Entertainments at Hickling Priory, Norfolk, 1510–1520

Tanner MS 194 in the Bodleian Library was at its inception a register of ‘accompt’ kept by the Augustinian canons of Hickling Priory, in northeast Norfolk, during the early sixteenth century. Like other extant East Anglian conventual account books of the period, it yields a great deal of detailed and interesting information regarding the everyday income and expenditure of the house, and amongst the outgoings are a number of payments to visiting players, minstrels, and other entertainers. The manuscript does not appear to have received extensive attention, and the references to entertainers at the priory have remained largely unknown to historians of the theatre. They are therefore set out below.

Hickling Priory was founded in 1185 and flourished until 1536. It stood close to the coast of Norfolk, some fifteen miles northeast of Norwich; a few remains of the buildings are still visible. At the period from which the register survives usually nine or ten canons were in residence, together with their lay household. Mention of a grammar-master, or rather the absence of one in 1514, suggests that they had educational responsibilities. The somewhat chequered history of the house may be read in the Victoria County History of Norfolk, and some impression of its condition in the generation preceding the Dissolution may be gleaned from the reports of successive episcopal visitations after 1492.

The Hickling accounts were drawn up annually, the accounting period running from the feast of St Michael the Archangel (29 Sept) to the same day in the subsequent year. The payments to entertainers are recorded under the heading 'Forincece
soluciones et expensis cum donis datis et expensis in lege.' In the following transcriptions, the regnal dates have been modernized, and geographical and personal elucidations are provided where necessary in the footnotes.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 194

f 12v (29 Sept 1510 – 29 Sept 1511)

... Item hominibus de Bekkelze7 pro ludo in christipherio8 xij d.

f 34 (29 Sept 1512 – 29 Sept 1513)

... Item hominibus de Beccles et Walsingham pro ludo penultimo die decembri iij s. iij d.

f 75v (29 Sept 1515 – 29 Sept 1516)

... Item hominibus de norwico9 pro ludo in septimana natalis domini viij d.
Item hominibus de Wymondham pro ludo in eodem festo pro domino xvj d.
Item hominibus de northreps10 pro ludo in hoc [ludo] tempore per manus viij d.
Robertii aleyne11 ...

f 107v (29 Sept 1517 – 29 Sept 1518)

... Item le berward domini regis duodecimo die nouembris iij s. viij d.
... Item regijs histrianibus vocatis waytez xx d.

f 117v (29 Sept 1518 – 29 Sept 1519)

... Item In regardijs datis diuersis hominibus pro diuersis Interludis In tempore vij s. viij d.
natalis domini et Berwardijs videlicet domini regis et ducis suffolciae12 ...

f 131 (29 Sept 1519 – 29 Sept 2520)

... Item Cuidam vocatus le Bereward de le Beres domini de Oxford13 iiij d.
Item histrianibus domini prioris ecclesie sancte trinitatis14 de Norvico9 viij d.
NOTES


2 The Hickling register resembles those of Thetford Priory and Mettingham College, recently discussed elsewhere by the present writer (*Theatre Notebook*, 32, (1978), 4-11; *idem* 33 (1979), 125-31). It is a large paper volume (13 inches by 8½ inches), and the priory accounts occupy folios 1-145 in the early but post-medieval foliation. Thereafter are family accounts and memoranda of persons to whom Hickling passed after the Dissolution; see Hackman, *loc cit.*

3 J.E. Thorold Rogers noticed the MS in *Notes and Queries*, 5th Series, 10, (1878), 494, mentioning the reference to the king's waits in 1517-18; he used it in compiling his *History of Agriculture and Prices* (1888).


6 The system of accounting used in registers of this type is explained (in the case of the Thetford example) by J.T. Harvey in *Norfolk Archaeology*, 27 (1938-40), 4-6.

7 Beccles, Suffolk.

8 So in MS, and of uncertain meaning. ? 'Christmastime.'

9 Norwich.

10 Northrepps, near Cromer, Norfolk. The word 'ludo' is repeated after 'hoc' in this entry, but deleted.

11 Evidently a lay servant of the priory. He is often mentioned in the accounts.

12 Charles Brandon, ninth Duke of Suffolk.

13 John De Vere, fourteenth Earl of Oxford.

14 Robert Bronde, prior of Holy Trinity (the cathedral priory), Norwich, 1504-29.

JOHN WASSON

Records from the Abbey of St Benet of Hulme, Norfolk

A few account rolls containing early references to entertainment in Norfolk have recently been examined, though too late for inclusion in the forthcoming Malone Society Collections of the dramatic records of Norfolk and Suffolk (1980). One of the entries is of particular interest, as it contains a very early reference (1373) to a village play.

The abbey of St Benet of Hulme once stood in the Norfolk marshes, near the bank of the Ant a mile south of Ludham. Every trace of Hulme and of the abbey