Multi-day Performance and the London Clerkenwell Play

The London Clerkenwell play (or Skinners’ Well play, as it is alternatively called) is one of the more significant theatrical phenomena to be associated with London over the four hundred years between the ‘holier plays’ noted by William Fitzstephen in his ‘Description of London’, at the end of the twelfth century, and the start of the Shakespearean period, in the mid to late sixteenth century. Very few records of it have come down to us, however; and what has come down – a couple of royal payment records, some chronicle reports, a civic prohibition – is brief, and some of it lacking in detail.

For many decades, nevertheless, theatre and other historians have pretty well agreed in general on what the Clerkenwell play was: a major London biblical play covering subject matter from both the old testament and the new (the creation to the passion or doomsday); the medieval London equivalent – in subject matter, size, and significance – of the great biblical dramas of the English provinces which were presented regularly in urban centres such as York and Coventry from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century into the sixteenth century; performed at Clerkenwell over several days, by London clerks, on a regular basis in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century (and perhaps even back to the early fourteenth century, though that has been a speculation by some rather than a widely held view); and then seemingly vanishing by the reign of Henry V. (There are no further records of it after 1409.) There have been some points of individual disagreement, and some challenges over the years, but in general the consensus has held. Recently, however, the general agreement has been challenged again: in significant part on the grounds that the Clerkenwell play has been recorded as a multi-day performance event, while the provincial biblical sequences/cycle dramas – with the exception of Chester’s in the sixteenth century–involved one-day-only performance. It has been suggested, with a citing of the provincial norm, that London’s so-called Clerkenwell play occurred, as a major event, only in two years, 1390 and 1409, and that it was not a series of biblical plays like the provincial sequences but was, rather, either a ‘sight’ only – a display of ‘stationary tableaux vivantes’ – or a play or plays limited in scope and size to one day and simply repeated on a number of following days, probably as a parish fundraiser in conjunction with London’s annually occurring late-Au-
A major, biblical presentation in some form – which we’ll call the Clerkenwell ‘play’ (leaving open, for the time being, just exactly what that term might mean) – most certainly took place, at least briefly if not longer, in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century London: or, rather, not in London itself but just outside its walls, north of Aldersgate, in the vicinity of the great Priory of St John of Jerusalem (the wealthy and powerful base in England of the religious order of the Knights Hospitaller) and of the smaller St Mary’s Priory. In this location both the so-called Clerk’s Well and Skinners’ Well were to be found; hence the alternative names used for the play, both in early records and chronicles and in modern theatre history. This area was also just northwest of the Priory of St Bartholomew, outside of which, in Smithfield, for three days once a year in late August, the great Bartholomew Fair took place. Smithfield was also a major location for royal tournaments at this time. We have royal account records and chronicle history references indicating a major biblical performance of some kind at Clerkenwell, covering both old and new testament material, in both 1390 and 1409. In 1391 a royal payment of ten pounds, an Exchequer Roll tells us, was made to the clerks of London (both parish clerks and other clerks) because of their 1390 performance after St Bartholomew’s Day, ie, after 24 August, at Skinners’ Well, of the passion of our lord and the creation of the world. Late sixteenth century historian John Stow tells us that this performance took three days – although we do not know Stow’s sources, and his information at this level of detail is not always reliable. Then, in 1409, the royal Wardrobe Accounts record payment for the construction at Clerkenwell of a timber scaffold upon which the king (Henry IV), the prince (ie, Prince Henry, later to become Henry V), and the nobility would sit to watch a great play/performance (a ‘magnum ludum’) showing how God created the heavens and earth, and Adam, and on to the day of judgment. The 1409 scaffold payment record does not mention clerks; but it has been generally assumed by modern historians that the same performers would have been involved as in 1390, when performance of the same or similar subject matter, possibly or probably over three days, also attracted royal attention. A Chronicle of London tells us that the 1409 ‘playe’ took place over four days – Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday (ie, four non-consecutive days) – after which a great tournament began in Smithfield, involving the seneschal of Hainault and his entourage.
icle’s detailed account of the tournament has it occupying, it seems, eight days out of the next twenty (ie, the eight days of jousts were not consecutive). Other chronicles largely agree that the play preceded the tournament and that the tournament occupied eight days; and the Wardrobe Accounts show that the tournament – for which another scaffold was built in July for royal and noble spectators, this one in Smithfield – was in mid-to-late July to early August, as about 4 August (apparently at the conclusion) the king gave a feast for the participants at Windsor. The Clerkenwell play performance must therefore have been in early to mid July. Records and references thus indicate a performance at Skinners’ Well/Clerkenwell of biblical material ranging from the creation, to the passion of Christ, and/or to the day of judgment, in both 1390 and 1409, probably both times (but at least in 1390) by London clerks, and probably both times (but at least in 1409) over several days, though once (in 1390) in late August and once (in 1409) in early to mid July.

