Some suggested emendations to Records of Early English Drama: Coventry

In working with both the reed volume for Coventry and the original accounts of the Cappers' guild of Coventry, I have come across one or two errors and omissions in reed: Coventry, which I feel it will be helpful to point out to other students using the volume. In doing so I am responding to the invitation to provide comments and corrections given in that volume (viii). Some of these points are in themselves minor but should be corrected lest they contribute to confusion on more important points concerning the Coventry Cappers' pageant. The matter of Robert Crow is one of great importance to the Coventry drama, and here I hope that I can both provide some new information on which to speculate and also clear up some earlier evidence which has been misconstrued.

The first two points concern the earliest accounts, which are of less interest to students of the drama, as they predate the Cappers' production of a pageant in the Corpus Christi cycle. Folio 1v col a of the Cappers' accounts contains a list of armor bought by the guild (reed: Coventry, 450-51). The ninth item in this list 'Item payed ffor a boklar' is given as costing 'ij s xvj d'. This should read simply 'xvj d', the 'ij s' having evidently crept in from the line below. I also believe that there is an error in the second item in the list, 'Item payed ffor a stondare of mayll gosetes & a ffalle ij s viij d'. This ought to be 'vj s viij d'. It should be noted that the amount of 6s 8d when added with the other items in the list agrees with the total given in the accounts (`xxx s [v] d ijd'). This total has been corrected by the scribe, but not even the uncorrected amount agrees with the amount reached by using 2s 8d for the second item. Although the addition of the accounts is sometimes in error, it is unlikely that the scribe himself, when adding up, misread the amount in question as 6s 8d. His correction of the total amount would indicate that he was taking especial care. Furthermore, 6s 8d, or half a mark, is a common figure to find in the accounts.

These are, as I have said, very minor points, but the others to which I would draw attention are more important. The first concerns Pilate's club. The possibility of Pilate's having had two clubs has been strengthened by the appearance in reed: Coventry (288) of a payment in 1578 for 'mendinge pylates gowne and his clvbbes'. However, the word on folio 115r of the Cappers' accounts is definitely 'clvbbe' in the singular. This does not completely dispose of the possibility of Pilate's having had two clubs, as there is a reference in the 1567 inventory to 'pylates mawlle & his clobe' (240). However, the Demon is also known to have had a mall, which is not mentioned in the 1567 inventory and which may in fact have been misascribed to Pilate. There are separate references to Pilate's mall in the accounts, but never elsewhere in conjunction with the club. On the whole, the usages seem to fall into two periods, with 'mall' being the preferred term from 1549 to 1553, and 'club' from 1576 to 1579.

Also associated with Pilate are the leather balls first mentioned in reed: Coventry in 1543, when 3d was paid for them (163). There is, however, an earlier reference to a
payment of 2d for balls in 1539 (Cappers’ Accounts, f 90r col a). This item does not appear in the pageant expenses of that year, but it is impossible to imagine that they were anything else than the pageant balls. As Pilate’s club is not mentioned as being made until 1540, it would seem that the balls either predated the club, or that both had been acquired from the Cardmakers and were being gradually renewed. The pageant expenses for the years between 1534 and 1539 are not itemized, so that it is impossible to tell what other replacements or improvements were made in the early years of the Cappers’ control of the pageant.

A final point concerns the important but elusive figure of Robert Crow. Writer or reviser of pageants, actor, and maker of properties, he is extremely important to the study of drama in Coventry, although it is not known for certain how many men of this name were involved in the civic drama. Professor Ingram has, however, created a ‘ghost’ Robert Crow with his endnote concerning the accounts of 1520–21. Robert Crow was Master of the Craft in that year, and Professor Ingram considers that the entry ‘Robert Crow mayd breder’ indicates that perhaps another Robert Crow was made a member of the guild at that time (116, 562). However, there is no mention of entry fines to be paid, and earlier in the same column is an entry ‘Rest to the craft for bowyth quarterage xxxj s (.) ij d and the be quyte with the craft & dyschardes & all the same Thomas Coton & Robert Crowe mayd breder’. Thomas Coton was the other Master in that year, and a list follows headed ‘Memorandum at Thomas Coton mayd (owte) breder’, which is in turn followed by that which Robert Crow’s name heads (Cappers’ Accounts, f 25v col b). Also the ‘e’ in ‘breder’ is more likely to indicate a plural than a singular. It would appear, then, that Robert Crow was not himself made brother in 1520, but was responsible as Master for making five other brothers.

