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## The Feast of Corpus Christi in the West Country

The feast of Corpus Christi, a late addition to the medieval calendar of festivals, was established in the thirteenth century as a response to the new eucharistic doctrine of transubstantiation. As Miri Rubin has shown in her rich study of the eucharist in late medieval culture, the energy for the establishment of the feast came, not from the hierarchy, but from the laity and the clergy who served them. It was the Beguines of Liege, inspired by the eucharistic visions of Juliana of Cornillon, who first sought to establish a special feast to honour the real presence of Christ in the sacrament.<sup>1</sup> But the local bishop showed little interest in the feast and it was the Dominicans who spread the new celebration beyond Liege.<sup>2</sup> It was not until Pope Urban IV championed the feast in his bull *Transiturus* in 1264, arguing that the day of the institution of the sacrament should be celebrated 'not in sorrow in the Passion week, but on another, joyful, occasion',<sup>3</sup> that the feast gained real recognition. It reached England in the early fourteenth century, with the earliest references to its celebration coming from the west country, first in the dioceses of Bath and Wells and Gloucester in 1318 and in the diocese of Exeter in 1320.<sup>4</sup>

Dioceses across the country soon enthusiastically adopted Corpus Christi, adding a new festival to the progression of spring and summer events that began with Easter and ended with Midsummer or the feast of St John the Baptist, 24 June. Clergy and laity alike celebrated the day, most commonly with a procession in which the host was carried through the streets of towns and cities in a reliquary to be viewed and venerated by the people. It was also a day on which, in England, plays were performed. However, we now know through the work of REED that Corpus Christi Day held no more special significance for drama than Whitsun or May Day or Midsummer. And, yet, the idea that there is a recognizable genre called a 'Corpus Christi play' has proved very difficult to eradicate. Now, REED collections provide ample evidence from the West Country, where the first Corpus Christi celebrations in England are recorded, to reassess this outdated, yet tenacious, notion. This evidence reveals not only the variety of celebratory practices and the number of festival days on

which they were performed, but also the importance of situating these practices within their specific social contexts.

Despite the growing acknowledgment in recent years that we need to reassess long-held notions about early drama in England, little progress has been made in the way scholars discuss the nature of the relationship between Corpus Christi and performance. A number of years have already passed since I wrote, 'It has become very clear to me that we must disabuse our minds of the idea that "Corpus Christi Play" is a generic term. The evidence makes it plain that, although Corpus Christi Day was a favourite time for playmaking, any play was possible.'<sup>5</sup> Corpus Christi drama as a genre simply did not and does not exist except as a scholarly construct as old as the first commentators on English biblical drama. Yet these antiquarian commentators were at least a generation away from the performance of these plays in time and a world away in religious sensibility. Richard James, Sir Robert Cotton's librarian, began the idea of Corpus Christi drama in 1629, when he acquired and annotated the manuscript of what we now know as the *N-Town Plays*. Practically everything James wrote in his note is wrong: 'Contenta novi testamenti scenicè expressa · et actitata olim per monachos sive Fratres mendicantes · vulgò dicitur hic liber Ludus Coventriae · sive ludus corporis Christ · scribitur metris Anglicanis.'<sup>6</sup>

The plays are in English metre but there the validity of the notation ends. We can only speculate about what led Dr James to write what he did. However, more serious for the history of scholarship was the way Halliwell reinforced the errors with seemingly corroborative evidence from Dugdale's 1656 *Antiquities of Warwickshire* in the first edition of the plays in 1841.<sup>7</sup> E.K. Chambers sought to sort out the problem in 1903,<sup>8</sup> but although he accepted the mis-ascription to Coventry, he did not take up the question of 'ludus corporis Christi' reinforced by the English 'the plaie called Corpus Christi' that appears in a sixteenth-century hand on the fly-leaf. Throughout his discussions of the play texts, Chambers loosely refers to the large biblical cycles and smaller plays produced on the feast day without distinguishing between them, although in his initial discussion he speaks of 'the "cosmic" type finally presented by the English Corpus Christi plays'.<sup>9</sup> Hardin Craig discusses the origin of the genre with magisterial assurance and no evidence while Rosemary Woolf carefully avoids using the title.<sup>10</sup> But it was V.A. Kolve's use of the phrase 'the plaie called Corpus Christi' as the title of his influential book in the 1960s, followed quickly by Eleanor Prosser's book basing her interpretation of the plays on the nature of the feast of Corpus Christi itself, that has embedded this concept in the discourse surrounding the biblical plays.<sup>11</sup> Not even Glynne Wickham's rational laying out of the variants found in the texts themselves in his chapter 'Drama of the Christian Calendar'<sup>12</sup> has shaken the general understanding that

there is a genre in English drama called the Corpus Christi play that dramatized salvation history from Creation to Judgment and was performed by craft guilds on the feast of Corpus Christi in the major towns of England.

Recent scholarship has not really helped the situation. Although Miri Rubin discusses the variety of dramatic activity on Corpus Christi Day in England at some length,<sup>13</sup> she begins her discussion with a reiteration of the old theory:

[The feast of Corpus Christi] gave its name to a dramatic type which developed in the North and the East of England, a cycle of biblical plays made up in a sequence from the Old and New Testaments, which told the Christian story from Creation through the Fall, the history of the Jews, the Incarnation, Christ's life and ministry, the Crucifixion, Resurrection to the Day of Judgement.<sup>14</sup>

However, before she reviews the variety of activity on Corpus Christi Day, she rightly identifies the scholarly problem: "To modern scholars the Corpus Christi play is a *type*, a neat and sophisticated structure; but in fact it seems far more changeable over time, sometimes even from year to year, and varied in its many manifestations."<sup>15</sup>