But we do not have only 1390 and 1409 evidence for major July and August performances of some sort at Clerkenwell in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. We also have records or references indicating three other significant performances, at least two of them recorded as involving London clerks, and with two of them scheduled (as in 1390) in August, and one (as in 1409) in July. First: the Westminster Chronicle (a usually reliable source of historical information) reports a five-day ‘ludum valde sumptuosum’ (very lavish performance) by London clerks at Skinners’ Well in 1384, beginning on 29 August (ie, three days after the ending of Bartholomew Fair). Second: in 1385 a London civic order on 12 August prohibits wrestlings at Skinners’ Well, and also ‘le iew qest ordeine destre fait’ by ‘gentz de . . . la Citee’ (the game/play scheduled to be put on by people of the city), until news should come of the king’s activities. (Richard II was then away from London/Westminster, conducting a military campaign against Scotland; and there were also fears of an invasion of the London area by the French.) Third: the Westminster Chronicle also reports a four-day ‘ludum satis curiosum’ (elaborate game/play/performance) by London clerks, of both old testament and new testament material, at Skinners’ Well in 1391. The chronicle gives the specific 1391 performance start date as 18 July – which indicates fairly strongly that this is not a misascription to 1391 of the late August/early September 1390 performance rewarded by Richard II but another, similar performance the next year.

Although each record or chronicle reference could be to some different kind of performance activity, and although each one of the various records and references does not include all the details we would like it to include for a
secure connecting together of all of them (no clerks specifically mentioned, for example, in either the 1385 prohibition or the 1409 scaffold payment), it has always seemed to historians more likely than otherwise that this accumulation of records and references shows major and ongoing (though not necessarily annual) multi-day biblical performance activity, by London clerks, at Clerkenwell in the years at least between 1384 and 1409. An actual/theatrical play or sequence of plays has also seemed the logical answer to the question of what was being performed: given the subject matter (old testament and new testament material, as specified for three of the five years concerned) like that of the extant provincial biblical plays of the late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries; and it might also be noted, given the recent suggestion that pageant display or repeated play performances were likely what was taking place, that pageant presentations or other such kinds of visual display would have been unlikely to have been made over several days in one location in early London (multi-day pageantry in London normally involved processions and multiple locations22), and that multi-day performances attracting the attention of royalty and of chroniclers would also seem unlikely to have involved the same material simply repeated each day for several days.

