Records of Early English Drama

REED's interest in a variety of dramatic activities is illustrated by the papers in this issue. David Mills (University of Liverpool) notes the Puritan hostility, exemplified by John Bruen in Cheshire, to various entertainments, while Caroline Balderston Parry (PLS, Toronto) and Michael Heaney (Bodleian Library) discuss two of those forms of amusement: Mrs Parry, in a paper originally given as a talk in the REED/PLS series 'Recreating the early stage', provides information on Maypoles; Mr Heaney, on the term 'fiddler'.

DAVID MILLS

'Bishop Brian' and the dramatic entertainments of Cheshire

A Faithfull Remonstrance of the Holy Life and Happy Death of John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford in the County of Chester Esquire, published in 1641, is a biography well known to historians but, so far as I am aware, little used by those interested in the drama and related activities in north-west England. Its author, William Hinde, was a Puritan preacher at the village of Bunbury, near Chester, from 1603 until his death in 1629. His subject, John Bruen, was born at nearby Bruen-Stapleford in 1560 and died in 1625. The book is a characteristically Puritan 'saint's life' biography 'usefull for all sorts and Sexes, but principally intended, as a Path and a President of Piety and Charity for the Inhabitants of the Famous County Palatine of Chester.' It documents the career of this Cheshire squire and, in particular, his extreme Puritanical zeal in the organisation of his own life, his household, and the spiritual welfare of the parish of Tarvin. Though primarily a fascinating revelation of the Puritan mind of its subject and also its author, the book is of interest to the drama-historian as a hostile witness to various entertainments of sixteenth-century Cheshire. It indicates the attitudes and values that prevailed against those activities and reveals the ingenuity with which groups of influential Puritans devised practical measures against them.

Hinde's opening sections describe the unregenerate youth of Bruen, a condition which he attributes to the negligence of the Roman Catholic Church. Sent for education to the
household of his uncle Dutton, he was drawn into the dancing-school there. Later, when a married man of 21, 'he was much addicted to the customary and ordinary exercises and recreations of hunting and hawking, following the courses, and affecting the company of such Gentlemen, as being of note and quality, took pleasure in such things' (p 28). At one time he kept six brace of hunting dogs. In his later life, Bruen served as a model to the landowners 'who had much rather spend much of their estate in maintaining idle and base persons to serve their owne lusts, and satisfie the humour of a rude and profane people, as many do their Hors-riders, Faulkeners, Huntsmen, Lords of misrule, Pipers and Minstrels' (p 86). Hinde picks up the same contrast some pages further on: 'And these would I willingly commend in the example of this Gentleman (to be duly considered, and diligently followed) unto many of our Gentlemen, and to many of inferior ranck also, that they would make an exchange of their vaine and profane exercises of May-games and Summer-greenes, of their Foot-races, and Horse-races, of their weekly and almost daily meetings and matches on their Bowling Greenes, of their lavish betting of great wagers in such sorry trifles, and of their stout and strong abetting of so sillie vanities, amongst hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of rude and vile persons...' (p 104).

Hinde clearly felt that it was the responsibility of a man of rank to purge his household of servants kept for private sport and entertainment, and also to set an example to the general populace by not engaging in public sport and revel — including the 'folk-activities' of May-games and Summer-greenes, though evidently many felt otherwise.

Bruen was, however, not only an exemplary squire but an active and zealous reformer. His family had its own chapel in Tarvin church and the right to appoint the Preacher to the living, and Bruen felt a special responsibility towards the local church, still with its pre-Reformation glass and ornaments:

Finding in the Church of Taruin, in his owne Chappell, which of ancient right did appertaine unto him and his family, many superstitious images, and idolatrous pictures in the painted windowes, and they so thicke, and darke that there was, as he himselfe saith, scarce the breadth of a grot of white glasse amongst them, he, knowing by the truth of God, that though the Papists will have Images to bee lay mens bookes, yet they teach no other lessons but of lyes.... Hee presently tooke order, to pull downe all these painted puppets, and popish idols, in a warrantable and peaceable manner, and of his owne cost and charge, repaired the breaches, and beautified the windows with white and bright glasse againe (pp 78-9).

And from the family chapel, Bruen continued throughout the church 'defacing all the popish and superstitious images' (p 80).

Hinde stesses that this was an act of piety and personal charity. Davidson comments that in Elizabeth's time 'the cost of replacing so much glass with plain white glass was prohibitive within the limited budgets allowed to the churches during this period,' but Bruen undertook it 'of his owne cost.' And Hinde moreover defends the legality of the action, done 'in a warrantable and peaceable manner,' and cites in its defence 'the Queenes Injunctions' and 'the Authority of a Commission sent down into the countrey to the Earle of Derby, the Major of Chester, and others to the same purpose.' The defence was a necessary one. In 1559 it was proclaimed that curates

shall take away, utterly extinct, and destroy all shrines, covering of shrines, all tables, candlesticks, trindles, and rolls of wax, pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages,
idolatry, and superstition, so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glasses, window, or elsewhere within their churches and houses.