William Tydeman ruminates about the problem of terminology in his contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*: "Which term – "mystery," "miracle," "craft cycle," "Corpus Christi play" – most appropriately describes the great sequences of biblical episodes presented annually in medieval cities, since all these labels can mislead, and some 'Corpus Christi plays' were manifestly not presented as part of the Church's feast of Corpus Christi at all?"<sup>16</sup> He comes to no conclusion. Meg Twycross in the next chapter of the volume takes considerable care to set the play sequences in the summer season rather than on a specific feast and emphasizes that Chester's 'Creation to Doomsday' sequence was performed on Whitsun. But, she then goes on to reinforce the notion of a Corpus Christi genre with the statement, "The great story that composed the Corpus Christi play (the whole cycle was called a *play*, while the individual portions were *pageants* this is the terminology adopted in this chapter), a history of the universe from just before its Creation to its ending at the Day of Judgement, was parcelled up into episodes."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Peter Happé, in his review of the criticism of early drama, freely uses the term 'Corpus Christi play' to mean the 'Creation to Doomsday' sequences.<sup>18</sup>

The essays in another recent collection of early drama criticism, *A New History of Early English Drama*,<sup>19</sup> open up many new areas of concern, but the idea of a Corpus Christi genre still lingers. Anne Higgins, in her essay 'Streets and Markets', concentrates her discussion on the *York Cycle* yet constantly sets

the cycle in the context of a presumed genre. She writes, 'The greatest of all such processional displays of influence and efforts at self-definition were the Corpus Christi plays', and later in her discussion, she returns to such sweeping statements as 'Corpus Christi plays traditionally used the ground level before the pageant wagons, or *platea*, as a nonlocalized, nontemporalized playing area', and 'Many strategies devised for the medieval demotic of physical space that informed Corpus Christi plays lost little of their power for a long time.'<sup>20</sup> Higgins offers much to admire in this essay and she, at least, bases her argument on the one surviving text that does conform to the criteria of a 'Corpus Christi play'. However, one play, even a play as great as *York*, does not constitute a genre.<sup>21</sup> In the same set of essays, both Paul White and Richard Dutton suggest that the abolition of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1548 affected the 'plays of Corpus Christi'.<sup>22</sup> A radical change in the pattern of religious drama *did* occur in the decade between 1538 and 1548 but the abolition of the feast of Corpus Christi was only one of the many sweeping changes. One of the truly interesting facts about the civic biblical plays is that they did not stop (as so much other biblical drama did) during the first stages of the English Reformation. York and Chester continued to perform their plays in some form for another twenty years.

But, if we can no longer say that there is a genre called 'Corpus Christi play', what plays were played during the summer season? Medieval England had an important tradition of biblical plays of all shapes and sizes designed for presentation at Easter or at one of the seasonal festivals. These plays could be prophet plays, plays on Old Testament themes, Passion plays, Resurrection plays, 'Creation to Doomsday' sequences, plays on the Creed or the Pater Noster (as at York, Lincoln, and Beverley), or plays on the sacrament itself, such as the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*. They could have protestant leanings or be staunchly Catholic. They could be lavish and complex, multi-parish plays, like the Passion play at New Romney, or simple, single-parish plays, like the Genesis sequence mounted over several years in St Laurence, Reading.<sup>23</sup> There were also saints plays, morality plays, and folk plays, particularly the ubiquitous Robin Hood plays.<sup>24</sup> Any of these could be and were played on Corpus Christi Day, as they were on Whitsun, May Day, or Midsummer. Corpus Christi was only one of the special days for community and parish events and it was a day when practically anything could be performed.

Activities on Corpus Christi took many forms in the West Country. The chief city in the west, Bristol, had a regular procession on the feast day in which the guilds carried 'pageants'. The first evidence of these pageants appears in the Wiredrawer and Pinners' accounts of 1505–6, the Bakers' accounts that begin in 1537–8 confirm the procession's longevity.<sup>25</sup> Like all such observances

of the feast, however, the procession was suspended during Edward's reign, restored under Mary, only to disappear again with the accession of Elizabeth. Although the pageants appear in the inventories of the guilds until well into the seventeenth century, they were not carried in public procession after 1557–8.<sup>26</sup> Mark Pilkinton, REED editor of the Bristol records, makes clear why the pageants at Bristol were carried, not mounted on wheeled vehicles,

[W]heeled vehicles were not permitted in medieval Bristol for fear of crashing through to the extensive network of underground storage warehouses and sewers beneath the streets. As Jacobus Millerd says on his 1673 map of Bristol, 'There are no sincks y<sup>a</sup>t come from any houses into ye streets but all is conveyed vnder ground rendering ye Cittie exceeding sweet & delightsom They use no Carts there as in London but carry all uppon Sledds.'<sup>27</sup>

This information points up the need for extreme caution in discussing the seasonal customs in England since all were influenced by local circumstances. In this case, it was the sewer system of Bristol that limited the size and nature of the 'pageants' used in the Corpus Christi procession. Pilkinton has reconstructed the 'pageants' and makes clear that they were similar to the trestle called in the York Corpus Christi guild accounts 'le bere',<sup>28</sup> which bore the reliquary containing the host and was carried on the shoulders of members of the guild. In Bristol, Pilkinton suggests the 'pageants' carried images, were sometimes decorated with flowers, and were accompanied, as in the York procession, by banners and torches.<sup>29</sup>

The records of only two other municipalities in the west give us evidence of other civic activity on Corpus Christi Day. The receivers' accounts of Plymouth record a small payment 'for dryncke for the players' on Corpus Christi, 1516, and the Black Book of the town records the civic agreement to hold a special ale in the church yard of St Andrew's parish church on Corpus Christi, 1536.<sup>30</sup> In the course of stating the regulations for the event, a warning appears: 'no *person* that shall goo aboute with the shipp of *Corp<sup>o</sup>ris ch<sup>r</sup>ist<sup>i</sup>*' should bring 'no body ... but him selfe' to the ale.<sup>31</sup> This indicates that the port town had a pageant representing a ship that was taken about the town on the feast day. The common bailiffs of Bridgwater in Somerset paid pipers of Ash Prior near Taunton 16d 'in festo *Corp<sup>o</sup>ris Ch<sup>r</sup>ist<sup>i</sup>*' in 1448–9, and in 1495–6 the water bailiffs of the town paid 10d 'mor<sup>e</sup>' for the shepherd's pageant on 'corp<sup>o</sup>ris cristy day'.<sup>32</sup> This mention of a Nativity play on Corpus Christi Day does not imply a larger biblical sequence. The parish of Thame in Oxfordshire sponsored an epiphany play on Corpus Christi in 1522 and the parish of St