The accumulation of records, then, between 1384 and 1409, with the matching details found in some of them, has been for most historians a persuasive demonstration of the likelihood of large-scale theatrical activity by London clerks, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, involving the same kind of biblical material that we find in the English provinces in their sequential biblical dramas covering the religious history of man from the creation to Doomsday, and therefore being probably a play or plays equivalent to (though not necessarily identical to) the provincial ones.23 Royal interest and attendance, and/or chronicle attention, also indicates a major activity.24 But it is of course possible to examine each record separately, as Lawrence Clopper has recently done, and to question its meaning: questioning the terminology each record uses (for terms such as ludus, jeu, and play are notoriously slippery in the medieval period, usually depending – as indeed ‘play’ still does today – on context for their meanings), and questioning the relationship of each record/reference to the other records/references (since no one record/reference is complete, in all details, in what it tells us). The records and references, in short, cannot be put together with certainty to prove what was happening at Clerkenwell between 1384 and 1409; they can be read in different ways, depending on what is believed to have been likely. That is, they can be differently read when placed within what we may call different ‘plausibility contexts’. This brings us back to the issue of multi-day perform-
ance. If one thinks, for various reasons, major multi-day biblical-play performance in London in the late fourteenth century to be, in itself, plausible, one tends to read the records as traditionally scholars have read them. If one thinks, for various other reasons, such performance in London to be implausible, one looks for other ways in which to read the records. The plausibility or implausibility of multi-day theatrical performance in late fourteenth-century London thus becomes an important factor in speculations about the London Clerkenwell play. Would Londoners around 1400 have been likely to have produced and watched a multi-day play? – or would such a production have been so unlikely as to cause us to look at other possible meanings of the Clerkenwell play records?

If we look at the general picture of festive celebration, entertainment, and performance in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century London, it would seem that multi-day play performance would not have been an unusual aberration then from performance practice in general, and that perhaps – as not in the provinces – in London it would even have been expected. Londoners and the royal court were accustomed to celebrations, entertainments, and other festivities that took place over a number of days. Throughout England, of course, some multi-day festivities were common: a variety of entertainments, for example, spread over the twelve days of Christmas; other church-associated celebrations, such as Shrovetide, extending over more than one day; spring-time hocking, a popular folk activity, taking place over two consecutive days. But London also had other multi-day festivities – performance events – which in the city were fairly common and elaborate and in the provinces were infrequent or less elaborate, or in some cases non-existent. Most royal coronation entries into London, for example, involved two related days of elaborate civic street pageantry: one when the to-be-crowned king or queen processed across London Bridge to the Tower, where s/he spent the night, and one (usually but not always the next day) when s/he processed from the Tower to Westminster. Accounts of such events (eg, of the 1445 royal entry into London of Margaret of Anjou) describe the pageants presented as though they took place as an undivided sequence; but historical sources show that they were spread over two days. The coronation itself, the culmination of the pageantry, in which major city officers were also involved, took up a third day. A second multi-day example is the great London Midsummer Watch, which had begun to be a decorative processional spectacle (as well as the military demonstration it was mandated to be) in the late fourteenth century, and took place on the evenings to mornings of 23 to 24 plus 28 to 29 June: ie, on two evenings-to-mornings five days apart from one
another. The Watch was thus a major London ‘performance’ event taking place on two non-consecutive nights over a seven-day period (though repetition was indeed involved, as not in a coronation entry); and in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (we do not know about the late fourteenth), royalty and the nobility would at least sometimes attend as spectators. A third multi-day example involves tournaments: foreign visitors to the court at Westminster or at Windsor – ie, in the immediate area of London – were entertained, with a variety of entertainments, over not simply multi-days but often over weeks, and sometimes with a multi-day tournament as a focus. A tournament would take place for part of a day only, over several not always consecutive days, with feasting, music, and other entertainments put on for the enjoyment of the tournament participants and other guests in their ‘down’ times. These tournaments, although royal events, often took place in London itself: either within its walls, in Cheapside, or just outside its walls, in Smithfield. Multi-day tournaments took place in Smithfield, for example, in the late fourteenth century, in at least the years 1362 (for five days), 1375 (seven days), 1386 (two days), and 1397 (fourteen days), as well as in the two years of the recorded royal notice of the Clerkenwell play, 1390 (between two and four days of jousts) and 1409 (eight days of jousts, as we have seen, spread over twenty days). Given these examples of multi-day performance events in London (and others could be given as well), it can be argued not only that multi-day performance would have been familiar to both Londoners and the court in the late fourteenth century but also that, for any performance event to have had major status (such as would have led to a royal reward, or to being noted in a chronicle), multi-day performance might have been expected or required. It should also be noted that all-day performance at Clerkenwell, for several days, is not likely to have been the case; the use of multiple days would have precluded the need to cram as much as possible into a day. None of the three examples given, of coronation entry, Midsummer Watch, or tournament, required all-day spectatorship on any one of its performance days.

