for þo spere rennyng at þo fotbal for kakis'. Finally, Richard Wacy 'recordith of pleyes of Schetyngis of wrestelyngis vpon þat grond .... withowten lettyng'.

The word sterclis, meaning spectacles, pageants or illusions, is of particular interest from a non-literary context as it occurs only a handful of times in literary sources.³

NOTES

1 Norfolk Record Office, Kimberely Collection, temporary number mm/E 1.
2 Francis Blomefield, History of Norfolk, VI (1807), pp 18, 165.
3 Lawrence M. Clopper, 'Miracula and the Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge', Speculum (1990), 892. I owe this reference to David Dymond.

A.F. JOHNSTON

Bicester Priory revisited

In REED Newsletter 18 (1993), I reported the discovery of a play on the story of Amys and Amylon being performed in Bicester Priory, Oxfordshire on September 3, 1424 by players from the town of Bicester.¹ In that article, I analysed the pattern of the entertainment records of the priory. The only dramatic or minstrel evidence that compares with the 'Amys and Amylon' entry is one recording expenses for a feast at the time of a 'magnus ludus' in a roll now missing its heading and so its date. In 1993, I had not consulted the surviving Bicester rolls in the Public Record Office. My analysis was based on five of the Priory rolls now held by Trinity College, Oxford and on an antiquarian source, J.C. Blomfield's The History of Bicester, Its Town and Priory, published in 1884.² I noted as well that the entries in Ian Lancashire's Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain (1984)³ for Bicester were also based on Blomfield. I have since had the opportunity to consult the rolls in the Public Record Office.

Blomfield's information is absolutely correct except for one major error that was not his but the archivist's whose dating of the rolls he was following. The roll that contains the reference to the 'magnus ludus' was marked 55/51 and in his list of rolls. The roll contains two membranes, is badly damaged, and begins in the middle of the 'receipt' entries. In the list of 'Bundle 55' which Blomfield describes as 'Eschequer Q.R. Minister's Accounts. Burcester Priory' it was placed between roll 55/50 dated 15–16 Richard II (1392–3) and roll 55/52 dated 23 Richard II and 1 Henry IV (1399–1400). Blomfield, therefore, quite logically dates this roll 'tempore Richard ii'.

Between the time of Blomfield's work and the publishing of the present Lists and Indexes of the PRO in the early twentieth century this roll was redated. It took me a long time to track it down among the forty-two surviving accounts of the priory and other related documents in the PRO. None of the account rolls dated during Richard ii's reign contained the entry recorded by Blomfield. Neither did several other documents of the
priory dated during Richard's reign. I finally tracked down as roll sc6 956/24 dated with a query during the reigns of Henry IV or Henry V (1400–1422). This redating places the reference firmly within the period when the play-loving John Parentyn was prior (1397–1434). It was Parentyn who paid 6s 8d for 'Amys and Amylon' in 1424. Also, the PRO archivists identify this as a Bursar's Account, not a Prior's Account and so different in kind from the other rolls that provide us with references to entertainment from Bicester.

The only clue to provide a more precise date for the damaged roll is the name of Robert James that appears in roll sc6 956/24 as being one of a party visiting Midlynton for whom expenses were paid and again in roll sc6 956/23 when his tilers are paid a small sum for work at Bygenhull. This roll is dated by the pro archivists 1411–12 and listed before the damaged one indicating that the best guess of the archivists was that the damaged roll is after 1411–12. James seems to have been a local man of some standing. The next numbered roll in the PRO roll sc6 956/25 is again very badly damaged and very difficult to read. The next surviving roll is the Trinity College roll containing the 'Amys and Amylon' record.

What can we deduce from this evidence? First of all, the evidence from Robert James' name supports the redating of the roll after 1411–12. Unfortunately we can go no further than that with any certainty. Even if it were possible to accept the undated roll as late as 1424, the references to the 'magnus ludus' and the play of 'Amys and Amylon' cannot be to the same performance. The 'magnus ludus' was performed 'Dominica infra octavo apostolorum petri et pauli' (the Sunday within the octave of the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul) which, depending on what year it actually was, was late June or early July and the payment to the Bicester players was made on Sunday, September 3. All we can say with certainty is that John Parentyn was patron of both performances and that he favoured plays on Sundays. In 1993, I speculated that 'Amys and Amylon' might have been a revival of the 'magnus ludus' performed a generation earlier. All the redating does is change the possibility to a revival of a play first performed within the previous decade.

The redating does have somewhat wider implications, however. In 1988, I published an article based on a paper I had given to the New Chaucer Society called 'Chaucer's Records of Early English Dramas.' The undated roll was one of only eight pieces of clear evidence for plays (as opposed to minstrel or folk activity) in England before 1400. As I argued in that article, the traditions of community theatre must have been very firmly rooted in Chaucer's lifetime to allow him to make such casual reference to them. Nevertheless, this redating further diminishes the non-literary witnesses to the tradition.

NOTES
2 J.C. Blomfield, The History of Bicester, Its Town and Priory (Bicester, 1884).
3 Ian Lancashire, Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain (Toronto, 1984), pp 84–5.
4 Blomfield, p 133.