Laurence, Reading, sponsored one on May Day, 1499. Both parishes performed other plays at other times but not as a sustained sequence.<sup>33</sup>

All other mention of activities on Corpus Christi in the west comes from parish records. The churchwardens' accounts of St Andrew's, Ashburton, in Devon, provide the richest records of playmaking activity both on Corpus Christi and on other days. The relevant records cover seventy-two years from 1487 to 1559, with payment for looking after the stock of costumes providing some of the earliest evidence.<sup>34</sup> Among the Ashburton records, the most frequently appearing evidence of dramatic activity comes from similar entries for the care of unspecified players' garments, including a tidy income from the rental of costumes, 1542–5.<sup>35</sup>

Nine references connect the playmaking activity with Corpus Christi. In 1492–3 and again in 1499–1500, bread and ale were provided for the players on the feast day.<sup>36</sup> John Soper seems to have been in charge of playmaking in the period from 1516 to 1529. In 1516–17 the parish purchases 'Ratilbaggez & vysers' and Soper is paid for painting five wigs and keeping the 'ornamentorum lusatorum'. In 1528–9 he helps to build new costumes as well as make staffs for the players and 'crestes' for their heads. The parish also buys gloves for King Herod in 1537–8.<sup>37</sup> Eight years later William Bound has taken over as the parish custodian of the playing gear building costumes and providing new collars.<sup>38</sup> A break in playmaking activity occurs during Edward VI's reign (1548–53), but in 1554–5 we find Bound still in charge of the gear.<sup>39</sup> In 1555–6 the parish buys more collars and a pair of gloves 'for hym that played god almyghty' and provides wine 'for hym that played Saynt Rosmont'. In 1557–8 Bound is paid for mending costumes and the 'Rattylbagys'. The last playmaking reference from the parish comes from 1558–9, when a pair of gloves is bought 'for hym that played chryst on corpus christi daye'.<sup>40</sup>

As John Wasson has noted, the play on Corpus Christi does not seem to be the same play every year.<sup>41</sup> Indeed from the other playmaking references in the Ashburton accounts, the parish seems to have had several plays that were performed in some years at Corpus Christi and in some years at Epiphany or on other days during the Christmas season. The '[r]atelbagges' appear again in the records for 1542–3 in an entry that includes the building of 'capitibus diabolorum & alijs necessariis,' but the only date specified for playing that year is in the Christmas season.<sup>42</sup> The noise maker and devils' heads might have been used for a Corpus Christi performance but it is not specified. One reference among the costume entries – for a 'noua tunica' (new tunic) made for Robin Hood in 1526 – argues a continuing Robin Hood tradition that is attested to nowhere else in the records of the parish. The last positive evidence for the mounting of the parish play comes from 1559–60, although 1563–4

accounts record a payment of 2s to unspecified players, which could be a reference to a travelling troupe.<sup>43</sup>

It is possible to deduce more readily the subject of the play performed by the parish church of Bodmin, Cornwall. The parish sponsored many guilds, among which was the guild of Corpus Christi, first mentioned in 1469–70.<sup>44</sup> A damaged receivers' account from 1494–5 records payment for the making of costumes and 'dyademys & crownys' that belong to the Corpus Christi 'game'.<sup>45</sup> Although this entry is reminiscent of those for the 'king games' in the Thames Valley, which were a form of summer inversion ceremony with servants named as the lord and lady of the summer festival,<sup>46</sup> it must be taken with subsequent references to the Corpus Christi event in the parish church of Bodmin. A fragmentary entry from 1509–10 records expenses for the building of costumes and sets for the Corpus Christi play that include a costume for Jesus. In 1514–15 more costumes are made and leather is purchased for the construction of 'thynges' for the 'showe' of Corpus Christi. Later inventories from 1539 and 1566 list the costumes as including several for Jesus and the tormentors and two devils' coats, indicating that the play or 'showe' on Corpus Christi at Bodmin represented part of the Passion story in some way.<sup>47</sup>

Somerset records include only one reference to a play on Corpus Christi. The town of Yeovil paid 5s 11d 'of the Corpus Christi playe' in 1539–40.<sup>48</sup> However, James Stokes suggests that this may be the play belonging to the parish church of Sherborne, Dorset, five miles away.<sup>49</sup> That play has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention, most recently by Rosalind Hays, one of the editors for the REED Dorset collection.<sup>50</sup> Hays traces the history of the celebration of Corpus Christi, noting that the procession, which ended with a parish supper in the churchyard, came to an end in the 1530s. She then examines the brief life of the play that may have travelled to Yeovil before it, too, ended with the accession of Edward in 1548. The renting of play gear supplied a modest income from 1548 to 1562, in the years prior to the remarkable 1570s' mounting of a play called 'corpuscristie playe' on the theme of 'Lot's Wife' or 'The Burning of Sodom'.<sup>51</sup> This was probably a protestant play and is one of several community plays on protestant themes that appeared in this decade but did not have a long life. The playmaking references in Sherborne stop in 1575, at the same time that the other community-based, religious drama was being suppressed.

But the most tantalizing and complex reference to a play on Corpus Christi in the West Country comes from Exeter. In the mayor's court of Exeter, 18 June 1414, one John Benet, skinner and freeman of the city, 'humiliter ... se

submitit *gracie* eiusdem Maioris &c'.<sup>52</sup> Benet's offence had been a vigorous opposition to an attempt by the city council to change both the nature of the play that had been performed on Corpus Christi Day and the date of its performance. The circumstances surrounding this dispute demonstrate not only why it is reasonable to consider all performances within their wider social context, but also how the intersection of religion and politics influenced the nature of the performance of religious drama.

The tale recorded in the court roll is briefly told.<sup>53</sup> In this year, the 'Maiores & Communitas' decided that a play apparently normally played by the Skinners on Corpus Christi should be played on the Tuesday of Whitsun week rather than on Corpus Christi and that the single play should be broken up into 'certas parcelas ... vocatas pagentes' and distributed among all the craft guilds, who were to be responsible for finding, at their own expense, the players needed to play the episode they had been assigned. Benet and the other Skinners objected and not only refused to take their own guild part in the production, but also suborned the other crafts to do likewise. The result was chaos 'in obprobrium tocius Ciuitatis & contemptum Maioris & tocius Communıtatis prædicte'. Reprimanded by the mayor, Benet replied, 'Parde a man shall nocht be an hange *with* outhe onsser' and marched away 'contemptuose & derisorie'.<sup>54</sup> After some negotiations (unfortunately unrecorded), Benet was persuaded to make his humble submission to the mayor's court.

