Anti-Catholic Plays, Puppet Shows, and Horse-Racing in Reformation Lancashire

Since the publication of the *REED Lancashire* volume (1991), material that affects two endnotes has come to light, along with an item that would have gone into the Records text. In this article I propose first to argue for a more precise date for Bishop Cuthbert Scott's visitation articles for the Diocese of Chester. Second, I want to show that William Sandes' travelling puppet-show called 'The Chaos' was much more well-known than I had supposed; and thirdly, I wish to gather in one more Lancashire horse-racing record.

**BISHOP SCOTT'S UNDATED VISITATION ARTICLES**

Cuthbert Scott was bishop of Chester from 1556 to 1559, for which diocese he wrote some undated Visitation Articles, now preserved in the Greater Manchester Record Office. In the *REED Lancashire* volume, they have been assigned the date 1556–8. Bishop Scott was concerned in his Visitation Articles to learn of any 'assembles or conventicles wherein is redprevie lecturs sermons [or] playes to thindrance or derysion of the Catholike faythe.' The impression given by these few words is that of a Catholic bishop still secure in his diocesan seat, but afraid of subversive and anti-Catholic material being more or less clandestinely disseminated. (A 'conventicle' was a subversive thing shortly after the time of Henry VIII, who died in 1547, as *OED*’s meaning 4 of the word makes clear, especially the quotation from Ridley in 1550: 'unlawful or private conventicles ... separating themselves from the rest of the parish.') As Mary's reign wore on, however, such subversive material must have become more abundant as the chances of a Protestant succession became more likely.

When Mary died on 17 November 1558, Elizabeth acceded and was crowned on 15 January 1558/9. This is precisely the period when we might expect Bishop Scott to fear that anti-Catholicism would erupt in his diocese. One might object that even in
1556 Reginald Pole, archbishop of Canterbury, was concerned with 'sowers of discord betwene neighbours, by plaies, rymes, famous libels, or otherwise' in his archbiocesan injunctions, but Pole's phrasing indicates that he did not face Scott's problem of anti-Catholic plays. These were being performed in London by 6 February 1558/9, that is, within a month after Elizabeth's coronation. On that date, Il Schifanoya, a Mantuan resident in London, wrote to Ottaviano Vivaldino, the Mantuan ambassador in Brussels, concerning an outbreak of anti-Catholicism in London. 'There are yet many frivolous and foolish people who daily invent plays in derision of the Catholic faith, of the Church, of the clergy, and of religion, and, by placards posted at the corners of the streets they invite people to the taverns, to see these representations, taking money from their audience.' Here is almost the exact phrasing Scott used, 'plyas to th[e] ... derysion of the Catholike faythe.' The London plays were put on in the taverns, and since these were the days before the building of Burbage's Theatre in Shoreditch, we may guess that the taverns in question were the inn-playhouses such as the Bel Savage, the Bell, the Cross Keys, the Bull, and the Boar's Head, all occasional playhouses in 1578 and probably for twenty years before that.

It is a little difficult to imagine what Bishop Scott had to fear in the north of England. In his whole diocese he had only two towns of any importance, Chester and Manchester, but it was probably in one or both of these that anti-Catholic plays were being put on. The best candidate is Manchester, which had been John Bradford's base for his protestant reformist preaching in 1552. The Marian government arrested him and martyred him in London in 1555. Manchester would have been ready to avenge its native son when the chance came in 1558/9, and probably that is what Scott feared when he wrote his Articles. I believe they should be dated 1558–9 rather than 1556–8, as they are now in the REED. Lancashire volume. If this were the real date, one must admire Scott's boldness. He was in any case a bold bishop; he spoke against the Queen's ecclesiastical authority on 17 March 1558/9, was incarcerated in the Fleet prison on 4 April, and was deprived of his bishopric on 26 June. He remained in the Fleet until 1563 and was then allowed to leave England for Louvain. Thus he had probably written the articles between November 1558 and March 1558/9.

PUPPET SHOWS AS REPLACEMENTS FOR CORPUS CHRISTI PLAYS

Corpus Christi plays continued in Lancashire (at Preston and Lancaster) until 'the beginning of the raigne of King Iamnes.' The Preston Corpus Christi play was, to John Weever, the same as or similar to an eight-day play at Skinners' Hall in London in 1409 which covered 'the sacred Scriptures, from the creation of the world.' Naturally the Corpus Christi plays at Preston and Lancaster were Catholic, and so an educated Catholic – perhaps a priest – seems to have attempted to supply the loss of the Preston play by composing a new cycle in 1609 or soon thereafter. He failed, and on that note I closed the matter in Appendix 6 ('The Stonyhurst Pageants') of the Lancashire volume.