I have also found two other mentions of the name Robert Crow which I believe have not been noted. The first is of a Robert Crowe who is recorded in 1532/33 as having married Joyce Botiler, co-heir with her three sisters of the manor of Alspath. Her father, Thomas Botiler, died in 1523, leaving a life-interest in the property to his wife Margery. The heirs later sold the property to Roger Wigson or Wigston, who died in 1542. Roger Wigston was Recorder of the City of Coventry from 1529 to 1541, and Alspath (now Meriden) lies not far from Coventry, so that it is possible that the Robert Crowe in question was a Coventry man. This does not mean that he was either Robert Crow the Capper or Robert Crow the Pageant-Reviser, but it raises interesting matter for speculation. If Robert Crow the Capper did marry Joyce Botiler, it would account for his ability to leave off his trade of capping (and possibly devote himself to pageantry?). On the other hand, he disappears from the Cappers’ accounts by 1525 at the latest, and there is no suggestion how he might have spent the seven years between then and his marriage. Nor does Robert Crow the Capper seem wealthy enough to aspire to the hand of the co-heiress of a manor, although he may have gained wealth during the seven undocumented years. The connection between Robert Crow the Pageant-Reviser and the husband of Joyce Botiler is even vaguer. All that can be said is that if they were one and the same, then Robert Crow was of a fairly high social standing. It is easier to imagine a man of some wealth having both the time and the education to undertake the work of revising pageants. If he were actually living at
Alspath between 1532 and 1542 when the manor was sold, it might account in part for his absence from guild records between 1535 and 1556.

Although there is silence in all the records of the craft guilds concerning Robert Crow between 1535 and 1556, there is a possible mention of him elsewhere. On 28 July 1545 a grant to John Combes senior and Richard Stansfelde of Coventry priory land included one messuage in the tenure of Robert Crewe. The land, located in Westorchard Street, which ran off Crosscheaping to the west, curving down to join Smithford Street at its far end, was in Crosscheaping ward. The earlier Robert Crow of the Cappers' Accounts is listed as living in Baileylane ward in 1522. Although Bailey lane ward and Crosscheaping ward are next to each other, Westorchard Street is on the west of Crosscheaping, while Bailey lane lies to the east. It is unlikely that Westorchard Street was ever in Bailey lane ward. This could indicate either that there were two Robert Crows, or that Robert Crow had two properties in the city, or even that he had left the Bailey lane property to go to Alspath and acquired the Westorchard Street property when he returned. Most of the questions concerning Robert Crow can probably never be satisfactorily answered, but I hope that this article has raised some new possibilities for consideration.

NOTES

1 Editor's note: Professor Reg Ingram, editor of REED: Coventry (London and Manchester, 1981), was at the time of his death engaged in making revisions and corrections to his volume in preparation for a major work on the social history of Coventry. A search through Prof Ingram's papers on Coventry has revealed that he had discovered some of the matters Dr Baldwin points out: 'my misread ... mea culpa' is his rough note of acknowledgement.

2 Mr Peter Meredith has kindly looked at a photographic reproduction of the folio in question, supplied by The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and agrees that the word is in the singular.

3 The exception is 1550, when 'cloobe' is used (REED: Coventry, 185; 'malle', 182, 187, 194; 'clvbbe', 277, 288, 291).


5 M.D. Harris, The Coventry Leet Book: or Mayor's Register, Containing the Records of the City Court Leet or View of Frank Pledge, A.D. 1420–1555, with Divers Other Matters, 4 parts, EETS OS 134, 135, 138, 146 (London, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1913), 696–746.


7 A Graund Subsedy collected in this Citye of Coventry 1522, Coventry, City Record Office (lithograph copy; original destroyed by enemy action November, 1940), f 13v.