth for whch
causez they nowe be
not of powier to
continue þe seid
Charges without
relief & comfart be
shewed to them in
þat partie..."*

supported by Crafts. When these charges began the Crafts were more prosperous and wealthy, and more numerous, than they now plainly seem to be, and that therefore they cannot continue to pay without support and help in that respect....

The crafts singled out as having borne charges of "*pageants and such other*" now in need of relief, include Dyers, Skinners, Fishmongers, Cappers, Corvisers, Butchers, who are to be joined up to others who are overburdened by their pageants.

Regrettably, evidence about Coventry's cycle in the affluent years of the fifteenth century is not detailed enough to allow us to extrapolate a performance analagous with either York's in the same period, or Coventry's at the much later date of the surviving play texts. All those named crafts excused from bearing pageant expenses in 1494 are listed as participants in the 1445 Corpus Christi procession. Although the procession and the plays were distinct and sequential events; there is nothing to exclude the possibility that more of these guilds staged pageants than sixteenth-century records suggest.

After 1494, the next document to consider is a memorandum enjoining the Butchers to contribute to the overcharged Whittawers, because of "*old acquaintance and amity*" between the crafts, unsurprising in view of the symbiosis of the leather and meat trades. The Skinners and Barbers, as well as a stray Carver and Cook, were to contribute to the Cardmakers, the Tilers and Pinner to the Wrights (Carpenters), the Cappers and Fullers to the Girdlers. Then in 1506 the Corvisers were ordered to contribute to the Tanners' Corpus Christi day expenses. When this alliance was confirmed in 1552, the Tanners were said not

to be "*of such substance as they haue bin in tymes past to meyntayne the pageant*". The Fishmongers were unassigned in 1533, when the mayor's intention to appoint an affiliation is noted, though not what it was.

The story of Coventry's pageants throughout the whole period of written record suggests that the retrievable history of the cycle is one of contraction and rationalisation. The craft organisations which we know to have been able to maintain pageants on known subjects right up to and through the catastrophic decline of the early sixteenth century all have certain economic characteristics in common⁸ which gave them a leading edge over others. In the context of what was essentially a single-product economy, certain guilds in the textile industry (Shearmen and Tailors, Weavers) managed to maintain sufficient numbers to continue to support a pageant. The Cappers' complex history is, in addition, characteristic of a specialist craft whose fortunes followed fashion and reputation, sometimes going against general economic trends. The Drapers in Coventry operated by having a monopoly power of buying and selling within the textile industry as a whole. The Mercers too, in common with the same guild elsewhere, were insulated by controlling imports into the city, spreading their risk across many foreign markets and diversifying to include, for example, grocers, hatters and haberdashers⁹. The Smiths may seem the odd one out in the elite, being neither textile-related nor trading guilds, until it becomes clear that in Coventry the Smiths included goldsmiths. Goldsmithing was an area of quality cartel, and in a city which had its own mint, goldsmiths acted as wholesale merchants in products which tolerated very high profit margins. These then are the survivors, in pageantry as in trade, sucking in other associations of occupations less well insulated by cartel or monopoly potential, by skill, specialism or fashion, or by trade in high-profit luxury goods, at times of recession. These are also the associations which enabled Coventry's cycle to continue, by commissioning long composite plays.

Discounting all those crafts with 'houses' to store their pageant wagons but no known subject, and concentrating purely on the known plays, it is possible to see that these alone present a coherent sequence from the Annunciation to Doomsday. What's more, even if there is no evidence for Old Testament plays in the Coventry cycle in times of recession;

that local resources stretched to staging the complete narrative originally at the peak of economic prosperity is not beyond the bounds of possibility. In short, what is now recognised as the Coventry cycle could plausibly be the result of an intelligent, if piecemeal, pruning exercise. This is the historical context in which our reconstruction of what Coventry's mystery cycle might have been like in the mid-sixteenth century, the only period in which we have enough information to attempt the exercise, must be placed.

The Staging of the Cycle

The Route

[See the Map of Coventry c. 1500. Fig 1, pp.28 - 29]

The cycle was performed processionaly, in that the pageants -- a word used throughout England to designate both the plays and the vehicles on which they were performed -- were taken in sequence around the city and performed at 'stations' along the route. Coventry's route has never been indisputably established, nor has the number of stations, and in a period of what amounts to almost two centuries, both probably altered. Although ten stations in all are mentioned at various times¹⁰, this does not mean that all plays were played at all stations every year, a proposal for the then size of the city which would be plainly ridiculous. Common sense alone would suggest that no more than three performances of each pageant were mounted in the day, a view corroborated by accounts of expendable props, such as the three worlds the Drapers burnt in Doomsday each year, presumably one at each stop.

Gosford Street appears to have been the starting point, as the inhabitants there requested of the Leet in 1494 that the pageants should "*be sette & stande at þe place there*" which was "*of olde tyme vsed*". This is not to say that anything was performed there: in York the pageants assembled at Toft Green and definitely did not perform there. Elizabeth Baldwin has recently suggested that there might have been a pattern of 'request stops', which would explain inconsistencies in the records. She has tabulated all the stops mentioned in the available

records, providing the most definitive, if inconclusive, guide to the route yet¹¹.

Baldwin concludes that the wagons must have moved towards the city from Gosford Street, and the junction of Much Park Street and Jordanwell is, therefore, a probable station. The players received refreshment at a tavern called the Swan for which the "*Swan with ij neckes*" in Jordanwell is a likely candidate, as other accounts mention ale bought at "*mickelparke strete ende*" and the tavern could have been at the junction. Earl Street is the next point for which there is an accumulation of evidence. Margaret of Anjou lodged at Richard Wood's house there in 1457 to see the plays, and the Smiths paid for ale at his door. Unless their refreshment stops were very frequent, it is likely that the house was at the Little Park Street end of Earl Street where Queen Elizabeth saw the Smiths play in 1566. Broadgate is another likely station, as Prince Edward in 1474, Prince Arthur in 1498, and Henry VIII in 1511 saw plays there. Thereafter there are two possible routes. Records of Margaret of Anjou's visit mention the conduit in Smithford Street, the east end of St John's church, and Bablake Gate, the last also being mentioned at Prince Edward's visit, but there are no regular Corpus Christi records of stops on Smithford Street. Crosscheaping is a more likely regular route, although evidence is flimsy. There are also isolated references -- to New Gate, White Friars, Grey Friars, and Cookstreet Gate -- which do not fit in with any route.

If the pageant route began in Gosford Street, continued in Broad Gate, turned into Crosscheaping, and went as far as Bishop Street, there could have been stations in Jordanwell, Earl Street, Broadgate and Crosscheaping, and need not have been only one station in each. That the Coventry play had only three performances need not be incompatible with this: different guilds may have performed at different stations, or may have identified their stations by different names, and, like everything else, arrangements probably changed down the years.

Staging: the Vehicles

The basic unit of staging for Coventry's pageants was the wagon, probably with four iron-bound spoked wheels¹². Our earliest records of

the cycle refer to the 'pageant-houses' in which these were stored, and from the records of individual guilds we can see, if not exactly what each one looked like, at least that they were costly and elaborate constructions. [See the York Doomsday Wagon: Fig.2 p.30] Plays like the multi-level Drapers' Doomsday had built-in machinery for moving characters in and out of heaven. The Drapers and the Cappers also had a hellmouth, fixed to the front of the wagon at street level and operated mechanically, and even those wagons which did not require more than one level had decorative roofs.

There is a temptation to imagine the wagon as a boxed-in stage, with the long side on which the box is open being the front, such as in the famous Gee engraving which forms the frontispiece for Sharp's 'Dissertation'. [See the Gee engraving: Fig.3 p.31] We are familiar with proscenium-arch stages, and tableaux mounted for modern processions on the backs of flat-bed trucks. In the absence of contemporary drawings, however, recent reconstructions have favoured using wagons orientated end-on. This has the immediate advantage of allowing the scene to be observed by an audience on three sides, like a thrust or corridor stage, and, because of its greater depth, makes the stepping of different levels of staging easier to achieve. It is also substantiated by drawings of Continental triumph cars, and by actual surviving performance. Valencia in Spain still uses its sixteenth-century Corpus Christi wagons in its procession, and despite their adaptations, it is clear that they have always been orientated in this way¹³. [See 'The Valencia wagon' Fig.4 p.32]

It is also important to remember that plywood, hardboard, aluminium and the ubiquitous Styrofoam were not available; oak and iron were the staple building materials, meaning that the wagons would have been immensely heavy, but also that the standard of workmanship, particularly of carving, would have been of the same quality as that we now associate with medieval churches. They were also decorated lavishly with painted cloths, not an exclusively theatrical property, like the modern backdrop, but a common and relatively costly element in domestic decoration.

The wheels of the wagons were iron-shod, and there is no evidence that they had a steering front axle, although a single pin and central shaft arrangement such as the Valencian wagons use, is likely, and was in

use in England at the right date¹⁴. The Coventry Smiths are unique in the records of English mystery plays in apparently having used horses to draw their wagon. For evidence of this we are, however, dependent on the antiquarians who extracted from the no longer extant accounts of that company¹⁵. It is possible that this 'fact' has been overstated, that the few references to "*horsyng*" have been misread. Generally the Smiths had their wagon manhandled in the same way as everyone else, and hired a horse for Herod to ride.

Neither surviving Coventry pageant could be performed in its entirety on the back of a wagon, however elaborate its construction, as both the Shearmen and Tailors' and the Weavers' pageants call for multiple locations of action. Stage directions offer some clues to what was done. In the Shearmen and Tailors' pageant the Magi, when they enter, "*spekyth in the strete*", and Herod "*ragis in þe pagond & in the strete also*". But even with the use of the street for some of the action, and a given space standing for more than one location, it is difficult to conceive of an arrangement whereby the Bethlehem stable, the shepherds' hillside, and Herod's court were all represented on a single vehicle. It seems altogether more likely that the Coventry Shearmen and Tailors had more than one vehicle, and stage directions in the Weavers' pageant also suggest a complex area, at least a single vehicle with two available playing levels.

Where we have no surviving script speculation about scenic arrangement becomes more complicated. The Smiths' wagon had legs as well as wheels (1470). The Cappers' wagon had, in addition to the hellmouth and windlass like the Drapers, a forepart and a sidepart, tressels, a sepulchre and a ladder (1543). More importantly, they, like the Smiths, also had a 'scaffold' which had wheels, or 'trulls' as the Smiths' account calls them (1565). Scaffolds are usually found in the context of large outdoor fixed staging in the late Middle Ages, and generally refer to the 'houses', or display platforms, of the major characters. On the Continent biblical epic plays staged in this 'place-and-scaffold' manner were common.

As all of the Coventry pageants, so far as we can tell, required several locations of action, it has been suggested that there was fixed staging available at each station, and that the guilds drew their wagons up to this in turn in order to perform¹⁶. The evidence, however, points to

nothing but moveable scenic elements, and to the likelihood that each play involved more than one vehicle. Perhaps the absolute distinction between processional performance and place-and-scaffold is false, and what was set up at each station was a moveable place-and-scaffold arrangement. In the case of the Cappers, this involved a wagon with raisable extensions at the front and the side, as well as a separate scaffold and, after 1552, a Castle of Emmaeus. The front extension might have concealed hell-mouth below it, the scaffold might have represented Pilate's 'seat', or, alternatively, the sepulchre. The tressels may have supported the raised extensions to one or both vehicles¹⁷.

Pageant Houses

The lengths and expenses to which the companies were prepared to go to house their pageant vehicles says much about the prestige-value of the cycle in corporate life. Coventry's records demonstrate that a pageant wagon was a custom-built vehicle which was dismantled and stored in a specially designated building for the whole of its life and brought out only for performance. The records of pageant-houses in Coventry are also very important because they supply the earliest references to civic drama in the city, and to the involvement of some companies, records of whose part in the cycle have otherwise vanished. The Drapers' 'domum pro le pagent' is mentioned in the Cartulary of St Mary's Priory in 1392. Later on the Drapers refer to two pageant houses, an old and a new, so the old one was perhaps retained for its value in rents. Still earlier material may yet come to light: Ingram was pursuing records of a land dispute over the Whittawers' pageant-house going back at least to 1402¹⁸.