This entry appears at the end of the dorse of folio thirty-eight of the mayor's court roll for 1413–14. It is separated from an entirely unrelated entry before it by 38mm. Nothing follows it. The mayor's court sat almost every Monday throughout the year, with the business conducted recorded in a highly formulaic manner on the recto of the parchment roll with miscellaneous items – wills, indentures, and incidents like this one – entered on the dorse. Presumably the clerk understood the relevance of this item to the deliberations of the court but he provided no context for it in the document. There are two skinners named in the document – Benet and William French. Benet had been a freeman for four years before the incident and French was actually admitted to his freedom on the payment of £1 'fine' or fee only three weeks after the recording of the dispute on 9 July 1414.<sup>55</sup> These were not insubstantial trouble makers but members of what Maryanne Kowaleski has called an 'exclusive group' who alone had access 'to civic power in medieval Exeter'.<sup>56</sup>

What are we to make of this episode? What evidence is there for a play performed 'ab antiqua Consuetudine'?<sup>57</sup> Why were the Skinners so upset? Why should the city council take it upon themselves to alter so radically a time-honoured custom? The answers to these questions lie, I believe, in the long-standing tensions between the city and the bishop in the early fifteenth century. The

Skinner's craft and their Corpus Christi activities seem to have been caught in a quarrel not of their own making that divided the loyalties of the citizens of Exeter.

Without stopping to ask the contextual questions, twentieth-century commentators have asserted that Exeter had a 'Corpus Christi play'. Cecily Radford states this categorically, with considerable imaginative flair, in her 'Three Centuries of Playgoing in Exeter'.<sup>58</sup> Joyce Youings, although she tempers Radford's claim for a large dramatic event, also concludes, on the evidence of the 1413–14 court roll, that Exeter had a Corpus Christi play.<sup>59</sup> John Wasson is less sure about this, although he takes the Skinner's incident as evidence that 'Exeter once had a Corpus Christi cycle drama'.<sup>60</sup> There seems little support for any of these assertions in the surviving evidence.

The procession of Corpus Christi in Exeter was an episcopal event. As we have seen the feast first appears in documents of the diocese in 1320. Bishop Stapledon's register for 1322 mentions the route of the new procession in Exeter, making clear that it had become one of the major processions in the liturgical year that brought the bishop and the cathedral clergy out of the Close and into the city.<sup>61</sup> No evidence confirms that the city, as such, supported the procession. The feast day is first mentioned in the Exeter city records in 1386, '[i]n vj lagenis vini rubij datis fratribus predicatoribus & Minoribus pro processione eorum in die corporis christi iiij s ...', although an entry for the preceding year that does not mention the feast but does indicate the same sum for the same amount of wine for the two orders of friars '*venientibus ad processionem*' undoubtedly refers to the same annual event.<sup>62</sup> These payments by the city for refreshments for the friars continue regularly until 1423–4, when they disappear from the receivers' account rolls. What is not clear is whether the friars had a procession of their own on the feast day. The phrase '*pro processione eorum*' in the 1385–6 roll states that it was 'their procession' but the Latin of the formulaic entries that follow this early one are ambiguous, and it is possible that the friars were part of the episcopal event.

The association of the Skinner's craft with the feast of Corpus Christi presents another challenge in the interpretation of the evidence. In her analysis of the economic structure of late medieval Exeter, Maryanne Kowaleski, after mentioning the playmaking document, goes on to say that 'The [S]kinners' sense of solidarity was also evident in their lease of the charnel chapel for religious services in 1426–31, although they were not formally incorporated until 1462'. In her discussion of the leather and fur trades in Exeter, Kowaleski makes clear that these trades 'ranked at the top of the artisanal occupations in terms of wealth and status in 1377' and goes on to state that 'Skinners ... were

at the high end of the group'.<sup>63</sup> The Skinners, therefore, were a not inconsequential group of citizens in Exeter at the time of the dispute with the mayor in 1414. Kowaleski also teases out connections between individual Exeter Skinners and members of the rich and powerful London Skinners.<sup>64</sup> The confraternal face of the London Skinners was the guild of Corpus Christi. Just as the Mercers of York were also the guild of the Holy Trinity,<sup>65</sup> so the London Skinners 'formed the Fraternity of Corpus Christi in the fourteenth century, and what was known as the "livery" of the Skinners' company in the fifteenth century'.<sup>66</sup> In 1393, the London Skinners were granted a charter in which they were given the responsibility 'for the Corpus Christi procession in the City' – a procession that Stow describes in considerable detail.<sup>67</sup>

Evidence from the Exeter receivers' rolls from much later in the fifteenth century suggests that the Corpus Christi guild was also the confraternal face of the Skinners craft in Exeter and, indeed, John Wasson asserts that this is so.<sup>68</sup> Entries record substantial subsidies given by the city to the Corpus Christi guild (1482–3) and then to the Skinners' guild '*ad sustentacionem fratemitatis Corporis christi*' (1486–7) and '*pro sustentacione solempnitatis Corporis christi*' (1487–8).<sup>69</sup> In 1493–4 the council specifically subsidized the Skinners craft ten shillings for the play on Corpus Christi, and in 1494–5 the clerk records that the play subsidy was paid to the '*fratemitatis corporis christi*'.<sup>70</sup> The wording of these various entries seems to indicate that after their incorporation in 1462, the Exeter Skinners, like their London brethren, adopted the feast of Corpus Christi as their own. The last year the play was performed – or the last year it received a civic subsidy – seems to have been 1494–5. A similar entry for the next year has no payment recorded and in 1496–7 the payment is recorded as a dismissive '*nil*'.<sup>71</sup> Exeter civic records contain no further evidence of Corpus Christi activity.