Such a conclusion was incomplete, since also among the Preston records is a will dated 1638 with a brief bequest of a show called 'The Chaos.' This was William Sandes' puppet show, which he bequeathed along with its wagon, stage, and tools to his son.
John Sandes. Almost certainly puppet shows like ‘The Chaos’ filled the gap left by the suppression of mystery plays in the late sixteenth century and therefore the point should have been made in the *Lancashire* volume, as it is easy to realize by hindsight, that they were overwhelming competition for pedestrian efforts like the Stonyhurst Pageants. I had no idea how overwhelming, however, until I wrote to George Speaight, the author of *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (1955), who sent me much valuable information on William Sandes and his once-famous show.9

William Sandes was licensed on 27 August 1623 by Sir Henry Herbert to show “the Chaos of the World;” to show a motion called the *Creation of the World*.10 Here are two clearly distinct shows, yet readers of my endnote to the 1638 bequest of William Sandes will find a confident speculation to the effect that ‘The Chaos’ was about Genesis 1:1–2 and also about Creation (the Chaos dealing with the Creation story).11 Sir Henry Herbert’s licence makes matters clear.

In 1630, Sandes, his two sons, and about nine others took their shows to Beaminster in Dorset. The Dorset Quarter Sessions Orders tell what happened on their arrival:

1630

*Dorset Quarter Sessions Order Book 1625–37*

ff 272v–273r (16–18 October)

Order versus poppet players

fforasmuch as complaint was made vnto this Court that William Sands the elder John Sands and William Sands the younger doe wander vp and downe the Country and about nine others of their Company with certaine blasphemous shewes and sights which they exercise by way of poppett playinge contrary to the Statute made against such vnlawfull wanderers. And whereas the Constable of Beaminster in this County and other inhabitants there haue now alsoe informed this Court that the said William Sands thelder and his Company are come to Beaminister aforesaid and there haue sett vp their shewes of poppett playinge and there doe exercise their feats not only in the day tyme but alsoe late in the night to the great disturbance of the Townsmen there, and the grievance of divers of the Inhabitants who cannot keepe their Children and servants in their houses by reason that they frequent the said shewes and sights late in the night in a disorderly manner. And likewise that the said John Sands and two other of their company on Sunday last pursued the precher that preched at Beaminster aforesaid from the Church to his house and entred the said house and there challenged him for his sermon and gave him threateninge speeches and likewise that on Tuesday night last there was an vproare in the said Towne of Beamister by reason of a brawle between the said John Sands and a disorderly inhabitant of the same Towne, the said John runninge in a forceible manner into a Townsmans house there to the afrightinge of the people of the same house: Wherevpon this Court takinge the said complaint and Informacion into consideracion and findinge the same to be true. And father consideringe the great dearth of Corne and other victuals at this time and the extremity that is like to come on the poore of this Countrye by reason of the said dearth/ and alsoe by two severall Proclamacons his Maiestie hath
commanded the puttinge in execution the Law and Statutes against such wanderers, doe hold it very vnfit and inconvenient to suffer the said Sands and his company to exercise their said feats in this Country. It is therefore by this Court ordered that the said William Sands the elder John Sands and William Sands the yonger shall remove themselfes and their shewes on Monday next and shall then forthwith departe out of this County and that neither they nor any of them or any of their Company shall henceforth use or exercise their said feats or shew the said sights in this County but shall forthwith depart out of the County toward the place of their dwellinge/ And if they or any of them shall againe use or exercise their said feats or make shew of their sights within this County That then the Constables Tythingmen or other officers of the place where they shall doe exercise their said feats or shew their said sights shall convey all the said parties soe offending contrary to this order before some one of his Maiestys Justices of the peace neare or next adioyninge to the place where they shall doe offend to be by him bound over to the then next Assizes to be held in and for this County and in the meanes ytm to be of the good behavior towards the kings Maiestie and all his Leige people.12