The Weavers' pageant house was transferred in 1434 by an indenture which tells us that it was situated in Mill Lane and was flanked by that of the Tailors. In 1499, we have the first mention of the Smiths' one, rented from Cheylesmore Manor, in an extract from their accounts. It occupied a plot at least twelve feet square and had an iron crest on top of it. An entry in the Leet Book for 1531 refers to the pageant house of the Cardmakers and Saddlers which, with the maintenance of their chapel and their pageant, had become too burdensome for them so it was to be shared with the Cappers. Then a city Rental Roll of 1574 makes chance reference to fourpence received for the rent of the

Girdlers' pageant-house. The Mercers' pageant house first appears in the records in 1576, when the city Payments Out Book records major repairs costing £6: for reasons not altogether clear, the wealthy Mercers never owned their pageant house but rented it from the city, hence although as tenants they carried out minor repairs, the cost of the major ones fell to the owners. Then finally, when the pageants have ceased production, and the Shearmen and Tailors are conveying their pageant house into other hands, we learn that it had been situated next to that of the Tilers and Coopers, heretofore unmentioned in connection with the cycle, a clear warning against viewing surviving evidence as in any way complete¹⁹.

We do know, however, that the Drapers and Mercers' pageant houses were on prime sites in Gosford Street, whereas the Weavers, the Cardmakers and Saddlers (later Cappers), the Girdlers and Pinners, the Shearmen and Tailors and the Tilers and Coopers all had theirs on the west side of Mill Lane, the Smiths' on the east side of the same street. The Drapers' old pageant-house was on Little Park Street, and the Whittawers' on Hill Street. The size of these buildings must have varied considerably, but we are probably wrong if we consider them simply as garages. Some may have been, but the Drapers retained two, receiving rent for both, while the Weavers saw fit to rebuild theirs the year the pageant finished production. Some must have been buildings of general value as commercial properties, perhaps with dwellings on an upper floor²⁰.

It is from pageant house records alone that we know of the Whittawers', the Girdlers', and the Coopers and Tilers' pageants. In addition, the Tanners' ordinances (1496, 1507 and 1552) make it clear that they had a pageant, and were latterly in need of help from the Corvisers to keep it going, although the subject of the pageant and the location of their pageant house are alike unknown. This brings the total of known pageants to ten. Until further evidence comes to light, the subject matter of the lost four will remain a matter for speculation. In the meantime it is more productive to look at the pageants of the remaining six guilds.

The Participating Guilds and their Pageants

The Shearmen and Tailors

The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors is well known. Its subject matter covers the whole Nativity narrative: the Annunciation, Joseph's Doubts, the birth of Christ, the shepherds, Herod, the Magi and the killing of the Innocents. The Shearmen and Tailors' pageant also contains the poignant 'Coventry Carol', the lament by the mothers of the children slain by Herod's soldiers.

The records of the Shearmen and Tailors' guild, except for a single deed of conveyance of 1590 by which they disposed of their pageant house to a Thomas Wilks, perished before they could be recorded by any of Coventry's antiquarians. They are linked with each other and with the Fullers through the religious confraternity of St George from the mid-fifteenth century²¹, but by the end of the century the Fullers were contributing to the Girdlers' unidentified pageant. In 1450 the Leet ordered a muster of the guilds, from which it appears that there were 64 participating tailors and shearmen, a higher number than that recorded for any other guild, but that none of them, unlike the 59 Drapers, had held civic office. The pageant itself, therefore, surviving only because of Thomas Sharp's fortuitous copying, must stand as the sole testimonial of the company's impact upon medieval Coventry.

The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors

The pageant, which Robert Crow claims in a colophon to have 'newly corrected', is a collage of contemporary written styles. As poetry, the elements most probably added by Crow are over-ornate and rather banal, but his theatrical sense is sound, handling shifts of tone between the solemn and the burlesque, and shifts of pace from narrative to action to instruction and back again, while managing a giddy number of location changes. The 'lude de taylars and scharmen' is quite readable, but it remains eminently performable.

The pageant opens with Isaiah's prophesy of the birth of Christ (*Isaiah* 7:14) as a prologue in the seven-line rhyme-royal stanza which Crow

favours for all linking and non-narrative elements. Isaiah probably delivered the speech in the street while the wagon and other staging elements were being set up, just as the dialogue of the two prophets in the centre of the play may have covered the entry of Herod's court, perhaps a second vehicle. Crow's Isaiah seems partly to be derived from the traditional procession of prophets, linking Old and New Testament events. As things stand, he opens the known cycle, alerting the audience to the significance of what will follow.

The first 'scene'²² is the Annunciation. It is very close to its source in Luke's gospel, written in simple quatrains which suit the intimacy and solemnity of the subject, and is probably derived from an earlier play. The iconography of the Annunciation was and still is relatively invariable and universally recognisable, so this episode works like a speaking picture, focusing on Mary's consent to the Incarnation as the pivotal moment of world history. The same affectingly simple stanza form is used for all momentous events: the angels talking to the shepherds, the coming of the Magi, the angel's warning to Mary and Joseph to go into Egypt, and the laments of the mothers whose infants are killed by Herod. In addition, Crow employs an eight-line stanza similar to that of the Chester cycle for humorous and burlesque elements in the play. The same three stanza forms are favoured for equivalent material in the Weavers' pageant. The substance of the bible stories seems to have been imported in an earlier form, whereas Crow composed amplifications in what he felt was a more sophisticated and modern style.

More than a change of metre marks the transition from the Annunciation to Joseph's return. The conventional intervening episode of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist, is glossed over in a few of Gabriel's departing lines. Then an abrupt change in tone occurs when Joseph addresses the audience directly, as if he were the elderly cuckold with a young wife of the medieval comic 'fabliau' tradition like Chaucer's 'Miller's Tale'. His position is highly ironic, and he is enlightened in his despair by a visiting angel. Crow is by no means innovative in introducing this burlesque episode into his play: the picture he gives us of Joseph as the natural man, with whom the audience must sympathise, then with whom they will be corrected, derives from apocryphal accounts of events surrounding the Nativity.

Introducing ridicule into religious plays was common and accepted in the late medieval traditions as laughter is used to assert superior spiritual vision. The episode is well handled as the laughter never touches the Virgin Mary herself.

The long composite play like this has a distinct advantage when it comes to presenting the Nativity itself. In a cycle of short pageants the appearance to the shepherds and the Nativity of Christ have to be treated as sequential actions although they are in fact simultaneous. The dramatist also has to confront the difficulty of having the Virgin Mary give birth on stage. In this play action moves from Joseph settling Mary in the stable and setting out to get help, to the shepherds on their hillside, and back to the stable where the infant has already been born. How the two locations were staged, and how the audience's attention was moved between them is unclear, but the composite nature of this play suggests that the audience is cunningly cheated of witnessing the central event.

The shepherds at Christ's Nativity are among the most popular figures in mystery plays. Presented always as the contemporaries of the audience, they are local men with local names and a common occupation, yet they are the direct witnesses of divine revelation. As in all other extant cycles, Crow's shepherds are comic, but laughter directed at them is controlled and sympathetic. They are discovered on the hillside where one has lost the others who creep up and give him a fright. All then complain about the weather and the loss of sheep. This is not just light relief, but sets them up as unredeemed men in need of a comforting saviour, the Good Shepherd. Another traditional element which Crow employs is the shepherds' feast, a piece of comic business with a serious symbolic meaning, possibly representing the breaking of the Advent fast at midnight on the first Christmas day. When they have sung in joyous response to the angels' song, the shepherds go to Bethlehem to present their gifts to the baby. There is no consistent tradition of what these gifts are, and they vary from cycle to cycle, but in all cases they are everyday objects needed by their owners and charitably given. Here the second shepherd gives the baby a hat to protect him from bad weather. Christ will later repay physical comfort with spiritual, or so goes the teaching on works of charity which is the focus of Doomsday.

At this point, two rather prolix 'prophets' replace the shepherds on the scene and analyse the story so far. This section is probably original to Crow, fulfilling both the theatrical exigencies of this moment in the action and his apparent need to introduce explicatory material into the play. These characters are not really prophets at all, more teacher and pupil than mystic dignitaries. Inserting this type of material into mystery plays is not unique to Crow: the sixteenth-century cycle from Chester has a character called the Expositor who keeps appearing to tell the audience what to think. It may be that the mid sixteenth-century climate of thought left playwrights less willing to leave the message of their material to visual and verbal 'figurae'. At least Crow makes the effort to render this didactic material -- on the relationship between doubt and belief -- dramatic, by creating two contrasting characters in Socratic dialogue. But the audience is nonetheless wrenched from the essentially emotional world of the star, the ox and the ass back into the medieval schoolroom²³.

After the prophets' dialogue another abrupt gear-change is brought about by the entry of Herod's messenger who makes a long speech in French, probably in satiric attack on courtly affectations; later Herod's soldiers, sent out to kill babies and put to flight by women, will be contrasted with the ideals of chivalry. The general impression, however, is of the exotic, and Herod, supplied as he was in the Smiths' pageant with a fancy hat, a painted face and robe, a sceptre, mace and curved sword, is nothing if not exotic. The fact that there are three Herods in the New Testament does not trouble dramatists of English pageants in the least; for them there is only one, a ranting, violent, tyrannical worshipper of Mahound, the byword for over-acting, as Hamlet knew. Crow's Herod has been criticised²⁴ for being more over the top than most, a raving buffoon robbed of menace and theological significance. The play may indeed have succumbed to popular demand by designing an out-Heroded Herod who does everything possible to make the audience laugh and is, accordingly, difficult to perceive as a real threat. But the serious message of the play is retrieved by the Magi, who combine the pomp which Herod abuses with the quiet faith of the stable. They are also associated with learning and become another vehicle for providing intellectual explanations of the events of which they are part. They apply right reason, as recommended by the teacher-prophet, to what might otherwise descend into cruel farce.

They fulfil a formal, processional role, and their manner of presenting their gifts is reminiscent again of any number of sacred pictures.

The mothers of the Innocents, who replace the Virgin on the set, anticipate her role at the base of the cross, reminding the audience that Christ's death is merely postponed. Yet the Coventry play keeps the lamenting voices of the women for their famous carol at the end, and gives us another tonal shift into the burlesque as the women shrewishly set upon the murdering soldiers. Once more the play succumbs to popular tradition, again familiar to Shakespeare, whose Henry V threatens the unfortunate inhabitants of Harfleur with a similar fate. For the modern audience the play ends on the downbeat, therefore, lacking a final glimpse of the escaped holy family. But we must remember that the cycle is a continuum and the emotional unity of an individual episode is not a priority.

The Weavers

We know much more about the Weavers. Manuscripts of their pageant survive and theirs is the best set of documentary records over all. Though not engaged in a particularly prestigious activity, in common with the Shearmen and Tailors they had the strength of numbers associated with a key element in the textile industry²⁵. They also had a stable workforce, as weaving is a skill requiring long training and is then practised for life. When Coventry was in recession, the Weavers seem to have been under pressure to relinquish their part in Corpus Christi day celebrations to the parvenu Cappers' company, but, because they continued to be sufficiently numerous, began to engage more in trade in their own right, and were assisted by the Leet in regulating funds drawn from other less prosperous companies who were not sustaining a pageant, they managed to continue until the cycle itself ceased production²⁶.

The company's business²⁷, the protected production of high-quality woollen broadcloth, was a product of late fourteenth-century technological advance. The sale of broadcloth was restricted to Drapery Hall, where each cloth was sealed with the civic seal, making the guild vulnerable to the cartel practices of the Drapers. In 1510, the Weavers extended the right to seal cloths to all members of their company, a move endorsed by the Leet in 1535. This successful

assumption of responsibility for protecting the trade in, as well as the production of, quality cloth, contributed significantly to the Weavers' ability to weather the recession.

The Weavers were not only of a group of people drawn together by coincidental economic imperatives, but a true fraternity, who lived together in the wards of Bishop Street, Gosford Street, Spon Street and Jordan Well, who operated corporately as landlords of substantial property, and above all who worshipped together, accepting to their number 'love brothers' who did not practice the craft of weaving but who wished to ensure a respectable funeral as well as other benefits available to all paid-up members.