But is multi-day performance specifically of a biblical play or plays to be found elsewhere, outside London, at this time? Yes indeed. Mercantile and educated London, of course, like the court itself, usually looked to the continent, and not to the English provinces, for its entertainment and ceremonial norms (as when it founded a continental-type puy – an elite musical society – just before 1300); and on the continent, from which came important visitors both to mercantile London and to the court, multi-day performance of religious drama had begun at least as early as about 1300 (in northeast Italy) and in France by the fifteenth century was a norm.
Moreover, within England itself there is also an early non-London example of such multi-day play performance: the fourteenth century Cornish Ordinalia, which, as the recent Records of Early English Drama edition of the records of Dorset and Cornwall tells us, consisted of three large biblical plays—each including several parts—performed over three days.36 (Some scholars believe that this was originally a full cycle of plays.) The extant Ordinalia, with its first play on the creation of the world and its second on the passion of Christ, also seems remarkably close to what the Exchequer Roll tells us was being performed at Clerkenwell in 1390 (also in three days, Stow tells us): which was also the creation of the world and the passion of Christ (though listed in the reverse order in the Exchequer Roll).37

I have my own speculative suggestion about the Clerkenwell play, involving my own ‘plausibility context’. The London Midsummer Watch in at least the fifteenth century apparently existed in two forms: the ordinary Watch, and ‘the greater Watch’ (as the London Mercers’ Company’s manuscript Acts of Court calls it).38 The ‘greater watch’, which is recorded as having taken place on 28–9 June in 1477 at the request of the king, to impress visiting ambassadors from France and Scotland, involved many more marching armed men than the ordinary watch; and at this watch there was also a morris dance and a portable pageant apparently of the nine worthies.39 (It is unclear whether the dance and the pageant were also special – part of the augmentation of the watch – or were usual but only recorded in this year because the whole event was special.) Further, in 1445, Bale’s Chronicle tells us, royalty attended a splendid London Midsummer Watch (‘the royallest wacche th a t ever was seyn ther a fore’) on both of its nights;40 presumably the occasion was worth chronicling because the Watch was augmented as well in that year (though I am speculating again) because of the 30 May coronation, just a few weeks earlier, of Margaret of Anjou, queen of Henry VI. Bale specifically notes the jousts and the Watch as following the coronation. That is, fifteenth-century London had a regular, ongoing, multi-day festive Watch which could be turned into a ‘greater watch’ for special occasions involving, in the one or possibly two fifteenth-century examples we have, royalty; and such occasions might be chronicled, as regular ones were not. Did the same perhaps pertain to the Clerkenwell play in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century? May there have been an ongoing play which, in some years only, was augmented, perhaps even at the king’s request, and also then recorded by chroniclers? In 1409, for example, the play appears to have served as a kind of warm-up act for the major royal tournament immediately following it; and in 1390 the play, ‘after’ St Bartholomew’s Day, would have been six or fewer weeks before
the great tournament, proclaimed in June, which began in Smithfield in early October. Might Richard II, for example, have encouraged the 1390 Clerkenwell performance (and later given it a special reward) as a useful advance attraction for his October 1390 tournament, in a year when, according to Froissart, the king was trying to emulate the recent magnificence of the reception at Paris for Queen Isabel of France?

