

# MEDIEVAL ENGLISH THEATRE

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Edited by

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## EDITORIAL

In this journal, we hope to provide a forum for the discussion of medieval English theatre that is relatively cheap, comes out regularly, and gives contributors a chance to pass on ideas and discoveries fairly quickly. It is also intended to act as a Newsletter, putting people in touch with each other through the Director, the first instalment of which can be found on pages 34–41, and through notes and queries; and where possible, to provide advance notice of productions, conferences, and other happenings.

We have decided to concentrate on medieval *English* theatre, partly because there are already several journals which look at drama from the comparative angle, but also because we feel that the English stage is big enough to have a journal of its own. This does not mean that we will exclude Continental material: it can often provide useful visual analogues, or examples of modern survivals of religious pageantry of the type seen in Alan Nelson's 'Pageant Waggons of Valladolid and Medina del Campo' to be published in our next issue. But on the whole we are interested in detailed examinations of the evidence from English records and plays. 'Plays' we interpret in the widest sense, as any kind of dramatic activity; mummings and Royal Entries are included as well as the staple mysteries and moralities.

Our time scale is roughly from the *Regularis Concordia* to 1575, though we expect that material will mostly be from the late medieval and early Renaissance periods. ('Medieval' English drama is one area which demonstrates vividly how false a division the medieval-Renaissance split can be.)

Theatre is a practical art, and we intend above all to discuss the practices of it, from the construction of scaffolds to the construction of speeches. This means that we must pay equal attention to what we can learn from the records (and to a certain extent we are a complement to *REED*), from the scripts of the plays themselves, and from our own and other people's productions. This should inevitably lead us to consider the kind of theatrical experience all this suggests.

So many different talents and types of enquiry go into the study of medieval theatre that there is bound to be a much greater variety of style and format in the contributions

we print than in a conventional journal, and this is all to the good. A number of useful ideas have been lost in the past because they could not be couched in the traditional 'learned' format. All we ask of our contributors is that they should show practical imagination and scholarly accuracy — in other words, professionalism! The articles in this issue are rather long: ideally, we would prefer to be offered ones of 3,000 to 5,000 words, though shorter ones are also welcome. But the nature of the subject matter will usually dictate the length.

One useful thing about the offset litho process is that it allows us to print sketches, diagrams, and black and white contemporary illustrations (line drawing, woodcuts, engravings) in the body of the text. Photographs and tinted drawings are more expensive, as they have to be screened, but we hope to have a certain number in each issue. We are building up a collection of illustrations of medieval staging and would like to publish copies of any interesting examples you may come across.

If you are sending in black and white illustrations, please make sure that they will fit into a space not larger than 5½ inches wide by 8 inches high. If they are not your own drawings, or do not come from either the British Library, or the Department of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian, please enclose written evidence of copyright permission, and where appropriate, that the correct reproduction fee has been paid.

This present issue centres on one topic, the Pageant Waggon. It is largely made up of material arising from the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1979 in the University of Lancaster. A brief report of this appears on pages 3–4. Future issues will not necessarily stick to only one topic, however. If you have any comments to make, or ideas to float on the material in this issue, please send them in, however short they may be. Notices of productions are also very welcome.

Among the many people who have helped to get this issue off the ground, we would especially like to thank Professor Alexandra Johnston of Toronto, who has given invaluable advice from her experience in inaugurating the *REED Newsletter*, and who has answered a stream of Transatlantic enquiries with admirable good humour.

Finally, we should like to thank the John Lewis Partnership, and Peter Lewis, Esp., their Chairman, for playing the truly medieval role of Patron to this enterprise. Their most generous gift of £200 has enabled us to launch *Medieval English Theatre*: we hope our subscribers will keep us afloat.

MT PM

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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**REPORT OF A MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY 7TH APRIL 1979 IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER TO DISCUSS THE PAGEANT WAGGON**

This meeting was organised on the assumption that it would be useful to get together people who were working on medieval English theatre in different areas and from different points of view, and to get them all to compare findings on a fairly restricted subject in which we were all interested. In fact the topic turned out to be far larger than we had expected, and the conclusions are still to seek: but everyone agreed that it was a useful exercise, and that it should become an annual event.

The programme was divided into two sessions, the first on *Evidence*, and the second on *Reconstructions*. In the first session, various people who have been working on the dramatic records of different cities were asked to reassess what is known about the pageant waggon from the latest state of the evidence available for their particular city. Peter Meredith and Richard Beadle talked about York, Diana Wyatt on Beverley, John Anderson on Newcastle on Tyne, John Marshall on Chester, Richard Beadle on Norwich, and Reg Ingram sent a very full and interesting written contribution on Coventry. They had all been encouraged to make use of a checklist of items such as ‘Roofed? Horse-drawn or manhandled? Dimensions?’ and so on, and to say where there was no evidence as well as where there was.