From the Weavers' ordinances we gain a unique insight into the basic funding mechanism for a pageant. The Master of the guild made an annual visit on the fellowship to collect pageant money. In addition to dues collected from the masters, he demanded 4d from each journeyman of the craft, for which the journeyman's master was held liable. It was the guild's journeymen's responsibility to take the pageant wagon out of storage, to drive it from one playing station to the next, and to put it away again, "*without ony hurte in ther defawte*". For this they were to be paid 6s.8d., although in practice they never received as much. Responsibility for seeing that the annual production went ahead fell to "*the master's fellow*", who had to pay 5s to the craft if he failed to produce the play, and was also to be personally responsible for financing one of the rehearsals²⁸.

In most years the accounts for Corpus Christi are not broken down but are presented as a simple total which fluctuates both up and down, at its highest, 30s.8½d. in the first accounting year, and its lowest, 24s.2d. in 1531. Income dedicated to the pageant does, however, seem to change radically when in 1530 and 1531 the Walkers begin to contribute at a rate of 10s per annum, lowered to 6s.8d. in the following year when the Skinners contribution of 5s. per annum is added. Certain expenses remain the same, such as the annual 3s. paid to William Blackburn the minstrel for playing at midsummer and Corpus Christi, until he begins to pay 12d. for guild membership in 1535 after which it seems to be all right to pay him 2s. In 1538 the guild receives 10d. for burying his wife. Occasional expenses intervene, such as the 2s. for the mending of the pageant-house window in 1531 and, 5s. for

making the new playbook in 1535. The next year in which the accounts are broken down is 1541, when expenses rise to 34s.8d., though how much of this is attributable to the rewritten play is unclear, as remedial work on the wagon accounts for much of the increase. The following year sees a further rise, as major construction work is undertaken at the pageant house. Expenses for the year then revert to a more normal 28s.4d. Accounts continue remarkably consistently until the last performance in 1579.

In 1586, 2s.6d was spent “at Iames ileges when we met a bovt the *pagone*”, and in the following year the wagon was sold off to John Showell for 40s., while the ironwork in the pageant house fetched 2s.6d. The pageant house was dismantled at a cost of 2s.10d. and another building erected on the site bringing the total cost to £11.17s.10d. With the sale of the pageant wagon, the Weavers do not cease to be involved in civic festive and dramatic activity, but their part in the history of Coventry’s cycle of mystery plays draws to a close.

There is little in these records which help us to recreate the presentation of the pageant. Beyond odd bits of ecclesiastical vestment, there is passing reference, for instance, to only one costume, that of Jesus (1564). The hiring of two false beards does enter the accounts in 1570, perhaps rendered necessary by changing contemporary fashions in facial hair, and two angels’ crowns are mended in 1577. Had the inventory of the crafts’ goods compiled in 1547 survived, no doubt more information of this kind would be available.

The Weavers’ records have, nonetheless, yielded important information about who performed in the pageants and to what standard. From an early date it seems there was competition for good actors and accepted practice that actors did not necessarily or even normally act in the pageant produced by their own company. In 1444, an order of the Leet required members of the Cardmakers, Sadlers, Masons and Painters to seek the mayor’s permission to perform in any pageant other than that of their own guild, and Ingram noted that the Weavers made some of those who acted in their pageant members of their company, rather than drawing on the existing membership²⁹.

Guild records show that some performers went unpaid, others were paid but also paid membership fees to the company, and a third group received payment without apparently joining the company at all. All this has led Margaret Rogerson to suggest recently that a number of performers had nothing to do with the guild, but were simply brought in and paid for their services. Then other well-to-do citizens were also paid, but in return paid the guild membership dues for the privilege of being allowed to take roles, like Jesus, Anna and Simeon’s Clerk, (also Joseph and Mary in 1523) which allowed them to make image-enhancing statements of public piety. This leaves the remaining unpaid parts as either, as Ingram suggests, evidence of doubling, or simply as ordinary members of the Weavers’ guild. It may be then, as Rogerson suggests, that some major roles were customarily given to paid men, quality actors and total outsiders³⁰. Equally, the John Careles, the Coventry weaver recorded in Foxe’s ‘Acts and Monuments of Martyrs’, who was released from jail to act in the plays, did not necessarily play in the pageant of his own craft³¹. And Japheth Borseley who joined the Weavers and was paid to play in 1523 was a member of a family of prominent cappers with a house on the pageant route substantial enough to entertain the cast and helpers, as on several occasions the guild spent a few pence there, “*between the plays*”. He seems a plausible candidate for someone prepared to pay for the social cachet of playing a particular type of role in the pageants.

The Pageant of the Weavers

The Presentation of the Virgin Mary and the episode of Christ before the Doctors in the Temple, the subjects of the only Coventry pageant to survive in manuscript, are the conventional focus of the feast of Candlemas which ceased to be celebrated in England after the Reformation, so are not generally well known. The Presentation episode (Luke 2:22-40) tells how Simeon’s prayer to see the Messiah before he died was fulfilled, as the infant Jesus is brought to the temple where he presides. The following episode of Christ and the Doctors (Luke 2:41-51) focuses on the ten commandments, the Old Law of Moses, as the knowledge, unspecified in the biblical account, on which the young Christ as bringer of the New Law was able to impress the Jewish scholars.

Crow again presents Joseph as a burlesque character³², taking his inspiration from the account (Luke 2:24) of how Joseph took two doves as an offering to the temple. Here he complains tetchily about his old age and his wilful young wife, and the Virgin Mary is a trifle indecorously tart with him. Yet the hunting of the doves is treated seriously enough. The more 'real' Joseph becomes, the more the Virgin's marriage becomes plausible and domestic, hence the family in which Jesus is reared takes shape for the audience³³. The best mystery plays always succeed in confounding time, not only Old Testament with New, but biblical time with the audience's present, rendering the events which they celebrate simultaneously marvellous and accessible. Touching and successful in the Weavers' play is the way in which Jesus's earthly parents marvel at how he has grown, when the play makes its transition to the later episode. Mary's fretting when he is found again after having gone missing is tangible, as is Joseph's relieved anger. All this was written to be played in the streets of a large city during the major fair of the year, and the parallels for many anxious parents of children who had wandered off to see the sights must have been many and obvious.

As with the other play, Crow's main expansions of the text are explanatory. This play also has its 'prophets', a pair indistinguishable from those in the middle of the Shearmen and Tailors' pageant. The credulous questions of the second prophet this time cause his companion to lead the audience through a giddy catalogue of all the Old Testament prophesies of the birth of Christ, as well as an account of the events of the previous pageant, ending with a call for penance. There may have been another dialogue in the middle of the play, but the critical leaf is missing from the manuscript.

It is widely accepted that four of the five Doctors' pageants from the extant English cycles draw on a common source, possibly the York pageant³⁴. A picture of early Tudor urban taste in religious plays, as well as the intellectual furniture of the redactor, begins to emerge when this version of the doctors' episode is compared with its close analogues. It is doctrinally conservative, not tampering with the paraliturgical wording and traditional iconography of most of the biblical scenes. The expansions of these scenes, however, also demonstrate that Crow is no provincial hack, as his concern with the exposition of

ideas reflects the preoccupations about education in the vernacular of the humanist thinkers of the age. In many cases he made changes for linguistic reasons, as the words in the original are either too archaic, too Northern, or both. On other occasions, however, Crow seems to be working to create a different dramatic effect, leavening the sombre metrically regular evenness of the earlier version with the verbal ticks which characterise his Joseph as a grumbling old man "*Ey! Mare, wyff,...*" and creating a cameo role for at least one of the doctors as a rather crusty elderly gent with a strong distaste for precocious children.

The Smiths

A patchwork of surviving records, incomplete but comparatively early, tells us that the Smiths were responsible throughout the known history of the cycle for the Passion, although no play-text survives, and that aspects of their organisation and production were eccentric. Their accounts, by distinguishing between work done on the pageant "*among the feliship*" and that farmed out to, for example, a joiner (1471), draw attention to the way in which the guilds traded expertise with one another in the production of their pageants. In addition, their employment from 1450 of a skinner called Thomas Colclow to organise the performance for them, is the first instance in Coventry records of an identified individual being heavily involved in pageant organisation without necessarily being a member of the guild concerned or of a craft directly related to the job in hand. In that year and the three following he received £2.3.4d. "*for the play*". Then in 1453 there appears a contract which sets out his precise duties:

*"Thomas Colclow
skynner ffro this day
forth shull have þe
Rewle of þe pajaunt
unto þe end of xij
yers next folowing he
for to find the pleyers
and all þat longeth
þerto all þe seide
terme save þe keper
of the craft shall let*

Thomas Colclow
skinner shall from
now on, have control
of the pageant for the
next 12 years and
provide the players
and whatever else is
needed for it for that
period except that the
Keeper of the craft
shall be responsible

*bring forth þe pajant
& find Cloyes þat
gon abowte þe pajant
and find Russhes
þerto and every
wytson-weke who þat
be keepers of the
crafte shall dyne with
Colclow & every
master ley down iiijd
and Colclow shall
have 3erely ffor his
labor xlvj s viij d &
he to bring in to þe
master on sonday
next after corpus
christi day þe
originall & ffech his
vij nobulle³ and
Colclow must bring
in at þe later end of
þe terme³ all þe
garments þat longen
to þe pajant as good
as þey wer delyvered
to hym....”*

for bringing out the pageant, draping it and providing rushes for it. On every Whitsun week those who are keepers of the craft will dine with Colclow and each master shall contribute 4d. and Colclow shall have 46s 8d for his work. On the Sunday following Corpus Christi, he shall bring the original (playbook) to the Master and fetch his 7 nobles. Colclow must also at the end of the period bring back all the clothes that belong to the pageant in as good order as they were delivered to him...

Detailed sets of Smiths' accounts for two single years have been preserved. The first (1477) includes a cast-list, itemising payments to Jesus, Herod, Pilate, Pilate's wife, Caiaphas, Annas, the Beadle (called Dycar in 1489), two knights, Peter, Pilate's son and Malchus. In the same year there are accounts of fascinating items for props and costumes: arsedine -- a metallic decorative substance which is gold in colour -- gold paper, gold foil, silver paper and 'green', possibly copper, foil. Procula, Pilate's wife, had white sleeves, although later (1488) women's clothing is hired from a mistress Grimsby for "her", played in 1496 by "Ryngold's man". The demon is mentioned in connection with the repair of his leather costume, although he is not on the list of paid players until the following year.

In 1490 another set of full accounts tells us that the first rehearsal took place in Easter Week, the second in Whit week. Rehearsals had already been mentioned in the accounts for 1479 with actual dates: 'black' Monday (following Good Friday), Sunday 16 May, the Tuesday in Whitsun week, and the Sunday after Holy Thursday. The last is inexplicable, as it is three days after Corpus Christi day when, so far as we know, the performance took place. Payments for the cast are recorded as before, followed by the garments which were refurbished. There were four jackets for the four tormentors with dice and nails on them, another four for another four tormentors, with damask lilies on them. There are two jackets of buckram with crowned hammers on them, two party-coloured jackets of red and black, a cloak for Pilate, a gown for Pilate's son, a gown and hood for the Beadle, and two other hoods.

Herod's elaborate costume is then described in some detail. He wore a crest, in 1495 made of three plates of iron, and carried a curved broadsword, a sceptre and a mace. We know from the 1476 accounts that he also had a horse hired for him, and in 1480 he gets a slop, a loose outer garment, when his "stuff" also has to be painted. Herod's finery is in fact a constant expense: in 1501 another new gown is made for him from satin and buckram. Pilate was bought a hat in 1490 (perhaps replacing the one he was bought in 1480) as was his son. Pilate is regularly bought a quart of wine also, which may be a prop: Pilate in the York cycle certainly drinks on stage. The 1490 account includes mitres for Annas and Caiaphas, two hats for two princes, six hats for tormentors, a pole-axe and a sceptre for Pilate's son, four scourges and a pillar, two golden wigs for Jesus and Peter, and a head for the devil, all of which cost 15s. for materials, workmanship and painting.