The question has been raised as to how a major London biblical play – whether multi-day or not – could have been organized and financed, since neither the city itself nor its craft guilds as a group appear to have been involved, as was not the case in provincial centres such as York and Chester. But London had several times the wealth, population, parishes (over one hundred), and independent religious institutions of any other urban centre in England at this time; it would not have lacked for potential sponsors of major biblical performances, and elsewhere I have suggested several possibilities, including major religious institutions such as St John’s Priory (in the vicinity of which the play was performed), or a combination of such institutional sponsors. The city itself – as was not the case in the provinces – did not need to be directly involved (although it could have been indirectly so). And we must also not forget that clerks in general (legal, administrative, and so on), not only parish clerks, were performers and/or producers of the Clerkenwell play; none of the original records and references are to parish clerks specifically/only, but to clerks more generally, with the Exchequer payment explicitly mentioning both parish clerks and other clerks. Not only the potential sponsorship base, but also the production base, is thus much larger than is often realized, given the large numbers of clerks in medieval London, and the large number of institutions and households within which they were to be found.

The London Clerkenwell play may have been performed only a few times, at irregular intervals, in the 1380s/90s to 1409; or it may have been a regular, even annual, event. It may have been confined to the years approximately of 1384 to 1409, or it may have extended before (and after?) those dates, in some version(s), and have been recorded only in years when it was in some way ‘beefed up’ into special-event status. It may have been a general popular event or, as has been suggested by Mervin James, an event designed for a predominately royal or courtly audience (given the far readier availability of such an audience – on a regular basis if desired – in London than in provincial centres). But, whatever its performance history, there seems no inherent improbability in its having been a multi-day biblical play: with the interesting
possibility that it may at times have served, perhaps even by royal request, as a kind of warm-up act for a major royal event.

We cannot conclusively answer any questions about the London Clerkenwell play, from the records and references that have been found so far; but the odds seem strongly on the side of a major, multi-day biblical play. And, given the weight of tradition in early London, and the continuities from one century to another, we should also bear in mind the later theatrical history of Clerkenwell: for from 1560 the royal Revels Office, with its store of theatrical costumes and properties for entertainments at court, was housed in what had been part of the dissolved (as of 1540) St John’s Priory at Clerkenwell \(^{46}\) – the Priory having been a possible sponsor of the earlier Clerkenwell play, as noted above, which was performed in its immediate vicinity and which also (regardless of sponsorship), if an ongoing event, would have needed storage (preferably in the Clerkenwell area) for its properties and costumes. The Revels Office was removed from St John’s in 1607–8; but by then the popular Red Bull theatre had been built and was in operation in the same area.

Especially if the Clerkenwell play had been a major biblical play, but whatever kind of play it may have been, the Red Bull in the early seventeenth century was thus apparently continuing a tradition, from the 1380s and perhaps even earlier, of Clerkenwell as a major London performance district.

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Notes

1 FitzStephen’s ‘Description’ was probably written c 1170–82; see Ian Lancashire’s *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain* (Toronto/Cambridge, 1984), #878.

2 For the c 1300–01 records upon which such a speculation is based, see *DTR*, #543; and for the speculation itself, see, eg, Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage* (Chicago and London, 1974), 170 (miracle plays at Clerkenwell), and Anne Lancashire, *London Civic Theatre* (Cambridge, 2002), 55.

3 For some examples of this consensus, see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300 to 1660*, vol 1 (London/New York, 1966), 162–3 (assuming parish clerks specifically), Nelson, *Medieval English Stage*, 170–1, and *DTR*, xvii; the general agreement goes back to the 16th and 17th centuries (see below, n 23), and has also had wide popular acceptance (see, eg, current public online
information sites such as <www.clerkenwell.org/top.html> accessed 28 May 2006).