It quickly became apparent that there was an immense range and disparity of information in the records, both in quantity, time scale, and the kind of things that Town Clerks and Company officials saw fit to record. In York, Chester, and Coventry there is almost too much information: in Beverley and Newcastle, very little on this particular topic. As Diana Wyatt pointed out, we have no evidence that the Beverley waggons even possessed wheels! This immediately raises the question of how we can fill in these gaps with information from other cities, when it seems likely that each town had its own local type, depending on fashion and terrain.

The time scale stretches from the late XIVth century to the late XVIth, with far more evidence coming in from the XVIth century than the popular view has it. Two centuries is a long time: and as Peter Meredith pointed out in his paper (printed in this issue on pages 5–18), we cannot take it for granted that what went on in York in 1415 also went on in 1526, or even in 1433. All the York evidence suggests that it was a constantly changing and developing affair.

He also pointed out that the terminology used by the writers of accounts and inventories is by no means as cut-and-dried as past scholars have assumed, and that their spelling is, to put it politely, idiosyncratic, and so tends to produce ghost objects.

Likewise, as everyone insisted, inventories are not descriptions, and often seem to miss out the largest and most important things (like the waggon itself), so that our hopeful reconstructions are more than likely to be like Sellar and Yeatman's Absolutely Marvellous Reconstruction of a Greek statue from its big toe (or possibly the end of its nose). All this cast the meeting into a mood of extreme caution, which was oddly coupled with a great deal of expertise in the actual construction of medieval carts, and in their practical reconstruction and manoeuvrability.

Alan Nelson and Meg Twycross then attempted to sketch in some possible outlines for other reconstructions by presenting pictorial analogues, Twycross from early Renaissance religious festivals in the Low Counties, and Nelson from some fascinating and elaborate surviving Counter-Reformation pageant floats from present-day Spain. Both of these illustrated the variety, as well as the size, of possible structures and stagings.

The second session began with a visit to the Nuffield Theatre Studio to inspect, clamber on, and generally test a Lancaster reconstruction, successfully proving that you can get at least twenty-eight people on a 12' by 6' pageant waggon stage, provided they all keep perfectly still.

There then followed accounts of waggon productions by the York Lords of Misrule (Panela King and David O'Connor), a York Cycle *Resurrection* at Lancaster (Meg Twycross), the Leeds York Cycle of 1975 (Peter Meredith), and the Toronto York Cycle of 1977 (David Parry: an edited version of his talk appears on pages 19–31). All these stressed the flexibility of this particular kind of staging, and the special relationship with the audience which it fosters.

What came out at this meeting, for one participant at least, was above all a sense of the actuality of the pageant waggon: that these remarkable vehicles really did exist, with all their technical problems and very real technical achievements. Coupled with this was the sheer variety of possibilities offered by what one would have thought was a very restricted type of staging: and the enthusiasm and skill of the modern scholar-producers who are bringing them to life again.

### **MEDIEVAL ENGLISH THEATRE AT LEEDS, 1980**

At the Lancaster meeting it was decided to make this gathering an annual event. The 1980 meeting will be at the University of Leeds, on Saturday March 29th, and the subject for discussion will be Props and Costumes. The catering charge will be about £2-£3 for the day. Anyone who wished to come, or who would like to come and give a short (15 minute) paper on some aspect of the subject is asked to get in touch with Peter Meredith, School of English, University of Leeds, LEEDS S2 9JT, as soon as possible.

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### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE YORK MERCERS' PAGEANT WAGGON

*This is an edited version of the talk given at the Lancaster meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1979, and includes comment and discussion from the audience.*

As John has just remarked to me, one of the difficulties with York, paradoxically, is that there is just so *much* material. But even with all this evidence, there is not that much which is specific in what it tells us about the structure of the pageant waggon. Because there is so much material, it seems crazy to try and work through it all in detail. So what I shall do first is establish a general picture of the development of the Mercers' pageant waggon, and then look more closely at certain parts of the evidence, following in the footsteps of Sandy Johnston and Margaret Dorrell (or Margaret Rogerson, as she now is).<sup>1</sup>