These accounts not only give us some insight into the construction and likely iconography of costumes, they also reveal that, as with the Weavers, there were more characters to be clothed than are paid for performing. It may be that the Smiths were paying outsiders to play the leading speaking parts in their pageant while using their own members as supernumerary soldiers and tormentors. The paid knights of which there are always two, must have worn either the livery of crowned hammers or of party red and black, or both, perhaps acting as arresting officers and escorts both for Annas and Caiaphas and later for

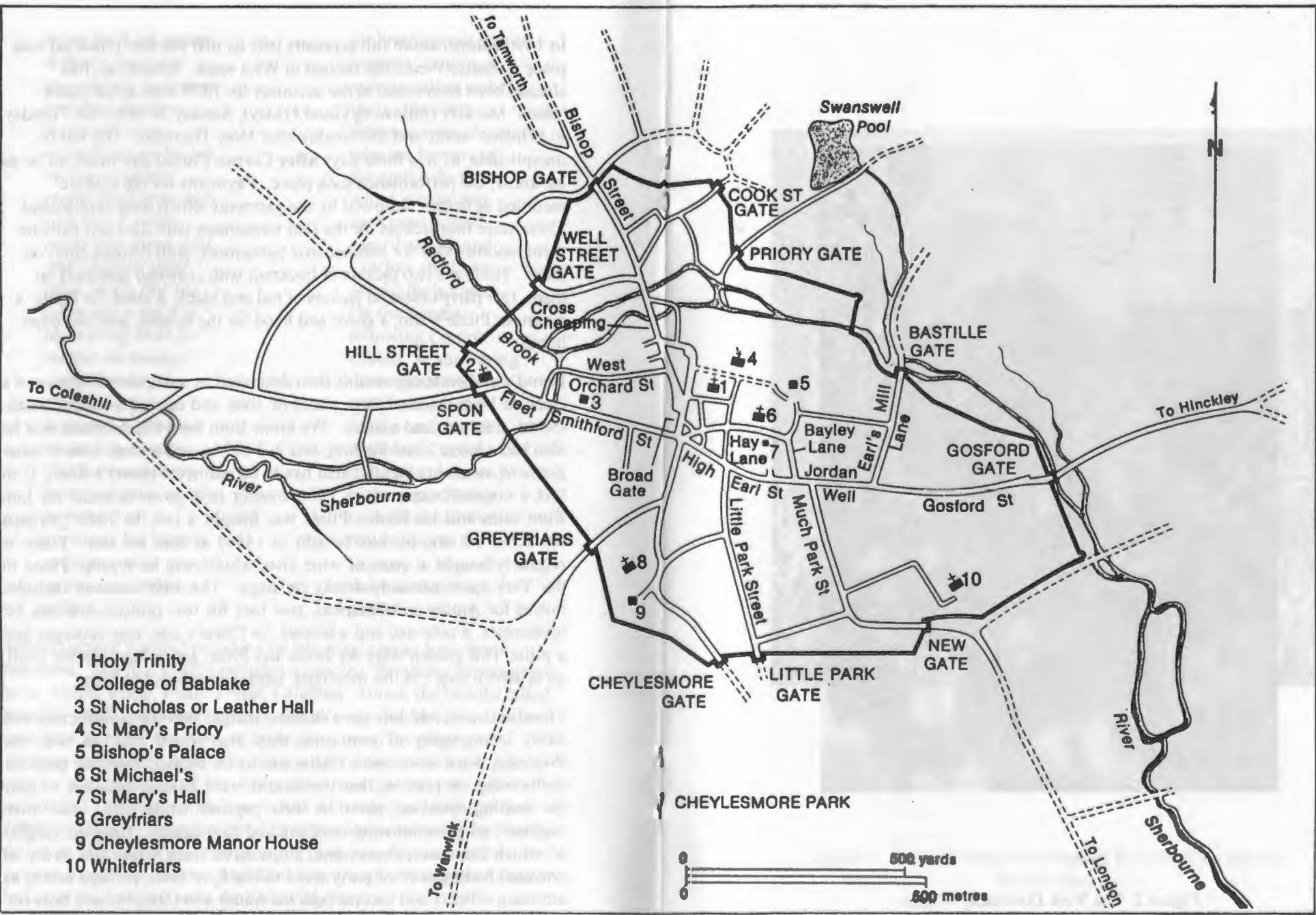


Figure 1 Map of Coventry c.1500



Figure 2 The York Doomsday Wagon

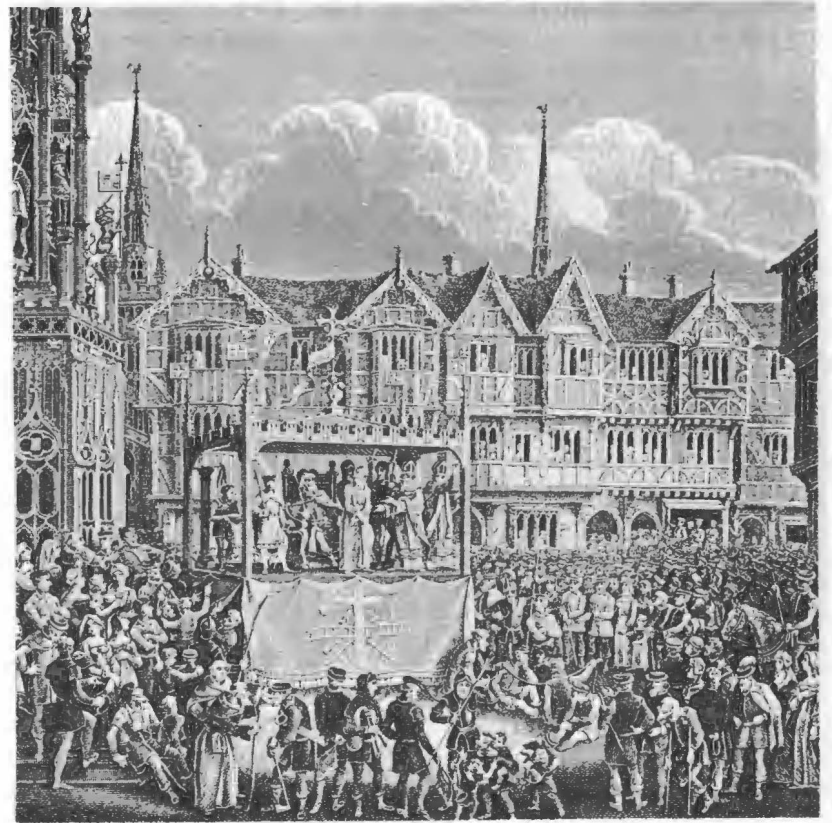


Figure 3 Representation of a Pageant Vehicle at the time of Performance.



Figure 4 Corpus Christi Wagons, Valencia.

Pilate. The four jackets with dice and nails on them are obviously for the soldiers at the Crucifixion, who are not mentioned amongst the paid cast. The four jackets with damask lilies on them are less easily explained, but could represent a force at one of the three courts, perhaps Herod's. Both sets of tormentors could have been doubled. The participating minstrels were paid for their board and lodging as well as their hire, so they apparently were not local men.

From extracts taken from the accounts of other years, we learn more about the guild's organisation of its pageant. The pageant had to be got out by the journeymen, washed and taken down to Gosford Street for the start, with, by 1565 the scaffold which needed new "trulls" [a form of wheeled or rolling cart. c.f. 'trolley'] is mentioned. In 1574, four men are paid to bring in Herod, perhaps on the scaffold. The playbook is also mentioned from time to time: in 1495 John Harris is paid for bearing the "Original", then in 1496 someone is paid to copy out the two knights' and the demon's parts. In 1505 the brethren contribute 2s 9d towards the "original", which may suggest that it required to be copied out again, and finally the celebrated Robert Crow is paid for two leaves for the playbook in 1563.

One further set of technical details survives from the Smiths, suggesting a later modification to the business of their play. In 1572 the wherewithal for staging the hanging of Judas is all acquired: a coat of canvas, a pulley, an iron hook, and a noose. The following year, Fawston is paid 4d. for hanging Judas and another 4d. for cock-crowing, presumably when Peter betrays Christ. The hanging mechanism seems, however, to have taken time to perfect, as in 1578 the celebrated Thomas Massey was paid to make a truss for Judas and the guild bought a new hook.

The Cappers

Although individual cappers' names appear in the Leet from 1434³⁵, it was the 1490s before the guild separated from the Mercers. From this beginning it is clear that the Cappers are one of those so-called craft guilds whose growing affluence is based not upon long hours of hard manufacture so much as upon the ability to put out work to cheap labour to meet the niche-marketing demands of a fashion. The process of cap-making was many-staged, involving subsidiary specialisms,

notably the employment of spinners and knitters who were exclusively female, had their own organisation, and were often the wives of journeymen of the guild³⁶. The most successful master cappers were engaged as much in trade as in manufacture.

The Cappers came late to the Corpus Christi pageants even though their involvement dates from the beginning of their emergence as a separate company. They acquired the pageant and their chapel in St Michael's church from the economically struggling Cardmakers and Saddlers, who were 'now but a few persons in number & hayng but smale eyde of eny other Craft', between 1531 and 1537. Prior to this, they had contributed to the Girdlers' pageant since 1494, and almost succeeded in taking over the Weavers' pageant in 1529, but the Weavers managed to hang on by gaining the assistance of the Walkers. It is possible to read too much between the lines of civic legislation, but it is clear that the Cappers are a parvenu guild striving throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to achieve recognition, respectability and status within the city, and that the acquisition of a Corpus Christi pageant was something central to this ambition³⁷.

Accordingly, the Cappers of Coventry became major players in the Coventry Corpus Christi cycle on purely economic and social grounds at a time when the cycle's days were already numbered. As is the case with the Smiths, the subject of the pageant which they secured has to be deduced from payments in their accounts for successive years as no script or detailed inventory of properties survives. While these payments establish with some certainty that the pageant concerned events surrounding the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection, the details pose as many problems as they solve, particularly with regard to the members of the cast.

In 1534, payments were made to Pilate, singers, God, the Mother of Death, four knights, the Spirit of God, Our Lady, two bishops, two angels, Mary Magdalen, two 'syde' Maries, the demon, and a minstrel. Pilate, the bishops, soldiers, angels, Mary Magdalen and the two other Maries are straightforwardly understood as necessary characters in a Resurrection sequence, and the inclusion of the Demon indicates that some version of the Harrowing of Hell was also included. The inclusion of both God and the Spirit of God suggests a *mise-en-scene* in which Christ's spirit harrows hell while his body lies in the tomb

prior to his full bodily resurrection. On the other hand, there are inclusions which suggest radical departures from the usual presentation of this narrative sequence in mystery cycles, beyond their amalgamation into a single long play. To begin with, there is no evidence that the sequence included the liberation of the souls of prophets and patriarchs from hell. Elizabeth Baldwin, who has examined the evidence in some detail, suggests that Adam and Eve might have appeared as non-speaking parts, as a distaff and spade are included in a list of properties and costumes for 1567, but equally Christ appearing as the gardener to Mary Magdalen commonly carries a spade. The identity of the Mother of Death, who might have owned the distaff, has been much debated and cannot be fully explored here. The most convincing identifications seem to be a semi-allegorical 'queen of hell' or 'sin' figure, based on the Epistle of James 1:15, but equally she could have been Eve, the anti-type to Mary who in the context of this play most obviously represents the mother of eternal life³⁸. Either way, the dramatist seems to have been striving for some symmetry of the forces of good and evil in what begins to look like a quasi morality play. The disciples are not included either, or at least not paid, suggesting that the scene of the risen Christ's appearance to them may not have been played. Yet there was some attempt it seems to extend the range of the narrative sequence played in 1552, when the Cappers paid for the construction of a Castle of Emmaus. No account of payment to the necessary characters for this episode is ever made in surviving records, so it is not clear whether it was ever played.

The inclusion of the Virgin Mary is an interesting one, as she does not appear in the relevant gospel sequence. That Christ's appearance to her should be played by the Coventry Cappers is not impossible, however: Rosemary Woolf contextualises the situation succinctly³⁹:

'Whereas theologians, harmonising and occasionally amplifying the gospels listed between ten and thirteen Resurrection appearances..., the English cycles more selectively concentrate upon three devotionally and dramatically important ones, namely those to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples at Emmaus and to Thomas with the assembled apostles... To these, Chester... briefly adds two further appearances which took place on Easter

Sunday, those to Mary Jacobus and to Mary Salome. The 'Ludus Coventriae' [now known as 'N-Town'] with dramatic fittingness includes also the greatest and most moving of the apocryphal appearances, that of Christ to the Blessed Virgin.'