4 The 1410–11 performance (12 Henry IV: ie, 30 September 1410–29 September 1411) recorded in the Greyfriars’ Chronicle (and listed as a 1410–11 performance in DTR, #549, as well as referred to by modern scholars such as Wickham, Early English Stages, 1.163) is a misdating by the chronicle of the 1409 performance. See below, n 14. More broadly, John Stow’s 1598 Survey of London has also sometimes been taken as referring to a continuous play tradition from the Clerkenwell Play to the late 16th century; but Stow can be read – see Charles Lethbridge Kingsford’s 2-volume edition of the Survey (Oxford, 1908), 1.93 – as simply pointing out a past theatrical tradition being continued specifically in the present, or as referring to plays generally, in London, of all kinds.

5 For points of some scholarly disagreement, eg, concerning specific parallels (or not) between the Clerkenwell play and the provincial biblical sequences/cycle dramas, see Nelson, Medieval English Stage, 172. Nelson argues for parallelism.

6 See Lawrence M. Clopper, ‘London and the Problem of the Clerkenwell Plays’, Comparative Drama 34.3 (Fall 2000), 291. His other two major reasons (also on 291) for questioning the consensus are the related reason of the existence, otherwise, of major multi-day play productions only on the continent and (with one exception) from the 15th century, and the doubt that London’s ‘clerics’ could have mounted an elaborate play production. I also look at these two points below, but in the course of focusing on the multi-day issue.

7 Clopper, ‘Problem’, 297 and 300. It might be noted, however, that with more questions being raised every year about the provincial biblical dramas, a provincial norm is becoming increasingly difficult to identify.

8 The names Clerkenwell and Skinners’ Well appear to have been used interchangeably in relation to the play, from at least the late 14th century, to indicate the same physical location. See Lancashire, London Civic Theatre, 55 and n 143.

9 Frederick Devon (ed), Issues of the Exchequer (John Murray, 1837), 244–5 (Issue Roll, Easter, 14 Richard II). The Issue Roll entry (PRO E/403/533, mb 11) is dated 11 July – one week before what the Westminster Chronicle tells us was the start of a 1391 Clerkenwell performance (see below).

10 Stow, Survey, 1.15. See below on Stow’s likely conflation of the 1390 and 1391 Clerkenwell performances, and his erroneous recording of the 1409 probably four-day Clerkenwell Play as having taken place over eight days. Lawrence Clopper, believing the various Clerkenwell Play performance records to refer
to different kinds of events, suggests (‘Problem’, 297) that Stow may be confusing the running time of the 1390 Clerkenwell performance with that of the tournament following it. But although, without Stow, we have no information on the running time of the 1390 performance rewarded by Richard II, three days does not seem implausible, given the Westminster Chronicle’s recording (see below) of a five-day performance at Clerkenwell in 1384, and of a four-day performance in 1391, and although chronicle sources often disagree on the number of days involved in a given multi-day event (two, three, and four days, eg, are all running times given in different chronicles for the 1390 tournament), they normally do not record as multi-day an event that did not take place over more than one day.


12 [Nicholas Nicolas and Edward Tyrrell (eds),] A Chronicle of London, from 1089 to 1483 (London, 1827), 91. Possibly (though not probably) this was in fact a three-day performance; the chronicle reads that the play ‘endured Wednesday, Thursday, Fryday, and on Soneday it was ended; and thanne began the fetees of werre in Smythfeld for diverses chalanges.’ John Stow in his Survey of London (as in his 1592 Annales of England, 539) states (1.15, 93, 2.31, 177) that the play lasted for eight days; but the detail of A Chronicle is convincing, and Stow was probably confusing – as Lawrence Clopper has suggested (‘Problem’, 296) – the running time of the play with the running time (eight days, according to most sources: see below) of the tournament immediately following it.