Sandes' shows must have been big affairs, requiring a dozen men to work them, and capable of being illuminated for night performances. They were probably similar to what William Davenant called 'Op'ra-Puppets' in 1668.13 I think therefore that 'The Chaos' must have been some kind of enlargement of Genesis 1.1. Quincy Adams thought it might refer to 'The end of the world, doomsday?' and Speaight thought it might even have been about the Flood.14 These strike me as unlikely guesses, and it is probably the charge of blasphemy that gives the clue to the actual subject matter. 'The Chaos' may have represented God creating the world, as He was represented in the old Corpus Christi plays, but now in the form of a hand puppet, and surely that is what irked the puritanical preacher of Beaminster. The order of the two Sandes shows as given by Sir Henry Herbert suggests the order found in Genesis – that is, Chaos followed by Creation.

Both shows were popular. 'The Creation' seems to have impressed Thomas Randolph (1605–35), who was writing plays in London in 1631–5. In his Hey for Honesty, a character remarks, 'Had he lived till now, I would h' showed him at Fleet Bridge for a monster. I should have beggared the Beginning o' th' World.'15 That may well be a reference to 'The Creation of the World,' of which there were various versions available. Speaight lists 'Creation' puppet shows by Sandes, Taylor, and Tomson before 1642, and many later ones.16 'The Chaos' was shown at Bartholomew Fair in London between c 1647 and 1657, but whose version we do not know.17 Probably, as the reed volumes continue to appear, we shall hear more of the Lancashire showmen William and John Sandes, and of their two travelling shows.

Nor were the Sandes the only puppet-showmen in the North of England. An entry in the Manchester Constables' Accounts dated 18 February 1636/7 concerns one Thomas Maskall, who at first reading sounds like an actor: 'to Tho Maskall a player & 5 more to voyd the Towne – 00 05 00.'18 However, Maskall was not an actor at all, but rather a puppetmaster, as George Speaight notes. Maskall showed his puppets in Norwich (1635)
and Manchester (1636). Another probable instance of the same kind of deceptive wording comes from the Manchester constables, who paid 'Jon Costine a player with 10 in his Company to a abide the Towne & Not playe, these dangerous times.' A William Costine was a puppet showman in 1632–3, according to Speaight, exhibiting at Coventry. The name Costine is relatively rare and I suspect that William and John were related. A solid case of identification of player and puppetmaster is the showman Robert Browne, who exhibited a puppet show at Coventry and Norwich in 1637/8 and 1639 respectively. He was working with George Hall in those two same years. In 1637 these two men had turned up in Blackburn, Lancashire, and had their children christened on 12 and 17 September respectively. Ominously for REED researchers, the vicar (Adam Bolton) called both of them 'player', and the same usage may be observed in the phrasing by the Coventry chamberlains for Browne and Hall and by the Manchester constables for Thomas Maskall. Naturally I never suspected that Maskall, Costine, and the Browne-Hall team might have been puppet showmen, nor is there anything in any REED volume or the OED to warn the hapless researcher that 'player' could mean 'puppeteer'. However, the above entries put the matter beyond dispute.

One confession I should make at this point. I did not know whether Elizabethan and Jacobean puppets were ever worked by strings, like Pinocchio, but I readily assumed so. George Speaight speculates that early English puppets were probably glove puppets: 'I would hazard the guess that the complete absence of the well-worn simile on man moved by strings in Elizabethan writings strongly suggests that marionettes were, at least, not well-known. The type of puppets used in the Bartholomew Fair play is not specified, but they are brought out in a basket before the show, and this strongly suggests that they must have been glove puppets.' However, matters are not so simple. Marionettes are clearly referred to before the end of Elizabeth i's reign and shortly thereafter; OED recognizes 'marionette' as a sense of 'motion', 'puppet', and 'poppet'. Mechanical motion in the style of marionette is suggested by Shakespeare in The Two Gentlemen of Verona (c 1592): 'O excellent motion! O exceeding puppet! Now will he interpret to her' (2.1.100). Ben Jonson in The Poetaster (1601) has a similar figure: 'What's he, with the half-armes there, that salutes vs out of his cloke, like a motion' (3.4). Also, Beaumont clearly alludes to puppets on strings in The Woman-Hater (1607): 'Like dead motions moving upon wyers' (3.1.). The best quotation for the existence of marionettes in the early seventeenth century comes from Babington, 1610, who wrote 'On Easter day in the morning they raise vp a Poppet, and make him walk by wyers and strings' (OED, 'Popper', meaning 3). The question remains open, then, as to whether The Chaos and other travelling puppet-shows were glove-puppet or marionette spectacles.