The 'N-Town' cycle is a composite work which is heavily Marian in focus, incorporating into its structure a pre-existing play of the life of the Virgin. It is, therefore, highly appropriate that this episode should occur between the Harrowing of Hell and the discovery by the Pilate's sleeping soldiers that the body they have been set to guard is missing. In that play, a stage direction reads, "*Tunc transiet Anima Christi ad resuscitandum corpus, quo resuscitato dicat Jesus*" ["then should the Spirit of Christ cross over to resuscitate the body, and when Jesus has been resuscitated he should say"]⁴⁰. The episode is found in the Cornish Resurrection play as well as German and French *Passions*, and is also referred to by mainstream theological sources for the period (St Ambrose, 'The Golden Legend', Nicholas Love's 'Mirroure', and the pseudo-Bonaventure 'Meditationes').

Given the late date at which the Cappers acquired the play, it is unlikely that the episode was included for reasons of Marian devotion, but it does assist the creation of unity of time and place important in a long and composite pageant. We have already seen how in the Shearmen and Tailors' pageant certain elements, like the flight into Egypt, were indicated very economically, whereas the dramatist was able to exploit simultaneous action at other points. Similarly, to choose to perform Christ's appearance to his mother allows for a most dramatic addition to the Resurrection narrative before the discovery of the missing body, while avoiding the awkward lapse of time and change of place necessitated by the other appearances. Equally, the 'Harrowing of Hell' may have been compressed into a simple debate sequence in hell-mouth between Christ and Satan, ending with the binding of Satan, and the token silent release of Adam and Eve, rather than a fully-fledged procession of prophets and patriarchs with attendant defeated devils. Unfortunately the harrowing scene in stained glass from St Michael's church is now too fragmentary to determine how it was depicted locally⁴¹. Unless new information

comes to light, exactly what the Cappers performed is likely to remain the stuff of speculation.

The Mercers

The 1454 muster figures reveal that the 38 Mercers available for bearing arms, included 2 mayors, 6 bailiffs and 5 chamberlains or wardens, meaning they were second only to the Drapers in their influence in late medieval Coventry. There is no reason to suppose that this relative position was other than strengthened in the ensuing century, and there is no evidence in the 'Leet Book' or elsewhere of the Mercers requiring or receiving the assistance of any other guild for the maintenance of their pageant. But the surviving records of the Mercers' company begin in 1579, on the eve of the abandonment of Coventry's cycle, so we know a great deal less about their participation than we might wish.

There are only two pre-Reformation references to the Mercers' play. In his will proved on 2 March 1518, which commences with a special appeal to the "*intercession and prayer of that most blessed Virgyn Mary the moder of our blessed Savyor*"⁴² Richard Pysford the elder, a member of the guild, left his lined scarlet gown without fur and a scarlet cloak, "*to serve theym in their said paionde the tyme of the playes*". The second reference occurs in the City Annals eight years after Pysford's death and records that Lady Mary (Princess Mary Tudor) came to Coventry for two days, when "*the Mercers Pageant Gallantly trimed stood at the Cross Cheaping*". Hardin Craig believed that the Mercers' Guild probably performed a play on the subject of the death and funeral (Dormition), Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, a view which Clifford Davidson, the latest to comment on the subject, endorses despite reading Craig's evidence with some scepticism⁴³. The subject would, after all, have been particularly apt for celebrating the visit of Catherine of Aragon's daughter to the city⁴⁴.

Unsurprisingly no trace of any such play survives. Coventry was a city which burned several Marian martyrs, and the 1560s was the scene of 'an orgy of iconoclasm'⁴⁵ under its Puritan council. The cycle as a whole may have survived because the people were not as zealous as their corporation, but it does seem unlikely that an overtly Marian play could have been performed in such a climate. Davidson believes that

although 'the cultic and iconographic associations...tend to corroborate Craig's suggestion', this play, like all the cycle, could hardly have remained static through the religious change brought about by the Reformation. And there is evidence that the Mercers were out of public favour in 1551, when a stray early entry in the account book states:

*"This ys to
Remember of
certayne pwintes
Which longen to our
craft Ordened of olde
tyme for mendyng of
Dyuers fawtes Which
are founden Within
our said crafte
Wherby our said
crafte ys noysed &
slanderd a monge the
commyn pepull as
Well a monge
Strangers knowen &
that to grett
Dysworschipp to vs
all & no profett to
the Said crafte.."*

The craft then guarantees that its members will attend upon the mayor at watches, weddings and funerals. The year, during the Protestant Protectorate, is certainly one in which any adherence to traditional guild devotions to the cult of the Virgin would have been particularly prone to bring slander and disworship upon the company, but the lacuna in the accounts which follows leaves the reference cryptic.

Plays of the Assumption of the Virgin survive in the register of the York Cycle, because that manuscript represents a written record of performance in the 1460s and does not constitute evidence of continuous performance long after that date, and in the collection of fifteenth-century East Anglian 'N-town Plays'. The latter is an

Memorandum
concerning certain
Craft regulations
enacted long ago for
the correction of
various mispractices
within the Craft.

Because our Craft is
publicised and
slandered among the
common people, and
its reputation also
made known to
aliens to the great
discredit of us all and
damage to the
aforesaid Craft.....

elaborate Assumption play, probably originally written for the interior of a large church building, like some of the technically elaborate Assumption plays which survive from Mediterranean Europe. There are records of such a play having been performed in Lincoln Cathedral in the Middle Ages⁴⁶. On the other hand, in the Towneley manuscript, generally supposed to represent a cycle performed in Wakefield in the fifteenth century, the pages which would have carried a play of the Assumption have been torn out, and there is no such episode in any of the extant versions of the Chester Cycle, all of which date from after the Reformation..

Davidson bases his agreement with Craig about the early subject of the pageant on the fact that Marian devotion was very strong in Coventry in the later Middle Ages. The religious confraternity of St Mary, established by fourteenth-century merchants, was amalgamated with the confraternities of St John the Baptist and St Catherine to form the Trinity Guild in 1414, and this guild was merged with the Corpus Christi guild in 1534, but the Mercers continued to use the chapel of the old St Mary guild as their own guild chapel in St Michael's church⁴⁷. The medieval decorative scheme of this chapel disappeared when it was rebuilt in 1778, except that Sharp records a roof boss showing a mature grieving male head in a hat⁴⁸. It is strongly suggestive of either Joseph of Arimathea at the base of the cross or one of the apostles at the funeral of the Virgin. The arms of the Mercers' guild were "*gules, a demy Virgin Mary with her hair dishevelled crowned, rising out and within an orb of clouds, all proper*": motto, 'Honor Deo', and guild ordinances state that their annual meeting should take place on the feast of the Assumption (15 August)⁴⁹.

Above all, however, the dedication of St Mary's Hall, long-established meeting place of all Coventry merchants, shows the strength of local affiliation. The famous tapestry which is preserved there has the Assumption of the Virgin as its centrepiece. It is thought to have been commissioned from the Tournai workshop of Arnould Poissonnier for the visit of Henry VII and Elizabeth Woodville to the Trinity Guild in 1500 on which occasion they were admitted members of the guild⁵⁰. The scene is flanked by pictures of saints and martyrs as well as the royal couple and their courtiers, the one intrusive element being the replacement of the Trinity at the top with a later image of Justice

enthroned. The surrounding glass in the Hall depicts civic dignitaries and local aristocrats, including Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, whose chantry chapel in St Mary's church in Warwick is also decorated according to a Marian scheme⁵¹. In addition, St Mary's Hall has a scene of the Coronation of the Virgin on a roof boss in the gatehouse, currently a nineteenth-century restoration of a fourteenth-century original⁵² and Davidson and Alexander have also traced records of a chest from the hall which bore the same scene and note that a misericord showing the Assumption was among those lost in the blitz⁵³.

From what little we know of the putative pageant, we should beware of being too conservative in imagining how it might have been produced. The fabulously wealthy York Mercers in the fifteenth century produced that city's play of Doomsday, complete with a revolving heaven full of mechanical angels and a lift which conveyed God between heaven and earth. When the same episode was staged by the Coventry Drapers in the sixteenth century, the property accounts alone suggest that their pageant was even more of a tour de force. The Coventry Mercers' pageant may have been comparable with Continental analogues, such as the play still performed in Elche in south-eastern Spain⁵⁴, which includes elaborate aerial machinery for flying angels, the Virgin, and even the Trinity, not unlike the Baroque machinery designed for the English Jacobean court masques by Inigo Jones. There is every likelihood that the Mercers' pageant would have been scenically very elaborate indeed. Moreover, the late accounts of the Mercers' guild show them spending the comparatively large sum of £3.7s.8d. on their pageant in 1579, and their pageant stuff sold in 1588 for £2.19s.8d.

If the Mercers had stopped participating in the cycle when the subject of the later life of the Virgin became unacceptable, their playing gear would surely have been sold off sooner. Besides, it is inconceivable that a guild of such great 'worship' should cease to participate in the country's most celebrated cycle. The expenses recorded in the years of accounts between 1579 when they begin, and 1588, when the pageant is sold, tell us little, being mostly concerned with repairs to the pageant house and costs incurred at midsummer. Mary Dormer Harris speculated that the 'Binding of Satan' would have been a suitable substitute subject occurring at the right point in the narrative sequence,

but did so on the strength of one property, a copper chain⁵⁵. Another possibility, sharing with the Assumption the need for a similar cast and some lifting gear, would be Pentecost, but for that there is no evidence whatsoever.

The Drapers

The power and wealth of the Drapers as Coventry's foremost entrepreneurial trading company is indisputable. By 1522, the Cappers and Weavers were more numerous, but it is clear that the Drapers were by far the most wealthy and influential, as they had successfully broken the Dyers' monopoly and gathered to them various other small specialised guilds from within the textile industry in which they controlled buying and selling from their centre in the Drapery⁵⁶. Their pageant house in Gosford Street, was a substantial edifice two bays wide, just one item amongst their impressive list of property owned throughout the city⁵⁷.

For the complete accounts of Coventry's most prestigious medieval trading guild and its most spectacular pageant we are dependent on the efforts of Thomas Daffern (?1795-1869), a shopkeeper without the broad knowledge of the period or illustrious antiquarian network of Thomas Sharp, but a book-keeper's eye for detail. Ironically what Daffern's transcriptions reveal is the utter chaos of the Drapers' accounting methods, contributing to the late Reg Ingram's outburst that 'Coventry accounts are an anthology of bad book-keeping practice'⁵⁸, and leaving him with no choice but to print the earliest (mid-sixteenth-century) material as an appendix to his chronological survey of Coventry's drama records. Nonetheless, a picture of the evolution of the Drapers' pageant emerged for him from the chaos⁵⁹:

'...whatever their numbers in the 1530s, they were more than twice as wealthy as the Weavers and could easily support so demanding a play as Doomsday with its burning worlds, earthquakes and hell-mouth spouting real flames -- yet most of these wonders belong to their last production, which dates only from 1555. Until 1554, I think that the accounting is for another version of the play. What Margaret of Anjou missed in 1457 because of "*lak of day*"

may well have been yet an earlier version. Each awesome, but each its own play.

The story of Doomsday draws on Christ's account of the division for all time of the good from the sinful at the end of the world (Matthew 25). Its popularity as a subject, particularly for frescoes adorning chancel arches, was as a moralised version of the last day: those who are to be saved are those who have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick and prisoners, and taken in travellers, the so-called 'six acts of corporal mercy', a touchstone of late medieval lay piety. The fifteenth-century Doomsday play from York, about which more is known than any other single cycle play, was performed by the Mercers in that city, and its message appears to have reached at least one fabulously wealthy mercer mayor of that city who had himself depicted in a stained glass window in his parish church carrying out these charitable acts⁶⁰. In the same church is a window illustrating the 'fifteen signs of the end of the world', another popular poem of the age predicting the kind of freakish climatic phenomena which the Coventry play probably attempted to simulate. A lot of this material draws upon the immensely popular long English poem, "*The Prick of Conscience*", from which the two 'worms' in the Coventry records may derive, although they originate in Mark 9: 43-47, and are common amongst the pains of hell described in many popular vernacular works of late medieval piety⁶¹. In Coventry, three judgement scenes have been traced: a misericord and fragments of stained glass from St Michael's, and a fresco in Holy Trinity. All the six acts of mercy were also shown in misericords in St Michael's, and a roundel of stained glass of Coventry provenance showed a man giving food and drink to poor and handicapped people. Unfortunately this last is now lost, as the description of its composition sounds very similar to the York window. There are numerous other examples of "*Last Judgement*" scenes in villages throughout Warwickshire⁶².