The Skinners Craft performed a play at Corpus Christi and the same guild (by the late fifteenth century clearly the Corpus Christi guild) also performed a play at Corpus Christi. The incident concerning John Benet and the mayor in 1414, then, seems to have been a unique event in which the mayor attempted to change a time-honoured custom but did not succeed. The larger civic context of that attempt by the mayor to alter the nature of Exeter's Corpus Christi observance merits additional consideration. The long-standing dispute between the bishop of Exeter and the mayor of the city was exhaustively treated in the 1930s by legal and constitutional historians.<sup>72</sup> The basic issue was who held jurisdiction over (and so had the right to collect taxes from) two Exeter parishes – St Stephen's within the walls and St Sidwell's outside the east gate of the city. The bishop claimed 'St Stephen's fee' and the dean and chapter claimed 'St Sidwell's fee'. Both claims were contested by the city. The origins

of the dispute went back to Domesday Book accounts and it had been pursued by the city from the mid-thirteenth century. In the early fifteenth century, the city stepped up its pressure. Muriel Curtis explains:

The first half of the fifteenth century was a critical and decisive period in the history of St. Stephen's fee and St. Sidwell's fee. It seems clear that during these years the city adopted a definitely aggressive attitude, which was not so much the outcome of any consistent policy, as the result of exasperation produced by the constantly conflicting claims of the rival authorities. We have seen that during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the difficulty inherent in such a situation gave rise to occasional disputes, but with the beginning of the fifteenth century, we enter upon a period of almost perpetual conflict between the bishop, dean and chapter and the civic authorities, culminating in the defeat of the pretensions of the city first in St. Sidwell's fee, 1436 and then in St. Stephen's, 1449.<sup>73</sup>

I believe that the dispute between the skinner, John Benet, and the mayor over the play on Corpus Christi is part of this larger dispute. Clearly, the historians of the 1930s failed to see in the records the extent to which both sides used public display and ceremony to reinforce their territorial claims.<sup>74</sup> In 1322, Bishop Stapledon, writing to the confessor of the cathedral, Richard de Braileghe, expresses himself anxious to ensure that due reverence be paid to the 'Corpus Dominicum' as it is carried in the 'nove solempnitatis Corporis Christi' and in the Palm Sunday procession. He wants to see the addition of large wax torches to be carried before the reliquary in the procession. In the course of this discussion, he mentions that the processions went 'extra Portam Orientalem Civitatis Exonie, ex more Ecclesie nostre predicte, annis singulis', that is, 'outside the east gate of the city of Exeter, according to the custom of our aforesaid church each year'.<sup>75</sup> The cathedral precinct occupied much of the southeast quarter of medieval Exeter. The areas of commerce lay to the north and west. If it was the intention of the bishop only to display the Real Presence of Christ to as many believers as possible (the purpose of the Corpus Christi processions that moved through the cities), then it makes little sense for the route to take the procession out the east gate of the city. However, by processing to and through the east gate, the bishop, in his own episcopal way, marked the boundaries of his claimed jurisdiction. To reach the east gate, the procession had to pass through the disputed parish of St Stephen, and once the procession had passed through the gates, it was in St Sidwell's parish. This route took the episcopal party directly away from the busier quarters of the town. We do not know how they returned to the cathedral. As Nicholas Orme writes, '[T]hey may have retraced their steps down the High Street or come

round Southernhay and into the Close via the South Gate.<sup>76</sup> The more provocative return would be to process back down the High Street, once again passing St Stephen's but going farther towards the centre of the city, past the guildhall on their right, before turning into the Close at Broadgate. The Skinners' play could have been performed outside the walls before the procession returned to the city or in the Close at the end of the procession.

The 1414 dispute document raises two significant issues. The first is the suggestion by the mayor and council that the Skinners share their play with other crafts, '*quod de qualibet arte eiusdem Ciuitatis duo tres vel quatuor de qualibet arte habere deberent certas parcelas ludi illius vocatas pagentes Et inuenirent lusores ad numerum sufficientem ad paiceto predictos ludendos sumptibus suis proprijs*'.<sup>77</sup> This would have created a play on the pattern of York or Chester, parcelled out among the guilds with the thought that they should appoint some of their members as 'pageant masters', to use the York phrase, to hire the players to perform the play. This would also have relieved the Skinners of the sole responsibility for the play and may have been intended as a positive gesture towards the craft, meant to help persuade them to accept the change in the nature of the event. Such a parcelling out of the episodes of the play might also have been a cynical move on the part of the city oligarchs to control the emerging crafts, as some historians have suggested for York.<sup>78</sup>

However, the second issue raised by the Exeter account – the date of the performance of the play – was far more significant, given the ongoing dispute between the bishop and the mayor. By tradition, the play was performed on Corpus Christi Day by a guild that would later be clearly identified as the Corpus Christi guild. Corpus Christi Day, then, would have been the high feast day of the guild. The identification of the Skinners with the feast and the procession can be deduced from the gratuities given by the Skinners to the canon in charge of the procession.<sup>79</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the Skinners guild were firmly identified with the episcopal event. The action of the mayor attempted to move the play from Corpus Christi to the Tuesday in Whitsun week, the week of the *civic* spring festival.

Medieval Exeter hosted four fairs: on St Nicholas Day, St Thomas Day, Ash Wednesday, and Pentecost or Whitsun.<sup>80</sup> The Monday of Whitsun week featured traditional 'May' celebrations to which the city contributed. Though the Exeter parishes, like parishes in many other cities, supported themselves from property rents, they still sponsored these traditional May events (a major part of spring and summer fundraising in many country parishes) despite the lack of economic imperative.<sup>81</sup> It appears from the evidence for Exeter that there was a city-wide May game on Whit Monday, with a May pageant to which the city contributed and at which the city waits, the official town

musicians, were regular performers. The first references to Whitsun celebrations in Exeter come from the years immediately surrounding 1414. Civic contributions to Whitsuntide events first appear in records for 1409–10, when the city pipers (the waits) are paid 12d for a riding on the Monday of Whitsun week.<sup>82</sup> The waits are paid for playing on Whit Monday, 1411–12, 1412–13, and 1414–15.<sup>83</sup> A cancelled entry from 1416–17 speaks of the need to repair a pageant for a minstrel on Whit Monday. The ‘página de May’ was repaired the next year. By 1418–19 the payments include 40d to the waits for bringing in the May and 4d to ‘luseribus qui luserunt ante Maij’.<sup>84</sup> Later references for 1442–3 and 1456–7 make it clear that a pageant elephant was a regular part of the Whitsun celebrations.<sup>85</sup> The city’s efforts to move the Skinners’ play from Corpus Christi to Whit Tuesday seem to be an attempt by civic authorities to ‘steal’ the Skinners’ play away from Corpus Christi and add it to its own growing festivities in Whitsun week. A play performed on Tuesday, the day after the civic Maying events, would have lengthened the festival period and added substance to the fledgling celebrations. The two celebrations – the episcopal Corpus Christi procession/Skinners’ play and the civic Whitsun May games – can be seen as the expressions of rival power bases within the city. Within this context Benet’s wrath and the opposition he succeeded in mounting against the change provide a rare glimpse of opposition to the exercise of municipal power. In the long run it appears that, even if the Skinners, through Benet’s submission to the court, lost the battle, they won the war, since there is no mention of the Skinners’ play in association with Whitsun again.

