Thomas Colthirst’s house, the former St Christopher and St George Guild property, was the
same occupied by Nicholas Bewyk, Thomas Cokke or Thomas Fleming (the spurrier or the
carver).

ALEXANDRA F. JOHNSTON

York pageant house: new evidence

While engaged in research for his volume of Coventry records for Records of Early
English Drama, Professor R.W. Ingram came across the following entry in the
Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellanea of the Public Records Office, London. It is
the notice of an inquisition taken in York 14 May, 1388 and it reads, "Men of divers
crafts (diverse artis) [held] divers pageants (erunt pagina diversa ludorum suorum)
within the hall of the palace; what they pay for the accommodation the jurors do
not know, but at Corpus Christi next ... will be known and the said Andrew will
answer the king therefor." The palace in question is the palace of the Archbishop
of York then within the precincts of the Minster.

Professor Ingram sent the reference to me and, at the next opportunity, I
followed it up. The document, PRO C145/240/14, is among a series of depositions
taken before Robert de Garton clerk and Richard Filongeley, the king’s commissioner.
It measures 30.5cm by 33.5cm with a severe water stain on the right hand edge.

The case concerns an enquiry into the way in which the various outbuildings of
the palace were being used. One Andrew Monymaker rented space to use as a small
mint; John de Feryby and Mariota de Patryngton rent part of the gardens as well as
storage space for trestles and forms while one William rents a cellar for an unspeci-
fied purpose. The majority of the payments specified in the document are for
storage space. The portion concerning the pageants reads,

...Item dicunt quod homines diverse artis (...)erunt3 paginas diversas
ludorum suorum infra aulam dicti palacij & quantum dant pro asiameto
dice aule habendi iam ignorant set in festo corporis christi proximo
futuro (...) & dictis andreas inde respondebit domino-Regi ...

(Item they say that men of different craft guilds (...) various pageant
wagons of their plays within the hall of the said palace and how much
they pay for the use of the said hall they do not now know but at the
feast of Corpus Christi next following (...) and the said Andrew will
respond to the lord king concerning this matter).
The parts of the document that are now illegible tease the imagination. However, it is quite clear that this is a record concerning not the performing of pageants (as the historian who calendared the documents assumed) but rather the storing of pageant wagons. This evidence adds to our understanding of where the craft guilds stored their wagons from one performance of the York Corpus Christi Play to the next. From the Bridgemasters' Rolls we have evidence for the storage of the wagons of the Skinners, Dyers, Tanners, Tapiters, Carpenters, Cordwainers, Goldsmiths, Weavers, Chandlers, Coopers, Girdlers, Bakers, and Mercers. There are also several years where a general entry for the storage of wagons of 'diverse crafts' appears in the Bridgemasters' accounts along with the named rentals. From the Bakers' Accounts we learn that the Pinners and Painters rented space in property belonging to the Bakers while the Butchers, Bowers, and Fletchers rented space from the Mercers. In documents published in York Records, therefore, the pageant wagons of eighteen named crafts are accounted for as well as a limited number of others. This new document gives us yet another location for the storage of wagons within the precincts of the bishop's palace. The deposition pre-dates by thirty-six years the first surviving evidence from the Bridgemasters' Accounts and may, indeed, refer to a rental space that fell into disuse. No evidence survives in the Minster itself concerning this matter. Nevertheless, the chance discovery of this new evidence once again underlines our need to be cautious in interpreting the meaning of record evidence. The records of only the Pinners and the Mercers survive of all the guilds of York. If those two guilds, who themselves rented space from the city on Toft Green, accommodated the wagons of five smaller crafts, we must assume that other guilds let space for wagons as well. The fact that the bishop's agents let accommodation to guilds is, perhaps, an indication that, had the financial records of the other religious establishments in York survived, we would be able to account for all the wagons needed to perform the York cycle in procession. The survival of evidence is frequently a matter of chance. To build theories on the absence of evidence is to build on unsure foundations indeed.

NOTES
1 Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery), V, 1387-93 (London, 1962), 74.
2 I wish to thank Professor Ingram for bringing this document to my attention.
3 The water stain here obliterates 3.75 cm of text. 'erunt' is clearly a verb ending whose stem is obliterated.
4 The water stain here obliterates 2.25 cm of text. I could not read (in 1981) the word translated by the compiler of the calendar as 'will be known.'
6 I have corresponded with Mr. Bernard Barr of York Minster Library about this document.