Bruen evidently felt that he acted within this injunction. But in 1560 a second proclamation was issued to check the wholesale damage being done to the churches:

Her majesty chargeth and commandeth all manner of persons hereafter to forbear the breaking or defacing of any parcel of any monument, or tomb, or grave, or other inscription and memory of any person deceased being in any manner of place, or to break any image of Kings, princes, or noble estates of this realm, or of any other that have been in times past erected and set up for the only memory of them to their posterity in common churches and not for any religious honor, or to break down or deface any image in glass windows in any church without consent of the ordinary.8

Bruen’s action in replacing the windows ran counter to the spirit of the second proclamation. He certainly acted unilaterally in treating the family chapel as his private property, and Hinde is clearly concerned to deflect criticism of the legality of the extension or the process to the ‘common church.’

This was far from the only occasion on which Bruen turned the letter of the law to his own ends. His greatest concern was the failure of the country to observe the Sabbath Day fittingly:

The principall occasion of his parents errour, and his own vanity, taking such and so great pleasure in these pleasures of sinne, was (as he himselfe hath since observed and acknowledged under his hand) the popish and profane estate and condition of the people and countrey round about them in those dayes, for at that time (saith he) “The holy Sabbaths of the Lord were wholly spent in all places about us, in May-poles and May-games, Pipings and Dancings, for it was a rare thing to heare of a Preacher or to have one Sermon in a yeare, all living prophanely in ignorance or in error” (pp 11–12).

Bruen voices a frequent Puritan complaint — witness the 1590 document The Manifold Enormities in the Ecclesiastical State in the most partes of the Countie of Lancaster: and many of them in some partes also of Cheshire:

Wackes, Ales, Greenes, Maigaimes, Ruchbarings, Beare-baites, Doveales, Bonfiers, all maner vnlawfull Gaming, Pipinge and Daunsinge, and suche like, ar in all places frely exercised vppon e Sabboth.9

Sunday had been traditionally a festival day before the Reformation, and the right to engage in ‘lawful exercises’ on Sunday after divine service was enshrined in post-Reformation legislation. Thus the Lancashire JPs in 1590 prohibited:

pipes and minstrels playing, making and frequenting bear-baiting, bull-baiting on the Sabbath days or upon other days in time of divine service;
as also against superstitious ringing of bells, wakes, and common feasts; drunkenness, gaming and other vicious and unprofitable pursuits. The extension of such local prohibition in 1616 to 'piping, Dancinge, bowlinge or beare or bull-baitinge or any other profanacion upon any Saboth Day in any parte of the Day; or upon any festivall day in tyme of Devyne service' underlay the protests made to the King during his passage through Lancashire in 1617 and led to Thomas Morton, Bishop of Chester, drafting that year a local countermand which in 1618 was issued by the King generally - The Book of Sports. The preamble to the Book complains that people are punished 'for vsinge theire lawfull recreations and honest exercises vapon sondaies and other holidaies after the afternoone sermone or service' - a state blamed upon 'two sortes of people whearwththat cuntrie [Lancashire] is too much infected (wee meane Papists & Puritanes...).' Hence the law is affirmed:

That after the end of Diuine Seruice, or good people bee not letted or discoraged from any vnlawfull recreacion such as Pypinge, Dansinge either men or women, archerie for men, leapinge valtinge or anie such harmles recreation & the women to have leave to Carrie rushes to the Church for the decoringe of it accordinge to their ould Custome but weth all wee doe heare accounte still as prohibited as vnlawfull games to be vsed upon sondaies onelie as beare & Bull beatinge enterludes & bowlinge.

Such a lenient view, albeit supported by his Bishop, was unlikely to appeal to Bruen, as the weary preamble with its reference to Puritans suggests. Bruen was nephew to the Duttons of Dutton, in whose household he was educated. Later, his cousin Thomas Dutton stayed with Bruen, and Bruen was able to agree with him on a measure which to some degree circumvented the law. The Dutton family had the right to licence minstrels at a special annual court in Chester. Documents relating to the court in 1478–9 and 1495–6 are extant, and there are seventeenth-century accounts of the origins and procedures of the court. The minstrels made a special appearance in 1540 at the double wedding of two daughters of Sir Piers Dutton. Bruen sought to modify the terms of the licence:

At the same time my cosen Dutton, being pressed and charged by some of great place to mainteine his Royalty of Minstrelsey for Piping and Daunsing on the Sabbath day, my Minister, my selfe, and my family were earnest against it, and prevailed so far with my cosen Dutton, that he promised that all Piping and Dauncing should cease on the Sabbath day, both forenoone and afternoon, and so his Licences were made, and do continue so untill this day. And so wee had great peace and comfort together, blessed be God (p 131).