13 A Chronicle’s account (91–2) usefully shows how different sources on any one tournament may disagree, without any one source necessarily being wrong, on details such as the tournament’s running time: for one can count, eg, actual jousting days, or the total number of days (of jousting plus of resting) over which the event took place. Also, when tournaments began with an opening procession on one day, the procession day might or might not be included in the count of tournament days; and sometimes (as apparently in 1390) a tournament may have been proclaimed in advance as one length but had changed in length by the time it took place. On the apparent change in 1390, see Froissart, Chronicles, 228–9 (two days) and 231–3 (four days): though the Westminster Chronicle, 450–1, gives a running time of three days, apparently not counting the opening day. Sometimes, however, the details in different sources simply cannot be made to fit together. Several historical sources, eg, set down the details of the jousts, day by day, for the 1409 Smithfield tournament; and the six-day detail provided in Leland’s Collectanea, 1. 486,

14 *A Chronicle* specifies – with credible detail – that the play came first. *The Great Chronicle of London*, A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley (eds) (London, 1938), 87, and Gregory’s *Chronicle*, 105, in James Gairdner (ed), *The Historical Collections of A Citizen of London* (Camden Society, NS 17, 1876), report the play first and the jousts second, though not stating that order as necessarily chronological. The Wardrobe Accounts (see above) also list the play/performance scaffold before the tournament scaffold. One chronicle – *Greyfriars* (*Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, John Gough Nichols (ed) (Camden Society, OS 53, 1852) – reports (12) both of these events (play and tournament) for 1410–11 (12 Henry IV), and mentions the tournament before the play; but from the context of other events and dates provided by the chronicle, and a comparison with other chronicles (such as the *Great Chronicle* and Gregory’s *Chronicle*), it is clear that *Greyfriars* is in fact misdating as 1411 the events of 1409; and, if its reporting order is supposed to be chronological (which may not be the case), it is in disagreement with the order used by other chronicles, as noted above. (*Greyfriars* also states – in contradiction of all other sources – that the play ran for seven days.) For the eight days of the tournament, see above, n 13.

15 See: *Wylie*, *History of England*, 3.247–8, 4.212–3, 225; Wardrobe Accounts, PRO E/101/405/22, f 35v; Enrolled Wardrobe Accounts, PRO 361/6, #3 (August feast date). The tournament was originally to have taken place in May, and was postponed, finally taking place in July (Wylie, 3.246–7). The menu
supposedly from the feast (I have been unable to check the original MS source) is printed in Robina Napier (ed), *A Noble Boke off Cookry* (London, 1882), 3–4.

16 *DTR* is therefore wrong (#548) in dating this performance as 24–8 July; it has followed Wylie, who seems to indicate (*History of England*, 4.298) that the king was staying then (24 July) at Clerkenwell (but the records he cites, 3.246, do not necessarily indicate that specific time).


18 Corporation of London, MS Letter Book H (currently located at the London Metropolitan Archives, COL/AD/01/008), f 195r. In relation to the ‘people of the city’ wording, it should be noted that none of the original records and references specifying clerks as Clerkenwell performers restricts the term to parish clerks; see below.


20 John Stow in his *Survey* (1.15 and 93) seems either to have largely conflated the 1390 and 1391 performances or to have used 1391 information for 1390; for he records for the 1390 performance an 18 July start date (the start date, according to the *Westminster Chronicle*, of the 1391 performance), when the Exchequer Roll clearly identifies the 1390 performance as having followed St Bartholomew’s Day (24 August), and his statements otherwise about the two performances are very similar, and are both accompanied by an account of the 1409 performance.

21 This is what Clopper suggests, ‘Problem’, 295.

22 See below for the multi-day processional pageantry of the London Midsummer Watch and for the stationary pageantry located along the route of two-day processional royal entries.