HORSE RACING AND RECUSANTS AT LANCASTER

Finally, among the many liberties permitted to Catholics incarcerated in Lancaster prison in 1598/9 was attendance at horse-races. Bishop Richard Vaughan of Chester wrote with some asperity to Thomas Hesketh, 'I hear that the prison at Lancaster is very ill kept; that recusants there have liberty to go when and whither they list; to
hunt, hawk, and go to horse races at their pleasure; which notorious abuse of law and justice should speedily be reformed. Bishop Vaughan did not say just how far afield the Catholic recusant prisoners were allowed to wander, but presumably they had to be back in prison for the night. The letter is evidence, then, of horse races either at Lancaster or nearby, and since it was written on 29 January, possible evidence of horse-racing in the colder months. However, Bishop Vaughan fails to state the date when the alleged irregularities had taken place; news of them may have reached him only slowly.

Two of these three corrections to the *Lancashire* volume could easily have been made prior to going to press. The only defence I can make is that when I began the *REED* *Lancashire* work, I did not realize I had signed on for an examination of the Catholic-Protestant struggle as it was waged in Lancashire. A.L. Rowe once remarked that it lasted so much longer there than almost anywhere else in England or Wales because the earl of Derby so skilfully temporized at the time of the Pilgrimage of Grace, effectively sheltering Lancashire Catholics from the kind of wholesale deprivation that fell upon other northern Catholics when the Pilgrimage failed. Be that as it may, had I realized that I was to come upon document after document making reference to the Catholic-Protestant struggle, I would have found Fr. Caraman's book and hence met Il Schifanoya and the sporting Catholics of Lancaster gaol earlier than I did. The lesson is clear enough—a county's religious politics in the sixteenth century probably mattered more to the authorities than, say, its ability to feed itself.

NOTES

1 *Records of Early English Drama: Lancashire*, David George (ed), (Toronto, 1991), [213].
2 This article (from the 1556 Visitation Articles of Reginald Pole, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury) is found in *STC* 10149, A.[iiij]. I owe this reference to the courtesy of William Cooke of the *REED* staff.
3 This quotation is found in the *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1558–80*, 27, and is here taken from the translation by Philip Caraman, in *The Other Face: Catholic Life Under Elizabeth*, Philip Caraman (ed), (New York, 1960), 9–10, with endnote on [289].
5 Scott's speech against the Queen's headship of the English Church is printed from John Strype's *Annals* in Caraman, *The Other Face*, 19–20. Details of Scott's fate following his House of Lords speech are from Caraman, 322, and the *DNB*.
7 *REED*: *Lancashire*, Appendix 6, [282].
8 *REED*: *Lancashire*, 87.
9 Sandes and his son are noticed in *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (London, 1955), 314, and their two shows on 325.
10 *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert*, Joseph Quincy Adams (ed), (New Haven, 1917), 47. Adams found Herbert's entry in George Chalmers, *A Supplemental Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare-Papers* (London, 1799), 208–9. Sandes was also licensed in the same entry 'to show certain feats of charging and discharging a gun,'
and George Speaight rightly comments that freak shooting was not usually combined with puppet shows (private letter of 23 December 1993).

11 REED: Lancashire, 334.

12 This lengthy quotation, taken from the microfilm of the ms, Dorset Quarter Sessions, Orders, 1625–37, is printed here, with the generous permission of C.E. McGee and Rosalyn Hays, the editors of the forthcoming REED: Dorset volume. A much briefer account given by T. Wainwright, compiler of Bridport Records and Ancient Manuscripts, 1.56, was reprinted in John Tucker Murray, English Dramatic Companies, 1558–1642, 2 vols (London, 1910), 2.206, as follows:

1630. In this year a case was tried at Bridport at the Michaelmas Sessions. William Sands the elder, John Sands and William Sands the Younger, and about nine others, it is stated, who wander up and down the country with blasphemous shows and sights which they exercise by means of puppet-playing, not only by day but late in the night, are arrived at Beaminster, so that the townsmen cannot keep their children and servants in their houses. The Court, considering the scarcity of corn and other victuals and the extremity likely to come on the poor by reason of the sad dearth, ordered Sands to leave the county. The preacher at Beaminster, not the Vicar probably, but one of the Puritan licensed preachers, had assailed Sands and his show in his Sunday sermon.