Though the exact date of the change is not known, Thomas died in 1614 and the biography cannot be later than 1629. The incident is a further example of private local Puritan initiative against national decree, the terms of the licence running counter to the law of the land.

Bruen's other major initiative against local entertainment concerned the Tarvin Wakes. Here Bruen took advantage of the law prohibiting entertainments during divine service
to mount what was effectively an ecclesiastical filibuster:

Against S. Andrews day, which is the time of Taruin Wakes, and the weeke followinge, I observed (saith he [Bruen]) many years together, to invite two or three of the best affected Preachers in the Diocesse, that spent most part of three dayes in preaching and praying in the Church, so as the Pipers and Fidlers, and Bearewardes, and Players and Gamesters had not time left for their vanities, but went away with great fretting (p 90).

Again, the private individual used his rights to prevent the intended conclusion of the law. Bruen’s objections to the Wakes seem, in fact, to have had two aspects – the celebration of a saint’s day and the excess which accompanied it:

Now because popery and profannes two sisters in will had consented, and conspired in this Parish, as in many other places together, to advance their idols against the Arke of God and to celebrate their solemne feasts of their popish saints, as being Dii Tutelares, the speciall patrons and protectors of their Church and Parish, by their Wakes and Vigils, kept in commemoration and honour of them, in all riot and excesse of eating and drinking, dalliance and dancing, sporting and gaming, and other abominable pieties and idolatries...(p 89).

A less obvious manifestation of Bruen’s influence may lie in his relationship with the Hardware family. His first wife, Elizabeth, was the daughter of Henry Hardware, ‘a worthy and wise gentleman, having been twice Major of the City of Chester’ [in 1559–60 and 1575–6]. It was Bruen’s father-in-law who had to draw up the document exonerating Sir John Savage from responsibility for the final production of Chester’s mystery cycle in 1575.17 His son, Elizabeth’s brother, was also called Henry, and he and his household stayed with Bruen. In consequence he ‘set up religion in his family ... And so afterwards being Major of Chester, he that yeare shewed his religion very graciously [cl: gloriously] in his government’ (p 99). Something of what this implied may be seen in the following passage from one of Chester’s Mayors’ Lists:

This mayor [Hardware] was a godly zealous man, yet he gott ill will amongst the Commons, for putting downe some anchient orders, in the Cittie and amongst some companyes, especially the shoemakers, whose he much opposed, he cause the giants which vs[e] to goe at midsomer to be broken. The bull ringe at the highe crosse to be taken vp. The dragon and naked boyes he suffered not to goe in midsomer showe nor the diuell for the Butchers, but aboye to ride as other companyes. he restrayned their leaue-lookers for sendinge wine, on the [em:feastifull] dayes, according to their anchant vse and Custome.18

while another claims that “This Maior for his tyme Altered many ancient Customs as ye shootings for the sherifs Breakefast the goinge of the gyants at Midsomer etc., and would not suffer any playes beare Baits or Bullbaites.”19

It is all too easy to dismiss a man like John Bruen as a religious fanatic and eccentric. In fact, he was an influential figure, cousin of Sir Robert Harley20 and distantly connected, through the Duttons, with the Egerton family. Lady Egerton, daughter-in-
law of the Chancellor, Sir Thomas Egerton, stayed with Bruen and was evidently influenced by his life and belief. He epitomises the committed, skilful and politically able opposition to drama and quasi-dramatic entertainment in the north-west of England in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Such was his authority in the area that he could comment wryly of himself that 'I have bin longe called Buschop Brian.'

NOTES

1 Printed in London in 1641 by 'R. B. for Philemon Stephens and Christopher Meredith' for sale at 'the Golden Lyon in Saint Paul's Church.' The book was published posthumously by Samuel Hinde, the author's son, who offers it to Sir James Stanley as an example. Two copies of the book are in the Library of Chetham's Hospital, Manchester. For this article I used a microfilm of the book initially and have verified quotations against the Chetham's copies.