#### **The 1433 indenture**

As I suppose everyone knows who has thought about pageant waggons at all, one of the most important pieces of evidence from York is the 1433 indenture.<sup>2</sup> And not simply for the Mercers' waggon but for York as a whole. Not only is it the most important, it is also the earliest of the Mercers' waggon evidence. Before 1433 there is evidence for the existence of a pageant, in the sense of a short play, but none for the waggon. (I should say that I will use the term 'pageant' for the short play; 'waggon' or 'pageant waggon' for the thing on which or around which it was performed; and 'play' for the whole series of pageants which constituted the Corpus Christi Play. In that, I realise, I am being more consistent than the records themselves.) The most important pieces of evidence for the pageant is the *Ordo Paginarum*,<sup>3</sup> in the case of the Mercers' entry, of 1415! but it would be quite wrong to assume that the pageant must necessarily fit the 1433 waggon. By 1433 very considerable changes had taken place amongst the Guilds and their pageants: pageants had amalgamated, others had split away, financial arrangements between Guilds had been formed and broken. And much of this for which records survive had taken place between 1415 and 1433. So the first caveat, I suppose, is against yoking the 1415 description and the 1433 structure together. Obviously they must be compared; but one must never assume that the 1415 pageant was ever performed on the 1433 waggon, or that the 1433 waggon was constructed for the 1415 pageant. I shall come back to the details of the 1433 structure, but I now want to move on to the next stage of development.

#### **The souls' waggon of 1463**

The next stage is the addition of the 'now pagand yat was mayd for ye sallys (souls) to ryse owto!'.<sup>4</sup> In the 1463 Mercers' accounts where mention is first made of this new 'pagand' a certain amount of information is provided about the materials of its

construction; but how it was constructed, what it looked like, what its relationship was to the ‘great pageant’, as the other waggon was called, is a matter of conjecture. One thing to notice is that in the accounts there is no mention of wheels; so that the ‘thing’ out of which the souls rose may not have been a wheeled vehicle at all — Johnston and Dorrell make this point,<sup>5</sup> and I think it’s an important one. At the same time, however, one should remember that in the previous year the Mercers had bought two new wheels,<sup>6</sup> and it’s possible that they were planning to make their new waggon a little bit earlier than we usually give them credit for. Certainly the cost of these two wheels (3s 8d the pair) makes it very unlikely that they were intended for the ‘great pageant’, for which a new wheel was bought in 1448 for 13s 3d<sup>7</sup> — in fact it makes them sound like trolley wheels. The possibility remains therefore that the souls’ ‘pagand’ was a wagon, or at any rate a wheeled vehicle, but nothing like the size of the ‘great pageant’.

What is absolutely certain is that the Mercers could, from 1463 on, perform their pageant from two ‘vehicles’. This is particularly interesting when taken in connection with something which Richard Beadle and I have been working on, namely the dating of the *Register* of the York play (BL MS Additional 35290).<sup>8</sup> It appears that it dates from somewhere between 1463 and 1477, and it may well be that we should think of the Mercers’ *Last Judgement* pageant as one which was specifically written for this double pageant ‘waggon’ production. But again we are moving into the realms of conjecture.

### **The Drawswerd waggon, 1501–7**

The next stage in the development of the Mercers’ waggon is, of course, the big change in 1501 when they scrapped the old ‘great pageant’ and employed the noted alabaster carver Thomas Drawswerd to create them a new one; ‘the said Thomas shal mak the pagiant of the dome belonging to the merchauntes newe substancialie in every thing perving to belonging having for the warkemanship and Stuff of the same vij marcs in money And his entrie fre with Also the old pagiaunt’.<sup>9</sup> They don’t, you notice, say anything about the souls’ pageant. Was it too insignificant to worry about? Or had they given up using it years ago? The last we actually hear about the souls’ pageant is in 1467, when some repairs were being done to it. But even that reference is not as clear as it might be. What the accounts say is ‘Item payd or stowres & ij Inglyshe burdes & dubyll spykyng & warmanship (workmanship) whare ye saulys lyes’.<sup>10</sup> And where in the past accounts (1463 and 1465) reference is made to ‘pageants’ in the plural (1465 even has ‘havyng of both pagyantes again to the pagyant hows’),<sup>11</sup> in 1467 we find ‘puttynghome of ye pajand’ and ‘puttyng ye pajand aboute on ye morn’. It is therefore possible that the life of the souls’ ‘pageant’ was only three or four years. To set against this evidence, however, there is the fact that there is no mention of either ‘pageant’ between 1467 and 1501, so the possible early scrapping of the souls’ one must remain a possibility only.