23 In the late sixteenth century John Stow, making use of earlier historical materials for his own printed histories of England generally and of London specifically, was persuaded that the Clerkenwell play was a London equivalent of the provincial biblical dramas. In his own personal copy (now in the Guildhall Library) of the earlier *Great Chronicle of London*, he annotated the *Chronicle*’s brief reporting, only, of a ‘grete play’ at Skinners’ Well in 1409 as referring to a play ‘of corpus christi’. (See the Thomas and Thornley edition, 87.) Early seventeenth-century antiquarian John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (London, 1631), citing Stow on the play as lasting for eight days, was confused about the location of the performance (naming Skinners’ Hall instead of Well: as also found in BL MS Cotton Vitellius F.IX, ff 1–70v, under mayoral year 1408–9), but also thought that the production sounded like a biblical cycle – a Corpus Christi play (405). The views of Stow and Weever
could be argued to have biased later historians; but their views would not have been accepted had the extant records and references not seemed to support them.

24 The only performance year (of the five recorded) without either a record of royal attendance or a chronicle reference is 1385: when the (city) record is of prohibition of performance.


27 For Margaret’s two-day coronation entry, see Lancashire, *London Civic Theatre*, 188. Isabella, queen to Richard II, had a two-day entry on 3–4 January 1397, with her coronation on a third day; see George B. Stow, Jr. (ed), *Historia Vitae Et Regni Ricardi Secundi* ([Philadelphia,] 1977), 136–7.


30 Edward III, eg, held a three-week festival of jousts, dancing, and singing to celebrate his marriage to Philippa of Hainault in 1328: see Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments. Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1989), 31–2; and tournaments were customarily associated with dancing and other entertainments: see Barber and Barker, 207, and Richard Barber, *Tournaments* (Harmondsworth, 1978), Section 11. For what we might call the ‘touristic’ aspects of Richard II’s 1390 tournament, see Froissart, *Chronicles*, 229: some visitors came from abroad not for the tournament but to see the manners of the English.

31 On tournaments in general, see Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, and note especially 176 and 207. Juliet R.V. Barker notes, in *The Tournament in England 1100–1400* (Woodbridge, 1986), 15, that there were two types of tournaments in England by the end of the fourteenth century: the courtly game, dominated by pageantry, and the feat of arms, involving real combat between opponents. Elaborate royal tournaments were largely of the first type. Tournaments often began on a Monday or a Tuesday, and in general avoided Sundays and holy days, and Fridays because they were fast days (Barber and Barker, 176). Dances,
feasting, and other entertainments took place during and after a courtly tournament.

32 For 1362, 1375, and 1386, see Barber and Barker, *Tournaments*, 36 (and also, for 1375’s Smithfield location, *DTR*, #896). For 1397 (after the coronation of Isabel, queen to Richard II), see *The Chronicle of John Hardyn [&] ... The Continuation by Richard Grafton*, Henry Ellis (ed) (London, 1812), 344. For 1390, see above, n 13.


36 Sally L. Joyce and Evelyn S. Newlyn (eds), *Cornwall*, REED (Toronto/European Union, 1999), 541–2.

37 Joyce and Newlyn (eds), *Cornwall*, 342; Devon (ed), *Issues of the Exchequer*, 244–5. Two later Cornish religious plays, one of them from the late 15th century, also involved multi-day performance: see *Cornwall*, 543–5, on ‘Beunans Meriasek’ and a later ‘Creacion of the World’.

38 Lancashire, *London Civic Theatre*, 155; London Mercers’ Company, MS Acts of Court I (Mercers’ Hall), ff 32v–33r. The MS entry refers to St Peter’s night (29 June), but the evening to morning of 28–29 June is clearly meant.


40 See Bale, *Chronicle*, 120.


44 Clerks in early London were not only men in the service of the church; clerks were also those, outside the church, who could read and write, and they filled various administrative positions (numerous in early London) which required such skills. Many served major institutions and households. The word could also cover students, or scholars, including those at the Inns of Court. See the complete *Oxford English Dictionary*, Clerk, *sb*. 
45 Mervyn James, ‘Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town’, *Past and Present* 98 (Feb. 1983), 24, n 79.