Before the 1560s the accounts are at their most chaotic, but some information about the pageant before Crow rewrote it can be found from the mid century, particularly about the technicalities of costuming supernatural beings. For example, around 1538, repairs are made to costumes for the evil souls which reveal that they are made of painted canvas. In later accounts we find that their faces were blacked. Good

souls on the other hand wear leather, each costume taking four skins. As the souls were white, off-white, or 'yellow', the costumes were probably made of the soft sheep's leather which was the special product of the Whittawers guild. The correlation between good and white, evil and black has no racial connotation: in popular medieval theology it was argued that, as everyone would be restored to physical perfection at the general resurrection, the way in which the good would be distinguished from the bad would be by their "*claritas*", by which they would shine⁶³. In mystery play records, leather is commonly used to clothe heavenly beings, and when this play is being re-equipped shortly after Robert Crow becomes involved, we find six golden skins being bought, possibly for angel garments, and a further seven skins for God's coat alone.

Hellmouth was evidently operated manually in the earlier (1538) version of the play, as, in the following account there are payments for someone who looked after it and the windlass. Windows operated by ropes are also mentioned. It is possible that what are conventionally called doors and windows in the Doomsday records are the hatches through which the dead emerge in order to be judged, the moveable part of a window at a period when glass was not commonly available for domestic buildings being a wooden shutter. Naturally demons have 'heads', full face or even full head masks, and angels have wings, all of which have to be repaired and replaced, and painted.

The production of 1555 and after was designed around the script prepared for the guild by Robert Crow, redactor of the two surviving pageants, and included God, at least two devils, three good and three evil souls, two worms of conscience, three patriarchs, four angels, two spirits, and a 'protestacyon' or prologue. The two spirits and the two worms of conscience never appear in the same set of accounts, so may be the same thing. Payment to these performers, who may not, as we have seen, represent the entire cast, the usual consumables, and the special effects, amounted to over 50s. per annum. The new play which Crow wrote appears to have had built into it a changed focus: he moved the Drapers from actors' theatre into directors' theatre and probably cast himself as director. Actors wages through the run of Drapers' accounts remain fairly constant, but payments to supernumeraries rise and fall. The elaborate business which the new play demanded clearly

involved a whole new scenic provision, as driving the pageant rose from 2d to 2s.6d. and the unspecified person responsible for it was the only one to be paid more than the trumpeter. In 1573 21s.4d. was spent on the actors who were paid, 6s. on rehearsals, 8s.2d. on food and drink, 6s. on music, and a total of 5s.7d. on what we would call special effects. The driving and dressing of the wagon had become a serious job of stage management. Added to an average annual repair bill of 16s.1d., the outlay on the maintenance of hardware and the execution of special effects equalled the outlay on acting.

The Drapers' effects list varies little from year to year -- keeping of the windlass and hellmouth, clearly both mechanical operations involving pulleys, went together at 16d., 16d. was also paid for opening and shutting doors and windows on the pageant, probably as part of a transformation scene. Then there are the fascinating annual payments for setting three worlds on fire and for tending the barrel of the earthquake.

A production with this evident focus on effects is impossible to conceive of as being produced by guild-actors as a co-operative committee; Crow obviously wrote himself a job, although he is not contracted for a lump sum like the Smiths' Colclow, but is paid in individual sums for his various contributions. The fact that he played God, for the sum of 3s.4d., may indeed open up a new way of looking at the organisation and direction of elaborate mystery pageants. In 1563, 'god' was paid for his 'welke', a problematic entry as it means 'welkin', 'firmament' or 'vault of heaven'. One possible suggestion is that Crow used the part of God in this play as a visible vantage point from which to direct operations, that on his command in the dual role of deity and director, the welkin, that is the display of heavenly pyrotechnics signifying the impending end of the world, took place.

Beyond those guilds who produced pageants surviving and lost, of subjects known and unknown, there are records, particularly in the 'Leet Book' of contributions made by all the other companies in the city to the enterprise of producing the cycle. Generally these take the form of monetary contributions, but in at least one case they go beyond that: the Carpenters' company has left the oldest surviving set of guild accounts (from 1446), from which it is clear that they are the unsung heroes of the cycle. Not only did they contribute to the unknown

Tilers' pageant every year for over a century, untroubled by the production of their own play, they were of course also the most vital expert workforce who ensured from year to year that all the wagons rolled.

Play-makers

Robert Crow

Robert Crow's name occurs more frequently and significantly than any other associated with Coventry's pageants, and yet we cannot even be sure whether he is one man or more⁶⁴. In 1510 a Robert Crow is admitted brother of the Cappers, paying 20d. fees until 1515-16 when his membership dues are paid off. In 1513-14, a Robert Crow is also involved in a lawsuit with the Cappers. He paid quarterage in 1517-18⁶⁵, and in 1520 was Master of the Cappers and himself engaged in making other brothers⁶⁶. In 1522 he took his only apprentice, paid the 12d. in the Grand Subsidy on goods worth 40s., and appears to have lived in Baileylane Ward. Baldwin believes it is then just possible that he is the same Robert Crow who married Joyce Botiler in 1532-33, and, as she was an heiress, that he may have given up capping⁶⁷. At any rate the specific company references to Crow as a capper cease around this date.

By this time 'Robert Crow', theatrical impresario, had embarked on his career, masterminding an extravagant Candlemas celebration for the Cappers in 1525, called 'Goldenfleece'. The accounts refer to the purchase of painted 'subleties', to lights, torches, gallons of wine, singers and players. John Crow and William Lines are also paid "*for the same*"⁶⁸. What actually happened cannot be reconstructed and was never repeated. John Crow's name appears twice more in the records: he is paid 8d. by the Cappers under their Corpus Christi day expenses in 1540 for something unspecified, and 2s. by the Smiths in 1547 for mending Herod's head, mitre and "*other things*".

The name of Robert Crow hereafter becomes associated with many different companies but now he has no recorded existence outside the theatrical context. He wrote the Shearmen and Tailors' and Weavers'

playbooks in 1535. In 1557 the Drapers paid him 20s. for their new playbook, and six years later he was paid by the Smiths for two leaves of their play. He then enters the records playing God for the Drapers in 1562 and 1566, making the worlds that they burned in 1556, 1561, 1563 and 1566, a hat for the pharisee in 1562. In 1556 he also made the two giants for the Drapers' midsummer show. The activity looks sporadic, but this is the nature of the records rather than a probable indication of Crow's level of engagement. Unfortunately in 1535, when Crow was writing for the Shearmen and Taylors and the Weavers, the Cappers, who had just taken over a pageant, present only summary accounts, and no Cappers accounts survive for the decade in which Crow was most active for the Drapers. The 'real' Robert Crow refuses to stand up, a man, if one man he be, whose whole life for us is pageantry, and who must have been well into his seventies by the time he played the Drapers' God. Our most tangible access to the man remains the two scripts which he left behind, one of them his holograph copy.

Other Playmen

Colclow who ran the Smiths' pageant is the earliest example of how civic pageantry in Coventry is scattered with the names of men who became more involved in it than a strictly *ex officio* role demanded. Francis Pinning, Master of the Cappers on several occasion in the second half of the sixteenth century, is also associated with the preparation of texts. In 1568, the Drapers paid him 5s. "for a playe". This sum is identical to that which the Weavers paid Robert Crow in 1535, but the Drapers paid him four times as much in 1557: it is possible that all Pinning did was to copy out the play from a worn out book.

No history of Coventry's cycle would be complete without mentioning the name of Thomas Massey, master upholsterer and, from 1576, brother of the Mercers' guild. That Massey came upon the scene in the cycle's eleventh hour is more his tragedy than a good reason for overlooking him. Enough material is available to make rudimentary biography of him possible⁶⁹, because he came from a prosperous and established local family, but chiefly because he, like his father before

him, was perpetually involved in controversy. Strictly speaking, his only involvement with the cycle plays was his already noted improvement in 1578 to the Smiths' technology for hanging Judas, and a later payment for a temple and for beards. By the time that the cycle plays were replaced in 1591 by the more politically acceptable 'Destruction of Jerusalem', 'Conquest of the Danes', and 'History of King Edward IV', Massey had gained a commanding position as the Cappers, Drapers and Mercers all handed their levies over to him. Thereafter he was known for making up his own plays and audaciously casting members of the court, the aristocracy and the city council in them. At length he fell out with the city council and engaged in a long dispute with them in an attempt to maintain civic pageantry in a city of increasingly anti-theatrical and Puritan leanings, specifically he planned to bring the Princess Elizabeth to the city to see a show. For his pains and outspoken nature -- he said that to compare himself with the then mayor was like comparing a custard with a dunghill -- he enjoyed fifteen days in jail, though was later pardoned, and never wholly abandoned his efforts to keep civic drama alive in Coventry.

The Weavers' Playbook

Coventry has two surviving versions of the Weavers' pageant in the form of the guild's own specially commissioned playbooks⁷⁰. One is the whole text, written on vellum, of the 1,192 line Weavers' pageant, prepared by Robert Crow in 1534/5 for 5s. The other consists of two paper leaves from an earlier version of the Presentation, some 119 lines.

The seriously defaced earlier fragments are written in a unadorned fifteenth-century secretary hand. They show signs of having been screwed up at some stage, as if for throwing away, perhaps as the new text rendered the older play obsolete, and the pattern of general wear and tear on them is also in keeping with very heavy use, probably as the single working prompt copy, the 'original' from which the performers learned their lines. Its functional appearance suits this designation, as does its small and easily handled page size and the use of paper, lighter and more malleable than vellum. The guild accounts

from the same period were also written on paper, although Crow used vellum for the later playbook. On the penultimate page of that manuscript he signs off in a colophon in red ink:

*"Tys matter nevly
translate be Robert
Croo/ In the yere of
owre lord god
MlvCxxxiiijte / then
beyng meyre Mastur
palmar beddar/ and
Rychard smythe an ...
Pyxley/ masturs of
the weywars thys
boke yendide/ the
seycond dey of
marche in yere above
seyde."*

This matter was newly translated (adapted) by Robert Crow in the year of our Lord God 1534/5, Master Palmer Beddar, then being mayor, and Richard Smythe and...Pyxley Masters of the Weavers. This book was ended on the second day of March in the year above said

Crow's text runs for thirty-one pages, leaving the final page for the words of the play's two songs in different hands. Folio 10 in the original numbering, between pages 18 and 19, has been torn out and was already missing when Thomas Sharp first edited the play⁷¹. In all other respects this manuscript is in good condition. But it too shows other signs of being a prompt copy: the attribution of speeches to doctors has been altered in the second half of the play, the kind of alteration which takes place to meet the needs of individual performances, and "*cantant*" [they sing] was added in the margins after the play acquired its songs. The casual graffiti scribbled in the margins prove that it was in the custody of members of the guild.

As we have seen, the play is a composite of two distinct episodes; nevertheless, the manuscript's quire-division suggests that Crow conceived of a single composite play from the outset and had all the material at his disposal before he began to write, working quickly over a relatively short period of time. The text is unpunctuated and unembellished, its presentation clear and functional. The handwriting, consistent in style and size, is a squat, unflourished mid-sixteenth-century secretary hand. Crow did, however, attempt to decorate his pages in a relatively conventional manner, linking rhyme-words by a

series of interlacing vertical red lines, which Sharp also reproduced in his edition of the Shearmen and Tailors' pageant⁷².