But what of the Drawswerd version? The first thing to notice is that it is being made completely new ('*newe substancialle in euey thing þervnto belonging*'), a total reconstruction. The date at which this is talked about first is 1501, but it would be wrong to assume that it was ready for Corpus Christi Day in that year for a number of reasons. One is that the Drawswerd agreement is said to have been made 'by thassent & consent of Richerd Thornto maior' and 'in this present yere abouesaid', i.e. 1501. But Thornton was Mayor from 3 February 1502 – 3 February 1503 (New Style) or 1501–2 (Old Style), so that the only way in which the agreement could have been made both with Richard Thornton as Mayor and in 1501, is for the dating to be Old Style, and the time to be somewhere between 3 February (when Thornton was elected) and 25 March when the Old Style year ended. The second reason for not immediately accepting a quick construction for the new waggon is that in 1504 Henry Marshall is paid for '*diuers Stuff for payntyng of ye pagiant xijs vjd*',<sup>12</sup> and in 1507 Drawswerd is given 40s '*pro pagine de Domesdaye*'.<sup>13</sup> These payments suggest perhaps continuing work on the new waggon: Drawswerd's possibly his final instalment, or something to cover rising costs. Some slight confirmation of this state of affairs is given by the fact that there is no evidence for a performance of the Corpus Christi Play between 1501 and 1506. Perhaps Drawswerd was never pushed for time because the new waggon was not needed until 1506. But once again this is conjecture and one could argue from the other side that the painting may have been re-painting, or the Mercers may have disliked the first colour scheme; and the absence of evidence for performance does not automatically mean that there was none. It is safest to think of the creation of the Drawswerd waggon as being within the period 1501–7.

### After 1507

The first point that needs making is that we have until 1526 no idea of what the Drawswerd waggon looked like, apart from the fact that some part of it or its appurtenances was painted. The 1526 inventory,<sup>14</sup> scrappy and ill-spelt, is the only clue to its appearance. In some ways it seems to have resembled the old 'great pageant', especially the '*yren sett with iiij Rappes*' (if '*sett*' does mean '*seat*'). On the other hand, '*hell dure*' and even more '*pagand dure*' and '*iiij wendows*' conjure up quite different pictures. But it's as well to realise just how scrappy this inventory is. Disregarding the costumes, what actually is there?

- (a) The cloud; (b) Hell door, pageant door, 4 windows;
- (c) 2 great angels, 4 angels (2 missing), 3 little angels (1 missing);
- (d) Iron seat (?) with 4 ropes, windlass with 1 rope, 8 pulleys;
- (e) 9 nails (+ 2 missing); (f) The '*trenette hus*', the '*trenette*'.

This is not a very impressive list of possessions for one of the richest Guilds in York, nor does it add up to the pageant waggon. There may be (b) two doors and four

windows, but where are the walls, the roof, the floor, the wheels? Was the waggon itself not entrusted to the pageant masters, unlike its counterpart in 1433? Or did they just not bother to mention it? There are decorative features: (a) the cloud (one only, apparently) and (c) the various angels (detachable presumably, since three are missing); there is a complete set of raising gear (d); and there is (f) the Trinity banner and its case (nothing to do with the waggon, *pace* Johnston and Dorrell<sup>15</sup>). Apart from that there are nine nails and two missing ones (e). Why should nails be listed separately, and noted if missing? They can't be common or *garde* 'dubbyl spikings' at 4d a hundred (1487), or 'midill spykyngs' at 3d a hundred (1477). If the doors and windows were detachable, were they perhaps put through the hinge irons to re-attach them? Whatever they were, they seem to be given the same importance at least as the pulleys. Overall there is very little to go on to get a picture of the Drawswerd waggon. It is simply the existence of the doors and windows that has provoked such imaginings as 'a solid wooden structure with the details of heaven carved into or painted on the fabric.'<sup>16</sup> It may be right, but it's important to remember upon what slender evidence it is based.

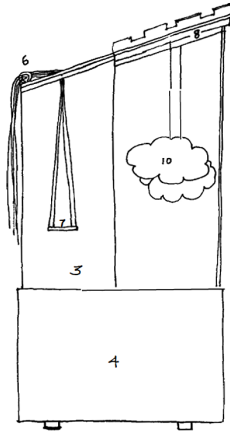
Thereafter, apart from the use of the 'merchauntes paicaunt' at the coming of Henry VIII to York in 1541,<sup>17</sup> there is no evidence at all for the waggon. No repairs, no wheels, no re-painting, nothing except the payment of rent for the pageant house and the receipts from Mercers refusing to be pageant masters. We know nothing whatsoever about its last years.