13 ord, 'puppet', meaning 3.c.

14 Adams, Dramatic Records, 47; Speaight thinks it might have been about 'Doomsday or the Flood,' private letter (13 January 1994), where he points out that Edward Eccleston composed a rhyming opera called Noah's Flood or the Destruction of the World, printed 1677. John Wilders, the editor of Samuel Butler: Hudibras (Oxford, 1967), notes that to Thomas Vaughan, the Chaos meant 'that limbus or huddle of matter wherein all things were so strangely contained' before the creation of the universe, citing Vaughan's Anthroposophia Theomagica, Works, 18 (335).

15 The quotation from Hey for Honesty is from Adams, Dramatic Records, 47, citing Hazlitt's edition of Randolph, 393.

16 Taylor and Tomson's Creation shows are listed by Speaight, 325. Creation puppet shows went on being played after the Restoration, from 1675 up till c 1790 (Speaight, 325).

17 Samuel Butler, Hudibras, Part i, Canto 1.557–62:

The Chaos too he had descri'd,
And seen quite through, or else he ly'd;
Not that of Past-board which men shew
For groats at Fair of Bartholomew;
But its great Grand sire, first o' th' name
Whence that and Reformation came:

Part i was begun c 1658, and published in 1662 (Samuel Butler: Hudibras, John Wilders (ed), xviii, xix). Wilders notes that mystery or cycle plays were not longer given in the late seventeenth century, but that such plays survived in the repertoire of the puppet showmen. 'A playbill of Queen Anne's reign advertises, 'during the time of Bartholomew Fair,' 'a little opera, called the Old Creation of the World, yet newly revived; with the
addition of Noah’s Flood’ (Joseph Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes*, ed. Cox, 1903, 144–7 (335)).

18 Reed: *Lancashire*, 69

19 Speaight, 314; his sources were Murray, 2.358; and G.E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford, 1941–68), 2.507. Maskall was at Norwich on 23 December 1635 ‘to sett forth an Italian motion’ (Murray, 2.358). The Manchester reference for 18 February 1635/6 in Bentley (2.507) is the same as the one in Murray (2.331) and Reed: *Lancashire* for 18 February 1636/7. Bentley (2.507) was aware of the use of ‘player’ to mean ‘puppeteer’: ‘Maskell was probably a showman, in spite of the fact that he was called a player at Manchester, but it is possible that six men formed a touring company, as they had in Elizabeth’s days.’

20 Reed: *Lancashire*, 69.

21 Speaight, 313; his sources were again Murray (2.252), and Bentley (2.414). Bentley dated John Costine’s visit to Manchester 3 July 1636, whereas Murray and Reed: *Lancashire* (69) date it 3 July 1637. Bentley’s speculation about Costine is more radical than mine; he thought that Jon Costine ‘may possibly be the same as the William Costine who was paid with two others for showing an Italian motion at Coventry in 1632–3.’ William Costine was accompanied by ‘Thomas Hunt[er] and Henry fussell’ at Coventry, who were ‘licenced to set forth an Italian motion’ and paid five shillings (Murray, 2.252).

22 The 1638 Coventry Chamberlains’ and Wardens’ Account Book iii has this entry on 27 November 1638: ‘to Robert Browne, Georg Hall, & Richard Iones players by warrant who had a motion to shew expressing the worldes abuses’ (R.W. Ingram, ed, *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry*, 442); Murray, 2.253 and Bentley 2.391, date it 12 January 1637/8. The Norwich Mayors’ Court Book xx has an entry for 9 October 1639 concerning Robert Browne and George Hall, who ‘did this Day exhibit a lycence from Sir Henry Herbert master of the Revelles to shewe an Italian motion but because he sayth his motion is noe Italian motion but made in London this Court thinkes fitt not to suffer them to shewe’ (David Galloway, ed, *Records of Early English Drama: Norwich*, 232; Murray, 2.359; Bentley, 2.391, 458).


24 Reed: *Lancashire*, 334.

25 Speaight, 65.

26 Quoted from Caraman, *The Other Face*, 216, who gives his source as the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth*, 246, no. 32.

27 Caraman fails to indicate whether the date 1598 means 29 January 1597/8 or 1598/9, but as his practice elsewhere in his book is to adjust 1 January – 25 March to the modern year, 1597/8 is probably right.