Various names are written in the margins of the text, some familiar from other sources for the cycle, others not: "*William Umpton*", "*Tho<ma>s norys*", "*Richard pyxley*", "*Thomas*", and "*Righte Reuerente fater and mother*", "*John*", "*William*", and more informatively, "*Allin Pyxley the day of April*". Alan Pixley was master of the Weavers in 1567 and 1570. The Pixley referred to in the colophon as Master of the Weavers may be either Harry Pixley, as his name is mentioned in the relevant accounts⁷³, or William Pixley, one of the masters a few years later. The guild accounts relating to the play in the later sixteenth century abound in persons called 'Pixley', and in the expenses of the play on Corpus Christi Day 1574, there is one intrusion, the sum of eightpence, paid at the burial of a 'Mistress Pixley'⁷⁴. The most interesting piece of marginalia, however, is the line of careful secretary hand along the top of the page immediately after the missing leaf, which reads,

"Jhesus in geare of scarlete ys put in,"

which obviously has the status of a director or stage manager's note. There are in addition sixteen stage-directions in Crow's own hand. These give little help to the performers of the play, as there is little about how a particular moment in the play should be performed, but they do direct positioning and movement on the elaborate set and are original to this version.

The playbook is bound in polished tanned calf, with a stamped pattern. It has been heavily repaired including being restitched and given a new spine. The original paste-downs have survived, however, guarded in as flyleaves. They are made from three printed pages and a woodcut showing a man at a lectern, taken from an edition of the '*Expositio hymnorum secundum vsum Sarum*'. The setting of the woodcut is not identical to any of the extant editions of this work, though the text is the same as that in All Souls LR 4b 21 ('Short Title Catalogue' 16113), printed by Pinson in 1498⁷⁵. It is easy to see from the graffiti on these little pages how they were originally turned on their sides and pasted down in pairs, back and front. It is intriguing so soon after the

introduction of printing to find fragments of a small printed book redeployed in the binding of a vellum manuscript.

Music and Musicians

There are two songs on the final page of the Weavers' manuscript, both written in hands different from that of the main text, though roughly contemporaneous with it. The first is ascribed to a 'Richard', either Richard Pixley, a member of the Weavers' company in the 1590s from the family associated with custody of the manuscript, or one of Richard Stiff or Richard Sadler, two of the waits in 1566. The second song is signed "*James hewyt*", much more readily identified as leader of the waits throughout the latter part of the sixteenth century. He first occurs in the records in 1559, styled "*organ plaier*", plays the regals for the Weavers from 1554-1573, and for a brief period in the 1560s appears to have attempted to play for the Drapers' pageant as well. He then played for the 'Destruction of Jerusalem' in 1584. At the top of the page is written, "*Thomas Mawdycke*", whose name is also printed by Sharp above the songs at the end of the Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors.

The first song, "*Rejoyce, rejoyce, all that here be*" has no known concordance, but is later than Crow's text and a suitable Candlemas carol. The second song, "*Beholde, now hit ys come to pase*", is more problematic, as not only has it no concordance, it seems quite unsuitable for the play, fitting dramatically into a moment between Crucifixion and Resurrection. Rastall⁷⁶ is of the opinion that the song may have been written by Hewitt for the Smith's pageant, as they hired the waits, although he is not mentioned by name in surviving records. He is also of the view that, as the three other waits, Richard Stiff, Thomas Nicholas and Richard Sadler, are recorded as singing men in Holy Trinity church, that for the purposes of the pageants, the four waits could have formed a singing group with Hewitt accompanying them on the regals. Thomas Nicholas was paid as copyist and possible composer, of songs for the Cappers.

There are three cues for singing in the Shearmen and Tailors' pageant, two for the shepherds and one for the mothers of the Innocents, and three songs. A heading above the songs states that the shepherds sing

the first and last songs, the women the 'middlemost'⁷⁷. A second heading records the name of Thomas Mawdycke and the date 13 May, 1591, six days before the city council decreed that only the 'Destruction of Jerusalem', the 'Conquest of the Danes' (Hox Tuesday play), and the 'History of Edward IV' might be played.

Although Mawdycke appears to have copied the songs in the spirit of late sixteenth-century optimism and nostalgia, they are much earlier compositions. Moreover they are copied in the wrong order, Song III is actually the second verse of Song I, and appropriate to the shepherds' setting out for the stable. No song suitable for their return journey is recorded. Both songs lack exact concordances though they have many close relations. The dramatic circumstances of the Coventry Carol itself are unique, as it the only one of its kind not addressed by the Virgin Mary to the Christ child. Both songs have in the past been edited in spurious four-part versions, but it is now generally accepted that each was written for three voices, tenor, treble and bass. Both would have called for three professional singers, suggesting, therefore, that the parts of the shepherds and the mothers, played of course by men, were doubled⁷⁸.

Decline and Resurrection

'Mysteries End'

Three reasons are generally given for the decline of England's mystery play cycles: religion, economics and changing aesthetic tastes. Coventry's cycle persisted longer than most and its end is comparatively well-documented. When we look at the doctrinal sea-change which occurred in the church in England in the course of the sixteenth century and the consequent change in religious mores, it can seem puzzling that mystery plays survived beyond the mid-century Protestant Protectorate. That they did tells us that their meaning in terms of economic and social vibrancy for the communities who owned and performed them went beyond their literal content. There is hard evidence in the Coventry records, however, that changing religious views brought about the cycle's decisive end when, in 1591 the city council prevented the planned revival of the cycle:

"It is also agreed by the whole consent of this house that the distrucion of Ierusalem and the Conquest of the Danes or the historie of K E the 4 at the request of the Comons of this Cittie shalbe plaid on the pagens on Midsomer daye & St peters daye next in this Cittie & non other playes./ And that all the mey poles that nowe are standing in this Cittie shalbe taken downe before whitsonday next, non hereafter to be sett vpp in this Cittie."

It is agreed unanimously in the chamber that the Destruction of Jerusalem and The Conquest of the Danes or The History of King Edward IV shall be played on the pageant-wagons at the request of the Commons on Midsummer Day and St. Peters Day next in this City and no other plays. And that all the maypoles now standing in the City shall be taken down before next Whit-sunday, and none to be set up after that in this City.

Coventry was never noted for being moderate in its opinions even before the city's silent hostility to Royalist prisoners sent there was immortalised in idiom. Already noted for its sympathy to Lollards in the early fifteenth century, Coventry spared none of its religious houses and confraternities in the Dissolution, and any local hesitancy was apparently overcome by the act of 1548 which allowed the corporation to purchase the property of religious confraternities. In the latter part of the century the story of drama in Coventry seems to be one of constant struggles between men such as Thomas Massey against a corporation which was anxious to please a Puritan local gentry.

More critically, the gradual process of religious Reformation began to dismantle the structures from within which the mystery cycle was generated. The dissolution of religious confraternities, all of which had overlapping membership and complex relationships with the craft and

trade guilds, hit at the social network which fostered traditional pageantry. And the loss of the institution of the chantry disposed of one of the main benefits which guilds offered to their members, particularly those affluent non-practitioners of a craft from whom they collected fees as 'love-brothers'. The continuing evolution of capitalism and monopoly was something else which eroded the guilds as the main system of urban social and economic organisation. General economic decline aside, when the very structure of civic organisation was struggling to redefine itself, the celebratory activities which had been a product of a cumbersome and outmoded system were bound to be incidental casualties⁷⁹.

Finally theatrical tastes simply changed in ways which must have made Coventrians a more sophisticated audience. Just as the late sixteenth-century saw the burgeoning of custom-built professional theatres on London's Bankside, so too the people of provincial urban centres saw many more troupes of travelling professional players with a rich repertoire. Theatre, in the half century before it was universally banned, became a leisure activity for its own sake, as the urban population came to enjoy interludes, histories, comedies and tragedies in a manner formerly only accessible to the inhabitants of great households. With that the occasional theatre of great religious holidays, like the holidays themselves ceased to have a place in the society for whom they had once been a defining element.

Thomas Sharp

There the history of Coventry's cycle ends. It is a story which we would not have with any clarity at all were it not for the work of Thomas Sharp (1770-1841), a native Coventrian and a scholar remarkable for his time, who merits a special postscript. The Shearmen and Tailors' pageant, and the contents of many other irreplaceable Coventry documents connected with the mysteries, have survived directly because of his labours, as he transcribed many of the documents later to be lost. Sharp, the son of a Coventry hatter, is the only one of Coventry's many antiquarians to have been interested in local dramatic records in their own right. He first published an edition of the 'Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors', limited to 12 copies and printed by Reader, in 1817⁸⁰, then his 'Dissertation on the pageants or

Dramatic Mysteries anciently performed at Coventry' in 1825. The latter is the single most valuable source of material connected with the Coventry pageants, even though its footnotes reveal that Sharp was being highly selective, such was the wealth of documentary material then available to him⁸¹. When it was first published, the 'Dissertation' was the victim of at least one prominent and scathing review⁸² precisely because of its scrupulous attention to the minutiae of detail for which later scholars owe such a debt of gratitude:

'Whatever certain antiquarians may delight to believe, the useful end of investigation does not consist in the laborious trifling with which the attention is frittered away upon minute certainties and petty doubts.'

Thomas Sharp was a respected member of a coterie of antiquarians who were breaking new ground in wishing to present whole texts and detailed records in published form, and who, in line with Romantic antiquarians in other fields, showed some interest in giving serious aesthetic consideration to their contents. His correspondence about his project includes letters from Walter Scott, Francis Palgrave, Dawson Turner and Robert Pitcairn, among others, as well as lengthy sets from J.H. Maitland, who was researching and publishing the Chester pageants and documents at the same period, and from Francis Douce, to whom the 'Dissertation' is dedicated. The correspondence with Douce begins in 1808⁸³, and shows that early in his researches Sharp was bemused by the relationship between the pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors, with its clear Coventry guild provenance, and British Museum MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII, the so-called 'N-Town Pageants', attributed to Coventry on their flyleaf by the Warwickshire antiquarians Dugdale and Stevens. Douce and Sharp concurred that the latter had nothing to do with Coventry, although the confusion persisted almost two centuries later⁸⁴.

Sharp had a remarkably broad and detailed knowledge of early dramatic records; not just those of England, but also of Spain, Lisbon, Lucerne and Antwerp⁸⁵. He shows unswerving clarity in his understanding of the nature of his material, constantly alerting his readers to the gap between broad, sweeping and ill-referenced histories of the theatre and the primary sources which he is studying. He discusses at length, for instance, the club, or 'mall' and leather balls

which were supplied as props to the Cappers' Pilate⁸⁶, describing a leather club which he believed to be the original prop, and which he personally discovered amongst the Cappers' effects. Although he was engagingly trenchant in his opinion of Robert Crow, author of the only surviving texts, whom he found 'so illiterate and confused, as not to exhibit the language of his times in a fair and appropriate dress...'⁸⁷, Sharp's 'Dissertation' continues to justify his commendation by Francis Douce as a 'kind', 'candid' and 'liberal' critic⁸⁸.

Notes

- ¹ Richard Axton, ed., *Three Rastell Plays* (Cambridge, 1979), 3-4.
- ² The Leet Book does not survive for this year, but see Kent Archive Office De L'isle MSSii 1475 12/1; Marion Colthorpe, 'Pageants before Queen Elizabeth I at Coventry in 1566', *Notes and Queries* (1985). For records of other visits see n.3 below.
- ³ Reginald Ingram, *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* (Toronto, 1981). All citations of primary civic records or antiquarian copies are drawn from this volume, and located by date, if no other reference is given.
- ⁴ Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays* (London, 1984), 10-11.
- ⁵ See specifically Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* (Cambridge, 1979), as well as the best recent general work on the period, J. L. Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy 1150-1500* (London, 1980, reprinted with supplement 1985).
- ⁶ Phythian-Adams, *Decline*, 41.
- ⁷ Alexandra Johnson and Margaret Rogerson, eds, *York: Records of Early English Drama*, 2 vols (Toronto, 1979), 212.
- ⁸ Sylvia Thrupp, 'The Guilds', *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol.3, 230-80.
- ⁹ Phythian-Adams, *Decline*, 100.