### **The 1433 waggon**

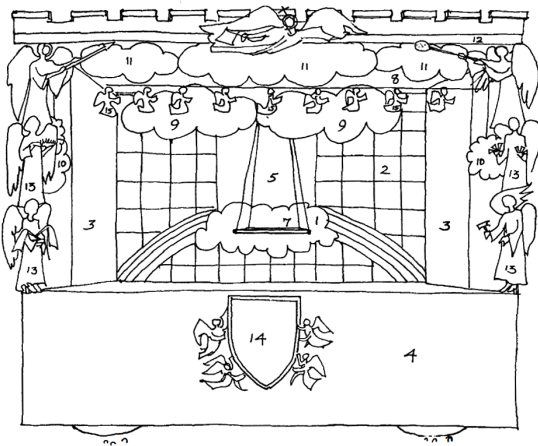
I want finally to turn back to the 1433 indenture, which, in as much as it is the fullest description that we have of a York waggon, deserves the fullest attention. Up to now, only Johnston and Dorrell have attempted to give a complete reconstruction (with drawing) of the waggon. (SEE FIG. 1.) Many of Sandy Johnston's ideas have, I know, changed through the production of the pageant in the full Toronto Cycle in 1977 and by itself in 1978, but it is nevertheless with the printed version that I want to deal because it is that one which is in danger of becoming accepted. It is only too easy, I think, for people to jump to conclusions without thinking through all the evidence, and one of the great advantages of a gathering such as this which Meg has arranged is that people can put their heads together over a problem and provide a variety of points of view about what a particular word might mean, or what structure is likely in a given circumstance; and this matter of likelihood needs stressing. I don't think we shall ever be absolutely one hundred percent sure what the waggon looked like, and in many cases there are going to be details, perhaps important details, which we shall never find out; but we can work out what is *likely*.

The indenture, as Johnson and Dorrell have said, and as I have stressed elsewhere,<sup>18</sup> is a binding legal document. It is not a





SIDE VIEW SHOWING  
GRANDETH AND BLUE CLOUDS .



FRONT VIEW OF THE PAGEANT WAGON .

FIG. 1: *Reconstruction by Alexandra Johnston and Margaret Dorrell of the York Mercers' Pageant Wagon of 1433.*

(Reproduced from *Leeds Studies in English* NS 6 (1972) 10, by kind permission of the authors.)

KEY: *The York Mercers' Indenture of 1433.*

A Pagent With iiij Wheles

helle mouthe ...

1. A cloud & ij peces of Rainbow of tymber ...
2. A grete coster of rede damaske payntid for the bake side of þe pagent
3. ij other lesse costers for ij sides of þe Pagent
4. iiij other costers of lewent brede for þe sides of þe Pagent
5. A litel coster iiij squared to hang at þe bakke of god  
iiij lrens to bere vppe heuen  
iiij finale coterelles &
6. a lren pynne
7. A brandreth of lren þat god sall sitte vppon when he sall sty vppe to heuen  
With iiij rapes at iiij corners
8. A heuen of lren With a naffe of tre
9. ij peces of rede cloudes & sternes of gold langing to heuen
10. ij peces of blu cloudes payntid on bothe sides
11. iiij peces of rede cloudes With sunne bemes of golde & sternes for þe heist of heuen With
12. a lang small border of þe same Wurke
13. vij grete Aungels halding þe passion of god Ane of þame has a fane of laton & a crosse of lren in his  
hede giltid
14. iiij smaller Aungels giltid holding þe passion
15. ix smaller Aungels payntid rede to renne aboute in þe heuen A lang small corde to gerre þe Aungels  
renne aboute  
ij shorte rolls of tre to putte for the þe pagent]

scrappy list like the 1526 inventory, and the ordering of its contents is, I think, important. It appears to break down into a number of natural groupings:

- (a) 'a Pagent With iiij Wheles  
helle mouth'
- (b) Costumes for devils, souls, angels, apostles (+ one or two props)
- (c) 'A cloud & ij peces of Rainbow of tymber  
Array for god ...'
- (d) Backcloths
- (e) Machinery: 'iiij Irens to bere vppe heuen, iiij finale coterelles & a Iren  
pyinne, A brandreth or Iren ... With iiij rapes at iiij corners, A heuen  
or Iren With a naffe of tre'
- (f) Decoration (clouds)
- (g) Decoration (angels)
- (h) Storage (?)

The only apparent oddness is the putting together of God's costume with the cloud and rainbow (clearly stage props), and I can only suggest that the two were so closely connected as a visual effect (God seated on the rainbow at the Last Judgment) that they naturally fell together in the writing up of the indenture.

What significance have these groupings for the waggon? Clearly (a) and (e), and to a lesser extent (g) and (h), are important. (a) The putting of Hell-mouth with the pageant suggests that it is closely connected with it but that it is in some way a separate object. I have always thought of a Hell-mouth attached to the front of the waggon in the middle between the wheels, but it is of course possible that it was a separate structure or that it was hinged on to one of the uprights of the waggon itself. The absence of anything that could constitute a superstructure in the rest of the indenture leads me to suppose that the term 'pageant' is to be understood in the (admittedly much later) Norwich sense of 'a howse ... buylded on a carte with fowre whelys',<sup>19</sup> in other words a wooden box-frame.