Thwarted by the stubbornness of the Skinners, the city found another very public way to assert its authority over the disputed parishes. This can be tracked in the entries for the civic ‘beating of the bounds’ on the feast of St John the Baptist (24 June), an activity first recorded in 1408–9: ‘... *Item* in iiiij lagenis vini circa Maiorem & socios suos *perambulantes* nocte diei festi Natiuitatis *sanc̄i Iohannis Baptiste pro* Ciuitate . ij s.’<sup>86</sup> In 1414–15 the entry includes tallow for the torches and payment to a trumpeter named Elfanius, who must have called special attention to the procession.<sup>87</sup> It is perhaps significant that these additions to the expenses for ‘beating the bounds’ appear the year after the incident over the Skinners’ play. By 1417–18 rosin, pitch, and tar have been added to ‘les Cressantys ardent’ *coram* Maioris & socijs suis in nocte Natiuitatis festi *sanc̄i Iohannis Baptiste*’ and two men are hired to carry the torches.<sup>88</sup> The regular payment to the friars preacher and friars minor already noted, for refreshment after their participation in the Corpus Christi procession, ends in 1423–4.<sup>89</sup> The payments for the St John’s Night event remain relatively constant until 1430–1, when the city pays for fourteen gallons of red

wine and thirteen gallons of white wine for the citizens who 'beat the bounds' with the mayor. In the next year thirty gallons were bought along with bread and several pipers were paid at the festivities.<sup>90</sup> In 1432–3, the consumption drops to the normal two gallons and John Shillingford, who would later serve as mayor, was given a small amount against his expenses on his trip to London to negotiate on behalf of the city in its dispute with ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>91</sup> The negotiations did not prosper, and 1433–4 saw yet another large display of civic power, with the waits walking before the mayor as he processed. That year the city's negotiators in London claimed £13 13s 9 1/2d (of which only £7 5s 10d was allowed).<sup>92</sup> Finally, in 1436, the dispute over St Sidwell's fee was settled in favour of the dean and chapter. No receivers' rolls survive from the years 1433–4 to 1436–7, and uncharacteristically, the roll for 1437–8 does not even record payments to travelling players. In 1438–9 the last entry for refreshments on St John's Night appears (9s for bread and wine) but the entry is cancelled.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps significantly, however, 12d is provided that year to pay for wine in the mayor's house after he has processed 'ad portam occidentem' through the still-disputed St Stephen's parish.<sup>94</sup> Although civic payments for feasting have disappeared, the city pays handsomely to keep the ceremonial torches in good repair through the 1440s for the St John's events as well as other civic processions and, in 1441–2, pays pipers for the procession on St John's Eve.<sup>95</sup> Under the heading 'Gifts and Grants' for the year 1446–7, entries document purchases of much food and drink 'pro materia inter D<sup>ominum</sup> Episcopum & Maiorem & Communitatem'.<sup>96</sup> But the negotiations did not go well for the city, and on 12 December 1448 the dispute over St Stephen's fee was settled in favour of the bishop, with the final resolution recorded in 1449.<sup>97</sup> That year the city sent gifts of wine to the bishop and hosted him at a banquet.<sup>98</sup> The long-running dispute was over.

No records of the Exeter Skinners have survived, nor has any specific reference to the route of the episcopal processions other than the incidental comment in Bishop Stapledon's letter of 1322. We are, therefore, dependent upon the sparse and laconic references to the Skinners' play on Corpus Christi in the city records. These references, when set within the wider context of the life of Exeter in the early fifteenth century, make it possible to arrive at a working hypothesis about the play. The two spring festive events – the civic Whitsun celebrations in the week after Pentecost and the ecclesiastical Corpus Christi celebration nine days later – were seen in the period before 1414 as the focus points of the two rival claimants to the fees of the parishes of St Stephen and St Sidwell: the mayor and city council, and the bishop and dean and chapter. In that year, the mayor tried to coerce the Skinners to move their play on Corpus Christi away from the ecclesiastical event to the civic one. Thwarted

by the refusal of the Skinners to agree to the change, the city then proceeded to enhance its display at the third spring event – the marching of the bounds on St John's Night. The expenses for torches and musicians escalated along with the amount spent on food and drink as the negotiations over the disputed parishes reached crisis points. After the city lost its first suit, it no longer subsidized the riotous behaviour, but it continued to pay for elaborate and impressive 'cressants' and music for the procession. These expenses fell away after the 1448 settlement. Forty years later, relations between the city and those responsible for the Corpus Christi celebrations had improved enough that the city undertook a regular 10s subsidy to the Skinners/Corpus Christi guild for their play on the feast day.

The nature of the Skinners' play cannot be determined with any accuracy. It was probably a religious play, possibly on a biblical theme, or on the efficacy of the sacrament or on the Creed or Pater Noster. We can deduce two things about it from the 1414 document. It had spoken parts and was sufficiently episodic to allow the mayor and his advisers to break it up among the other crafts of the city. The 10s payments made for it by the council at the end of the fifteenth century argue that it was certainly not a biblical cycle play on the scale of York or Chester.<sup>99</sup> It seems to have been typical of the many smaller religious plays performed by guilds, parishes, and towns, attested to by the documentary evidence from all over the kingdom. In fact, it was undoubtedly similar to the other West Country plays that we have been discussing, those performed on Corpus Christi in Bridgwater, Ashburton, Bodmin, and Sherborne.

The feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated in the West Country with processions and plays. However, each procession was governed by local conditions, such as the sewer system of Bristol. Some were civic; some were ecclesiastical. Similarly, the nature and sponsorship of the plays performed on that day varied from place to place and, indeed, from the evidence of Ashburton and Sherborne, were not necessarily confined to a traditional play performed year after year. This pattern is typical of the one emerging from all over the kingdom as more and more evidence is uncovered by REED editors. The term 'Corpus Christi play' in the records represents a rich and eclectic tradition of mimetic performance that included every possible type of late medieval play. It is time to set aside the intellectual 'straight jacket' earlier scholarship provided, which was based on misunderstanding of documentary evidence and the few surviving texts. Only when we fully assimilate the wide diversity of possible types of performance within our critical discourse will we be able to understand clearly the drama of late medieval and early modern England.

## Notes

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- 1 Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), 169 ff.
  - 2 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 174.
  - 3 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 180.
  - 4 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 199–200.
  - 5 Alexandra F. Johnston, 'What if No Texts Survived', *Contexts of Early English Drama*, Marianne Briscoe and John Coldewey (eds) (Bloomington, 1989), 11.
  - 6 Stephen Spector, *The N-Town Play*, Early English Text Society [EETS], ss 11 (1991), xiii; this note roughly translates as 'Collected scenes of the new testament formerly represented and acted by (or in the presence of) monks or mendicant brothers; this book is commonly called the play of Coventry or the play of Corpus Christi; written in English metre'.
  - 7 James Orchard Halliwell, *Ludus Coventriae. A Collection of Mysteries*, Shakespeare Society (London, 1841), x.
  - 8 E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1903), 2.416–22.
  - 9 Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 1.77.
  - 10 Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1955), 11; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972).
  - 11 V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, 1966) and Eleanor Prosser, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-evaluation* (Stanford, 1961).
  - 12 Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300–1600*, vol 3: Plays and Their Makers to 1576 (London, 1981), 42–3.
  - 13 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 271 ff.
  - 14 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 271.
  - 15 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 273.
  - 16 William Tydeman, 'An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre', *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, Richard Beadle (ed) (Cambridge, 1994), 4.
  - 17 Meg Twycross, 'The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays', *The Cambridge Companion*, 39.
  - 18 Peter Happé, 'A Guide to Criticism of Medieval English Theatre', *The Cambridge Companion*, 312 ff.
  - 19 John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York, 1997).
  - 20 Anne Higgins, 'Streets and Markets', *A New History*, 79; 90; 91
  - 21 The plays at Coventry were also performed on Corpus Christi but there does not ever seem to have been an Old Testament sequence. I suggested in 'What

- if No Texts Survived?' (see note 5 above) that this sequence of plays might well be a creed play. Margaret Rogerson has recently taken up this argument (*Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* [RORD] 36 [1997], 143–77.)
- 22 Paul Whitfield White, 'Theater and Religious Culture', *A New History*, 135; Richard Dutton, 'Censorship', *A New History*, 290.
  - 23 James Gibson, "'Interludium Passionis Domini": Parish Drama in Medieval New Romney', *English Parish Drama*, Alexandra F. Johnston and Wim Husken (eds), Ludus 1 (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1996), 137–48; Berkshire Record Office [BRO]: D/P 97 5/2, 31 (for 1506–7), 88 (1511–12), and 106 (1515–16).
  - 24 See Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The Robin Hood of the Records', *Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance, 1500–1993*, Lois Potter (ed) (Newark, DE, 1998), 27–44.
  - 25 Mark Pilkinton (ed), *Bristol*, REED (Toronto, 1997), 19; 47.
  - 26 Pilkinton (ed), *Bristol*, xxix–xxx.
  - 27 Pilkinton (ed), *Bristol*, xxix.
  - 28 Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson (eds), *York*, 2 vols, REED (Toronto, 1979), 1.79.
  - 29 Pilkinton (ed), *Bristol*, xxx.
  - 30 John Wasson (ed), *Devon*, REED (Toronto, 1986), 218 and 225.
  - 31 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 226.
  - 32 James Stokes with Robert J. Alexander (eds), *Somerset, including Bath*, 2 vols, REED (Toronto, 1996), 1.41.
  - 33 Oxfordshire Record Office: DD Par Thame c5, f 76v; BRO: D/P 97 5/2, 3; see also Alexandra F. Johnston and Sally-Beth MacLean, 'Reformation and Resistance in Thames/Severn Parishes: The Dramatic Witness', in Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin (eds), *The Parish in English Life 1400–1600* (Manchester, 1997), 181.
  - 34 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 17–30.
  - 35 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 25–6.
  - 36 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 18–19.
  - 37 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 20; 22; 24.
  - 38 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 27.
  - 39 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 28.
  - 40 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 28; 29; 29.
  - 41 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, xxv.
  - 42 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 26; 25, 'devils' heads and other necessities', translation, 336.
  - 43 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 21; 29 and 30.