- ¹⁰ Reg Ingram, 'The Coventry Pageant Wagon', *Medieval English Theatre*, 2:1 (1980), 3-14.
- ¹¹ Elizabeth Baldwin, 'The Worship of the Cyte and the Welthe of the Craft': the Cappers of Coventry and their Involvement in Civic Drama 1494-1591. BLDSC thesis no. D79856, School of English, University of Leeds (1991), 173-78; tabulation 179-82.
- ¹² The number of wheels is not definitively known (Ingram, 'Coventry Pageant Waggon' 6; Baldwin, 'The Worship of the Cyte', 139) but four seems likely. The only justification for more than four would be excessive weight, as a six-wheeled vehicle would be a lot less manoeuvrable and unlikely to have a steering axle.
- ¹³ For the Valencia wagons see Pamela King, 'Corpus Christi, Valencia', *Medieval English Theatre*, 15 (1993) pp.103-110.
- ¹⁴ For more comparative materials on pageant wagons see essays in *Medieval English Theatre*, I (1979).
- ¹⁵ Thomas Sharp, *A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries anciently performed at Coventry*, republished with a new foreword by A.C. Cawley (Wakefield, 1973), 20n.
- ¹⁶ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300 to 1660*, I 1300-1576 (London, 1959), 171, suggests that a 'pageant' is a wagon with scenery which is drawn alongside a 'scaffold' which is a stage without scenery.
- ¹⁷ Elizabeth Baldwin, 'The Worship of the Cyte', 145-47, shows diagrammatic representations of the different possibilities for arranging the necessary elements.
- ¹⁸ *Ingram Papers*, Records of Early English Drama, Toronto. The 1403 reference is to *Calendar Close Rolls*, Henry IV, vol.2, 1402-05 (1929), 290, which Ingram received from Peter Meredith of the University of Leeds after the REED volume for Coventry had gone to press.
- ¹⁹ Ingram, 'The Coventry Pageant Wagon', 3.
- ²⁰ Reg Ingram, "'To find the players and all that longeth thereto": Notes on the Production of Medieval Drama in Coventry', *The Elizabethan Theatre V: Papers Given at the Fifth International*

Conference on Elizabethan Theatre Held at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in July 1973, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Toronto, 1975), 17-44, speculates that the reason why records of the plasterer and his renting of a house from the guild slip into the Corpus Christi accounts is because the plasterer's house was the pageant-house, but then notes that in 1547 repairs to the plasterer's house and to the pageant-house door are paid for separately, so he omitted the former from his REED volume. It seems possible nonetheless that these were connected properties.

- ²¹ Joan C. Lancaster, 'Crafts and Industries', VCH Warwickshire, VIII, ed., W.B. Stephens (London, 1969), 159.
- ²² All references to the Shearmen and Tailors' and Weavers' pageants refer to Hardin Craig, *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, second edition, Early English Text Society, e.s. 87 (1957).
- ²³ For a fuller discussion of this element in the play see Pamela M. King, 'Faith, Reason and the Prophets' Dialogue in the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors', *Drama and Philosophy: Themes in Drama*, 12, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge, 1990).
- ²⁴ David Staines, 'To Out-Herod Herod: the Development of a Dramatic Character', *Comparative Drama*, 10 (1976), 29-53.
- ²⁵ The Weavers were the third most numerous company in the mid-fifteenth century muster, with 57 members having sufficient resources to bear arms, but only one chamberlain and one bailiff were drawn from its ranks. (Ingram, REED, 545).
- ²⁶ Legislation of the Leet in 1529 plays a crucial part here: see details under Cappers below.
- ²⁷ Mary H. M. Hulton, "'Company and Fellowship": the Medieval Weavers of Coventry', Dugdale Society, (Oxford, 1987).
- ²⁸ The total received from the Coventry Weavers' brethren towards their pageant is itemised once in the accounts, in 1561, at 8s.
- ²⁹ Reg Ingram, "'Pleyng geire accustomed belongyng & necessarie": guild records and pageant production at Coventry',

- Records of Early English Drama: Proceedings of the First Colloquium, ed., Joanna Dutka (Toronto, 1979), 60-100.
- ³⁰ Margaret Rogerson, 'Casting the Coventry Weaver's Pageant', Theatre Notebook, 48(3), 1994, 138-47.
- ³¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of Martyrs*, II, 1920-21. Careles was then moved to London where he died in prison, his body being subsequently cast on to a dunghill
- ³² C. Philip Deasy, *St Joseph in the English Mystery Plays* (Washington D.C., 1937), 104; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972), 200; V.A. Kolve, *The Play called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, 1966), 247-53; Mikiko Ishii, 'Joseph's Proverbs in the Coventry Plays', *Folklore* 93i (1982), 47-60.
- ³³ Ibid., 58-59.
- ³⁴ Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, 212-15.
- ³⁵ Baldwin, 9-10.
- ³⁶ Baldwin, 17.
- ³⁷ It is the Cappers who emulate London by introducing a giant with a candle in his head into Coventry's midsummer show in 1533 during the mayoralty of capper Hugh Lawton (Baldwin 48).
- ³⁸ Elizabeth Baldwin, 'Who was the Mother of Death?', Notes and Queries, 39(1992), 157-58. For corroboration of the suggestion that she might be Eve, I am grateful to Alexandra Johnston, Records of Early English Drama.
- ³⁹ Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, 278-79.
- ⁴⁰ Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, Early English Text Society, s.s.11 (1991), I, 352, notes II, 519-20.
- ⁴¹ Clifford Davidson & Jennifer Alexander, *The Early Art of Coventry, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick and Lesser Sites in Warwickshire: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama* (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1985), 32.
- ⁴² PRO, Prob 11/19, f.67r-68v. Ingram quotes a fragment of the will only in REED, 112.
- ⁴³ Craig, *Two Coventry Plays*, xvi, Clifford Davidson, 'Civic Drama for Corpus Christi at Coventry: The Lost Plays of the Mercers' and Cappers' Guilds'. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to cite his as yet unpublished essay, forthcoming in a book on medieval drama edited by Alan Knight. Craig based his conclusion in part upon the 1539 account of a tableau in the Corpus Christi procession put on by the confraternity of Corpus Christi. Davidson rightly believes that the tableau which included the apostles, Mary, Gabriel with a lily, as well as St Catherine and St Margaret, had nothing to do with the Mercers or any putative Assumption play. The lily is part of the standard iconography of the Annunciation; Gabriel makes his second appearance to the Virgin at the end of her life bearing a palm.
- ⁴⁴ Catherine of Aragon's special devotion was to the Virgin, her emblem the pomegranate, symbolic of the Virgin Birth. Davidson records a cope at Coughton Court with embroidery attributed to her, depicting a scene of the Assumption ('Civic Drama'). In the Elche play of the Assumption, the angel descends to Mary inside a large pomegranate machine (see n.55 below).
- ⁴⁵ Bolton, 'Social History', 218.
- ⁴⁶ A.C. Cawley, Marion Jones, Peter F. McDonald & David Mills, eds, *The Revels History of Drama in England*, I, *Medieval Drama* (London & New York, 1983), 166.
- ⁴⁷ Lancaster, 'Crafts and Industries', 156.
- ⁴⁸ BL MS Additional 44932, Thomas Sharp, *Illustrations of the History and Antiquities of St Michael's Church, Coventry* (Coventry, 1818), personal copy with interleaved notes, f.41r. The engraving of the roof boss was made by I. Schnebbelie in 1791.
- ⁴⁹ Davidson, 'Civic Drama', ; Bolton, 'Social History', 213.
- ⁵⁰ Joan C. Lancaster, *St Mary's Hall, Coventry: a Guide to its Building, its History and Contents* (Coventry, 1981), 42.
- ⁵¹ The effigy is venerating an image of the Virgin in the centre of the ceiling, while angels in the surviving tracery glass are

accompanied by musical notation and texts from the antiphon *Gaudeamus*, drawn from the liturgy of the Assumption.

⁵² Lancaster, *St Mary's Hall*, 27; Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, 35.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 35, 136.

⁵⁴ Pamela M. King and Assuncion Salvador-Rabaza Ramos, 'La Festa D'Elx: The Festival of the Assumption of the Virgin, Elche (Alicante)', *Medieval English Theatre*, 8:1 (1986), 21-50; Pamela M. King, 'The Festa D'Elx: Civic Devotion, Display, Identity', *Festive Drama*, ed. Meg Twycross, forthcoming (Cambridge, 1996).

⁵⁵ Mary Dormer Harris, *The Coventry Leet Book: Or Mayor's Register, Containing the Records of the City Court Leet or View of Frank Pledge, AD 1420-1555* (London, 1907-1913), 857.

⁵⁶ Lancaster, 'Crafts and Industries', 153-56.

⁵⁷ CRO Acc.99/6/1, Drapers' Ordinance f.4v; CRO 154 Drapers' 12, 1c 1950/33 f.5.

⁵⁸ Ingram Papers, *Records of Early English Drama*, Toronto.

⁵⁹ Ingram, "Pleyinge geire accustomed belongyng & necessarie", 60-92, 74.

⁶⁰ Pamela M. King, 'York Plays, Urban Piety and the Case of Nicholas Blackburn, Mercer', *Archiv*, 232 (1995), 37-50.

⁶¹ e.g. *The Mirour of Man's Saluacione*, ed. A. Henry (Aldershot, 1986), lines 4368-74.

⁶² Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, 36-39, 137-142.

⁶³ Meg Twycross, ' "With What Body Shall They Come?" Black and White Souls in English Mystery Plays', *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S.S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge, 1990), 271-86.

⁶⁴ Ingram read a number of wills and inventories relevant to the cycle both in the Public Record office and in the Lichfield diocesan records, but turned up no new material on Crow (Ingram Papers, *Records of Early English Drama*, Toronto);

Baldwin ('*The Worship of the Cyte...*', 199-205) believes that there might be as many as three.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 199, drawing on the Cappers' accounts which are transcribed in full as an appendix to the thesis.

⁶⁶ There has been confusion over this record, resulting in the creation of a 'ghost' Crow. Baldwin has pointed out that 'Robart Crow made breder' in this year refers to his creation of other brothers, rather than to his being made brother himself. Elizabeth Baldwin, 'Some suggested emendations to *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry*', *REED Newsletter*, 16(2) (1991), 8-10.

⁶⁷ L.F. Salzman, *VCH Warwick*, IV (London, 1947), 151, noted in Baldwin, '*The Worship of the Cyte...*', 200.

⁶⁸ Ingram, 'To find the players...', 25-6.

⁶⁹ Ingram, *REED*, Appendix 6, 495-502, provides a detailed biographical sketch.

⁷⁰ City Record Office Accessions 11/1 and 11/2.

⁷¹ Thomas Sharp, ed., *The Presentation in the Temple, a pageant, as originally represented by the Corporation of Weavers in Coventry*, Abbotsford Club, (Edinburgh, 1836).

⁷² Sharp, *Dissertation*, 83-124.

⁷³ CRO Acc. 100/17/1, f.15v.

⁷⁴ CRO Acc. 100/17/1, f. 66. Ingram omits this line from the records.

⁷⁵ I am grateful to Mr R. Browne of the Department of Printed Books in the British Library for his assistance in identifying these pages, and to the librarians of All Souls' College, Oxford; Glasgow University Library; The National Library of Wales, and the Bodleian Library; also to Dr Richard Beadle, St John's College, Cambridge, for their assistance in finding the edition which has the same setting as these fragments.

⁷⁶ G R. Rastall, *Heaven Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama*, Vol. 1. (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1996), pp 57 - 78 and 137

- 77 Sharp, *Dissertation*, 113.
- 78 Rastall, *Heaven Singing*, "57 - 78 and 137 - 152".
- 79 Harold Gardiner, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage* (New Haven & London, 1946, 2nd ed. 1963) was the first to scrutinise closely the economic argument for the abandonment of the pageants, though details of his argument are now questioned.
- 80 Coventry Record Office holds a copy of the first edition.
- 81 Ingram, *REED*, xxv-xxx
- 82 MS B.L. Additional 43645 (Sharp's proof copy of the *Dissertation*), 202, taken from *The Monthly Review* (May, 1826), pages to 220.
- 83 MS B.L. Additional 43645, f.239.
- 84 *Ibid.*, f.240r for Douce's opinion, f.17 (*Dissertation* p.7) for Sharp's eventual conclusion.
- 85 *Ibid.*, ff.160, 43v, 56v, 30-36.
- 86 *Ibid.*, ff. 53-55 (*Dissertation*, pp. 50-51).
- 87 *Ibid.*, f.93r.
- 88 *Ibid.*, f.239