Group (e) is the most interesting and the most tantalising. It first of all suggests that the raising machinery and the iron heaven with its wooden 'naffe' are very closely connected. I said in Toronto in 1978 that what I thought we had here was an iron-frame heaven on the roof of the wooden box-frame superstructure of the waggon, with the four ropes from the 'brandreth' running over a hub ('naffe'), and providing a simple raising mechanism. What is less easy to do is to present a clear picture of that and at the same time integrate into it the 'iiij Irens' and the 'iiij finale coterelles' and the 'Iren pyinne'. Or rather it's much too easy to integrate the last items. Any number of

satisfactory reconstructions can be produced, none more convincing than another. The main problem is the 'iiij Irens', since there is very little limitation of meaning possible. They may have been uprights to support the roof, as Johnston and Dorrell suggest, but I have been able to find very little use of structural ironwork in the Middle Ages. It seems mainly to have been used for decoration or for windows (upright and horizontal bars crossing the window space), for crampons to hold top courses of stone together, or stays to support free-standing chimneys and pinnacles. Only one reference given by Salzman sounds truly structural: two pillars, each 8 feet long, and a cross bar of iron to support a collapsing fireplace.<sup>20</sup> If not main supports, the 'Iren's could have been stay-bars used to steady the 'heuen of Iren' as the waggon moved around the streets' or, if the heaven is merely the top part of the structure, they could have been the uprights which held up the heaven on the roof of the waggon. The 'iiij finale coterelles' which come next to the 'Irens' could be the cotter pins which lock the 'Irens' on to the 'heuen'. Rather than present a series of possibilities, however, I will stick my own neck out and offer a reconstruction of my own.

### The reconstruction

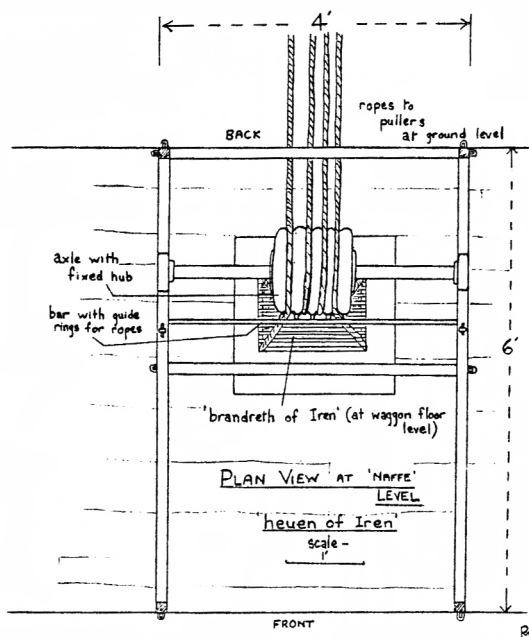
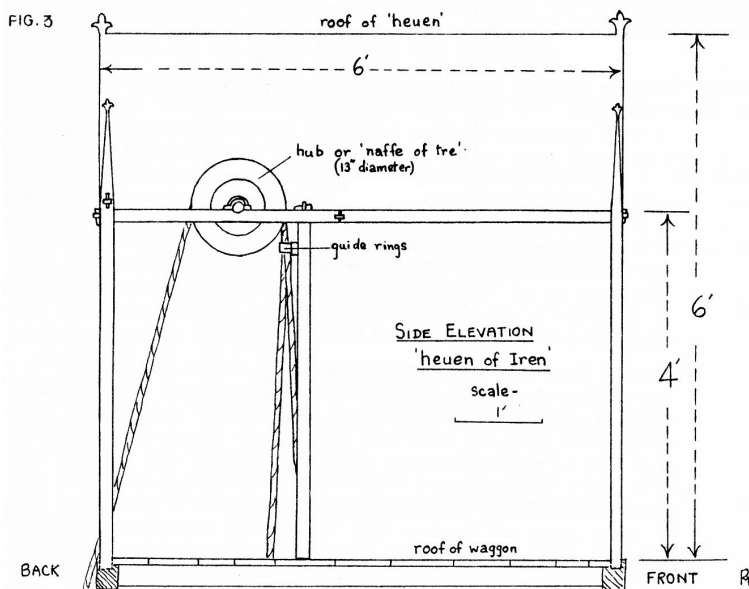


FIG. 2: Horizontal view of waggon at lifting-tackle level.