Chetham's Library also has a manuscript of the work written in two seventeenth-century hands, ms 11368. [ct.] Though claimed by Ormerod and by DNB as the author's copy, the manuscript is -- as the Library's catalogue shows -- a fair copy. The paper pages of the manuscript are numbered consecutively. On p 132 scribe 2 has incorporated margin-notes into the body of the text and scribe 1 notes in the margin 'Thus far is marginal writing,' indicating the manuscript's status as copy. Since the manuscript does not contain errors in the arrangement of material found in the printed text, it is not a copy of the printed text. Its readings, however, do not substantively differ from those in the printed text. The manuscript was presented to Chetham's by Rear-Admiral William Harington in 1857 in recognition of the connexion with the Hospital held by his family. He had found the manuscript in the papers of his uncle, Rvd D. Harington, Rector of St George's Church. The only clue to its earlier history is the name 'Catharine hunbridg' written vertically from bottom to top of p 49 in the left margin.

2 On William Hinde, see DNB 9, p 894.

3 On John Bruen, see DNB 3, pp 139-42 and the full pedigree of the family printed in G. Ormerod, A History of the County Palatine of Chester (1882), 2, pp 322–3. His will is in the Cheshire County Record Office. Extensive use is made of the biography by R.C. Richardson, Puritanism in North-west England: a regional study of the diocese of Chester to 1642 (Manchester, 1972).

4 summer-greenes presumably refers to the practice of carrying May-garlands in English villages. Bowling greens seem to have been a sixteenth-century formalisation of the playing-area for a popular medieval pastime; an accompanying development was the introduction of the biased bowl. See John Armitage, Man at Play: Nine Centuries of Pleasure (New York, 1977), 53–4.

5 The duties in Puritan-orientated churches were divided between the Curate, who was responsible for the conduct of the services, the prayers, responses etc, and the Preacher, whose duty was to give the sermon.

6 Clifford Davidson, Drama and Art (Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 1; Kalamazoo, 1977), 18.


8 id, Proclamation 469, pp 146–7.


10 Quoted in Minor Prose Works of King James vi and i, edited by James Craigie (Scottish Text Society; Edinburgh, 1982), 218. On the 'superstitious' ringing of bells, see Raines, 6–7, where complaint is made of the practices both of ringing bells during burials and of ringing them on the day and night of the burial and on the anniversary of the death.

11 id, quoted on 218.
Craigie's collected edition offers the most recent text of the book, here used. It presented the 1617 and 1618 versions on facing papers. The 1617 text is here quoted.

Ormerod, 1, p 651 gives the pedigree of the Dutton family.
id, 43–4.

Ormerod, 2, p 333 gives the pedigree of the Hardware family.
Harley 1944, fols 90–90v, in Clopper, 197.
Harley 2133, fol 46, in Clopper, 198.

Quoted by Collinson, 169.

CAROLINE BALDERSTON PARRY

‘The Maypole is up, now give me the cup…’

Onlookers at the 1983 Chester Cycle or the 1985 Towneley Cycle productions at the University of Toronto were delighted to see an additional, pretty spectacle: Maypole dancing. In the intervals between plays, as a part of the craft fair entertainment, I led a willing assortment of volunteer dancers through the over-and-under motions of simple Maypole ribbon weaving. Sometimes the red, yellow, blue and green ribbons got tangled, but more often we were successful at producing a beautiful pattern of motion and woven colours gradually extending down the pole — and then we would reverse our movements and unwind. Sometimes we had musicians; sometimes the audience helped out by singing a tune for us!

What both dancers and audience perhaps did not realize was that the ribbons which looked so pretty were entirely anachronistic. In English tradition, Maypole dances with hand-held ribbons, woven around short poles as part of a ‘show dance’, go back to the mid-18th century at the earliest. Otherwise, people did simple country dances such as ‘Sellenger’s Round’ or ‘Gathering Peascods’ around the foot of the pole itself, or in a circle nearby. The early pole (often painted in barbershop spirals) was decorated with streamers and garlands of flowers, and was usually quite tall — too tall for the kind of ribbons we wove at the Cycle fairs. A few of these old-style poles still survive in England today, such as at Barwick-in-Elmet, near Leeds, or at Padstow, in Cornwall.

Ribbon dancing, generally thought of as an Italian import, became fashionable in the mid-19th century, just when many older popular sports and recreations were fading out of English folk life. When education became compulsory in the 1880s, the spread of ribbon Maypole dances was furthered by a new generation of lady school teachers who enjoyed such genteel exercise. The Victorian love of the floreate and of innocent childhood (rather indiscriminately mixed up with a penchant for all things ‘Olde English’) contributed to the popularity of the new Maypole dances as well. Ribbon dancing became the dominant Maypole style, resulting in such compromises as one still seen today at Ickwell, in Bedfordshire, where ribbons have been attached about one third of the way up a tall red and white pole and the dancers wear mock rustic costumes of an uncertain period.

Even the ribbon-style Maypole dances faded into obscurity in England by the time