- 44 Cornwall County Record Office [CRO]: B/Bod. 244, 2. See also Rosalind Conklin Hays, C.E. McGee, Sally L. Joyce, and Evelyn Newlyn (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, REED (Toronto, 1999), 386, and Gloria J. Betcher, 'Makers of Heaven on Earth: The Construction of Religious Drama in Early Modern Cornwall', *Material Culture and Medieval Drama*, Clifford Davidson (ed) (Kalamazoo, 1999), 104ff.
- 45 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 469–70.
- 46 See Alexandra F. Johnston, 'Summer Festivals in the Thames Valley Counties', *Custom, Culture and Community*, Thomas Pettit and Leif Sondergaard (eds) (Odense, 1994), 37–56.
- 47 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 471; 472; 473.
- 48 Stokes with Alexander (eds), *Somerset*, 1.406.
- 49 Stokes with Alexander (eds), *Somerset*, 2.482.
- 50 Rosalind Conklin Hays, "'Lot's Wife" or "The Burning of Sodom": The Tudor Corpus Christi Play at Sherborne, Dorset', *RORD* 33 (1994), 99–125.
- 51 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 267; shelf marks at the Dorset Record Office have changed since the publication of the *Dorset/Cornwall*, the document cited here is now marked Dorset Record Office [DoRO]: PE/SH: CW 1/43, mb 4.
- 52 Benet was made free in 1410 (Devon Record Office [DeRO], ECA: MCR 11 Henry IV) as an apprentice of John Legh; Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 83, 'submitted himself humbly ... to the mercy of the same mayor', translation, 358.
- 53 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 82–3, translation, 357–8.
- 54 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 82, 'set portions ... called "pageants"', translation, 357; 83, 'as an insult to the entire city and a slur upon the mayor and the whole aforesaid commonalty', translation, 358; 83.
- 55 DeRO, ECA: MCR 1/2 Henry V. He served as Bailiff in 1423 (Alexander Jenkins, *Civil and Ecclesiastical History of the City of Exeter and Its Environs* [Exeter, 1841], 79.
- 56 Maryanne Kowaleski, 'The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century', *Mediaeval Studies* 46 (1984), 356.
- 57 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 82, 'by ancient custom', translation, 357.
- 58 Cecily Radford, 'Three Centuries of Playgoing in Exeter', *Report of the Transactions of the Devonshire Association* 82 (1950), 241–2.
- 59 Joyce Youings, *Tuckers Hall, Exeter* (Exeter, 1968), 10.
- 60 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, xxv.
- 61 Hingeston-Randolph (ed), *The Register of Walter de Stapledon*, 384.
- 62 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 73, '(He accounts for) 4s for six gallons of red wine given to the friars preacher and minor for their procession on Corpus Christi Day', translation, 348; 73, 'coming to (*or* for) the procession', translation, 348.

- 63 Maryanne Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995), 100; 157.
- 64 Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, 158 and 305–6.
- 65 Johnston and Rogerson (eds), *York*, 1.xiv.
- 66 Elspeth M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1966), 78.
- 67 Veale, *The English Fur Trade*, 111.
- 68 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, xvii.
- 69 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 107; 107, ‘for the maintenance of the Corpus Christi brotherhood’, translation, 382; 108, ‘for the maintenance of the mass of Corpus Christi’, translation, 383.
- 70 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 110; 111.
- 71 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 111; 112.
- 72 See Bertie Wilkinson, *The Medieval Council of Exeter* (Manchester, 1931) and, more particularly, Muriel E. Curtis, *Some Disputes Between the City and Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* (Manchester, 1932).
- 73 Curtis, *Some Disputes*, 20.
- 74 Curtis prints large portions of the receivers’ accounts that list expenses specifically concerned with the dispute in Appendix C (*Some Disputes*, 62–71), but she does not include the expenses for the ceremonial displays of jurisdiction. She does, however, remark on the added annoyance of ‘ecclesiastical property adjoining the city walls’ that obstructed the progress of the mayor as he ‘made his yearly perambulation of the walls’ (38).
- 75 Hingeston-Randolph (ed), *The Register of Walter de Stapledon*, 384.
- 76 Nicholas Orme, *Exeter Cathedral as It Was 1050–1550* (Exeter, 1986), 78.
- 77 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 82, ‘that two, three or four (members) of each craft of the same city ought to have set portions of that play called “pageants” and should find players of a number sufficient to play the aforesaid pageants at their own expense’, translation, 357.
- 78 Barrie Dobson, ‘Craft Guilds and City: The Historical Origins of the York Mystery Plays Reassessed’, *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, Alan Knight (ed), (London, 1998), 52–91, and Heather Swanson, ‘The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns’, *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 29–48. Maryanne Kowaleski discusses the role of the civic oligarchy in late medieval Exeter in ‘The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy’.
- 79 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, xvi.
- 80 Wallace MacCaffery, *Exeter, 1540–1640* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 77.

- 81 See Johnston and MacLean, 'Reformation and Resistance in Thames/Severn Parishes: The Dramatic Witness'.
- 82 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 81.
- 83 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 81, 82, and 84.
- 84 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 85; under 'Foreign Expenses', DeRO, ECA: 1417–18, mb 3; *Devon*, 86, 'players who played before the May', translation, 361.
- 85 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 97 and 99.
- 86 DeRO, ECA: 1408–9 mb 2; 'Item in four gallons of wine with regard to the Mayor and his associates walking the bounds on the night of the feast of St John the Baptist on behalf of the City 2s'.
- 87 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 84. The St John's Night entry comes between the Pentecost item and the payment to the trumpeter. Elfanius, therefore, performed for the mayor on St John's Night not Whitsun.
- 88 DeRO, ECA: 1417–18, mb 3; 'The cressants burning before the Mayor and his associates on the night of St John the Baptist'.
- 89 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 88; see also DeRO, ECA: 1423–4, mb 2.
- 90 DeRO, ECA: 1430–1, mb 2; Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 93.
- 91 DeRO, ECA: 1432–3, mb 2. Shillingford wrote voluminous letters, many of which detail the last years of negotiation between the city and the ecclesiastical authorities. Curtis prints the relevant sections in Appendixes D and E (*Some Disputes*, 71–85).
- 92 Wasson (ed), *Devon*, 94; DeRO, ECA: 1433–4, mb 2.
- 93 DeRO, ECA: 1438–9, mb 3.
- 94 DeRO, ECA: 1438–9, mb 3.
- 95 DeRO, ECA: 1441–2, mb 1d.
- 96 DeRO, ECA: 1446–7, mb 2; 'with regard to the matter in dispute between the Lord Bishop and the Mayor and the Commons'.
- 97 Curtis, *Some Disputes*, 41.
- 98 DeRO, ECA: 1448–9, mb 2.
- 99 Although the 10s undoubtedly only partly covered the costs, this sum should be compared to the York council's regular 2s subsidy of the Coronation of the Virgin, 1484–1548 (Johnston and Rogerson [eds], *York*, 1.133–4, *et passim*), the fine of 5s paid by the Weavers for not playing the 'Fergus' play in 1486 (1.145), and the amount paid by the Mercers for the 'Judgment' play during the 1460s – 45s 8d in 1461 (1.91–2), 30s 2d in 1462 (1.95), 31s 3d in 1463 (1.69), and 30s 3 1/2d in 1467 (1.99–100). Approximately 18s of the Mercers' annual expenses went to pay the players.