Fig. 2 shows the view looking down at the brandreth' through the hole in the waggon roof through which God ascends ('sall sty vppe to heuen' is the true reading; 'fly' was a mistaken transcription). The iron-frame 'heuen' is four feet wide up to a height of four feet, which should enable the seated actor to rise above floor level and without too much difficulty step off on to the waggon roof. The problem of carrying four separate ropes over the 'naffe' and preventing them from tangling or coming out of the grooves, I have solved by placing guide rings at a point just before they reach the 'naffe'. The most dangerous moment comes when the brandreth is raised through the roof and the ropes are splayed out to their greatest extent. There is no evidence in the indenture regarding this problem, as far as I can see, and I have assumed the guide-bar to be part of the 'heuen of Iren'. I have also assumed rope-pullers on the ground. They would need to be only about four feet behind the waggon to allow the ropes to clear the back edge of the waggon roof. The mechanism in general is based on the normal medieval method of raising stones, etc., in building operations.

Fig. 3 shows the 'heuen' from the side. The shape, dimensions, and structure are, of course, pure hypothesis. The structure, of iron bars with 'tongues' passed through the uprights, and locked with wedge-shaped pins, is based on the largest iron constructions of this sort that I know from the later Middle Ages, the cathedral clocks



(Wells, Salisbury and Exeter) and the Dover Castle clock. These also carried heavy, moving weights suspended from them. There are obvious differences but they make a useful starting point. I have placed the 'naffe' near the back of the roof to cut down the angle at which the ropes leave the 'naffe' and therefore the distance behind the waggon that the pullers need to stand. It also allows the actor playing God space to rise from the brandreth (a little under 3 feet from the edge of the hole to the front of the waggon). I have taken the 'heuen' from back to front of the waggon roof, but it could as well have been a smaller structure. Six feet is probably the minimum height that a 'heuen' of this sort could be without restricting the movement of the actor. The size of the 'naffe' is approximately that noted by Sturt as normal for the hub of a farm waggon ('eleven or twelve inches in diameter and twelve or thirteen inches from end to end').<sup>21</sup> It has not, of course, yet been trimmed as a wheel hub would need to be.

Fig. 4 shows the 'heuen' from the front. The raising machinery would probably be less visible than I have made it, since I have used none of the cloud decorations provided for 'heuen'. The Gothic trimming is pure fancy. I am not convinced of the accuracy of making the 'iiij Irens' into stay-bars, but it does seem to me that the structure as a whole might sway and could do with lateral support. But we don't know whether the 'heuen' already had it; and it remains a possibility that the 'Irens' actually supported the 'heuen' from the waggon floor. I would like to suggest a purpose for the 'Iren pynne', but no one seems any more likely than another. If I am right that

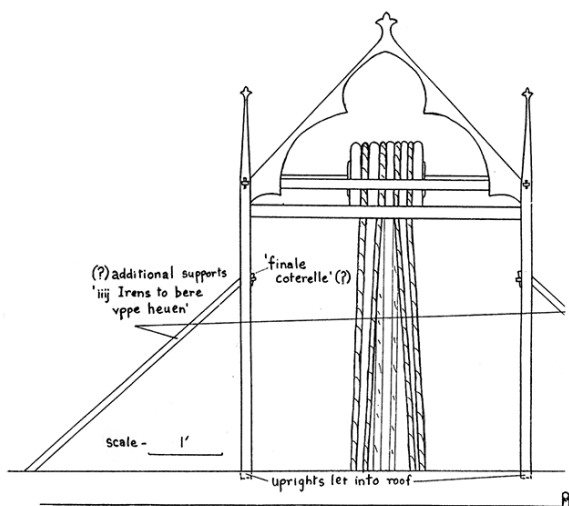


FIG. 4: Front elevation of the 'heuen of Iren'.

the groupings are significant, then it ought to be linked with the 'iiij finale coterelles' and possibly with the 'iiij Irens'. The opening at the front is not large, and a 5'9" actor would be the limit for casting God, but I don't think one need worry that he would look awkwardly cramped, since, if MS illuminations are anything to go by,<sup>22</sup> the Middle Ages weren't worried.

FIG. 5 gives an idea of the new structure of the whole waggon with 'heuen' and 'helle mouthe' in position, and the judgment seat suspended between. Apart from suggesting the rainbow and the 'costers' around the base, I have not added any of the

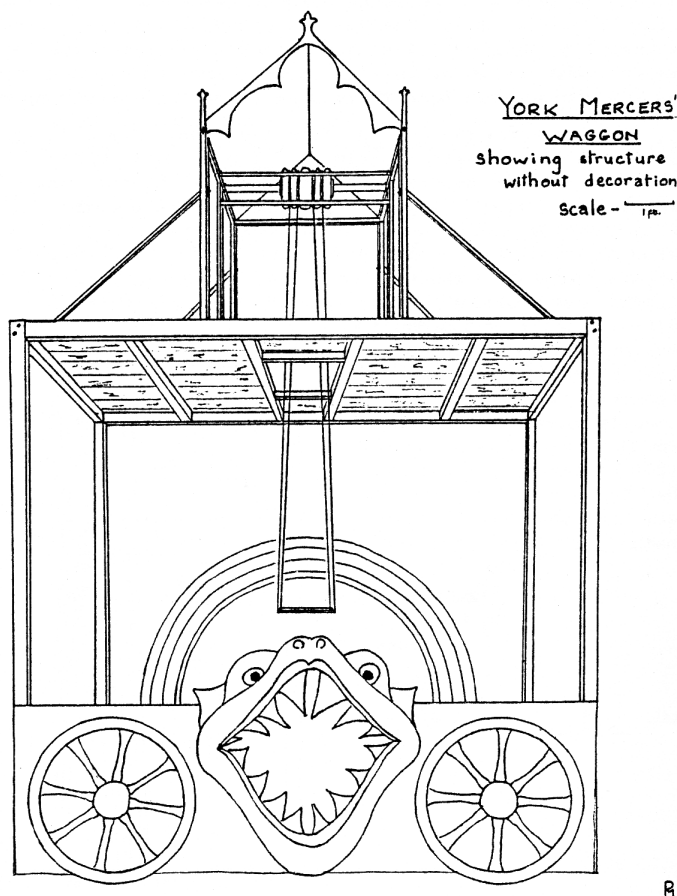


FIG. 5: *The York Mercers' Waggon, front elevation; structure without decoration.*

the decorative features, backcloths, clouds, or angels, or indicated actors. Access to the waggon I am assuming was from the side or sides. The whole stands 18' high.

It will be immediately apparent that I see the waggon very differently from Johnston and Dorrell. I do not think that they were aware of the problem of the 'naffe' and its implication for the raising mechanism, and structurally their reconstruction leaves much to be desired. Even the more recent practical approximation of the fifteenth century waggon at Toronto, valuable though it was, has been an impressionistic rather than a carefully detailed attempt at solving the problems of the indenture. At least it no longer has a 'braining' method of raising God, or one that leaves him dangling, with his head through the roof.

I can't, I fear, take us any further with the 'ij shorte rolls or tre to putte for the þe pagent'. If the wheels were taken off for storage, then the 'rolls of tre' could be useful for moving the unwheeled waggon in and out of the pageant-house. But why 'shorte', and why only 'ij'? And what are 'rolls of tre'? The earliest reference the *OED* offers is 1426–7 in the accounts of St. Mary-at-Hill, London ('Also payd for a rolle & ij goiouns of Iron & a rope'), which, in view of the gudgeons and rope, sounds like a hoisting wheel. 'Roller' is not earlier (*OED*, 1434), and the first reference is to a 'towel roller'. Like 'Irens', only to a lesser extent, perhaps more like 'brandreth', there are a number of possibilities. 'Brandreth', incidentally, which I have left as a plain flat swing-seat in the sketches, could be something more like a stool, as I have suggested elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> But we are back at the basic problem of word meaning. *Irons*, *pageant*, *pin*, *roll*, *brandreth* — however many times we turn to the *OED* or the *MED* for help, we can seldom be sure what a particular word really meant to a Mercer in 1433. And with that return to likelihood, I had better stop.

MEG TWYCROSS: It must have been extremely heavy, that brandreth — and why make it of iron?

PETER MEREDITH: Yes, I'm uneasy about the use of iron generally here. What worries me is that they used it, and they must have known what they were doing, and yet I can't really see why. I feel we've missed the point somehow. Someone I was talking to said, if you really wanted to have a framework on top of a wooden structure, it might look better in iron than in wood. Maybe the brandreth is a similar kind of thing — I know the brandreth we've got at home in the grate nearly breaks my back when I try and lift it. It would seem crazy to try and use something like that.

MEG TWYCROSS: Less likelihood of bits breaking off?

PETER MEREDITH: Yes, I suppose if it hit the roof as it went up through it, it's more likely to break the roof than to break itself. So God might be a bit safer.

JOHN ANDERSON: It's going to take a bit of a pasting, I suppose, over the years; so if you wanted it to last, iron would be better.

PETER MEREDITH: Yes, and it's one of those things that's mentioned in 1526 — if it is the 'yren sett'. If so then the same thing could have lasted from 1433 to 1526.

PETER HAPPÉ: Is it perhaps something to do with compactness? Because after all, if you're using iron, you're making a decision to have something small and strong rather than something cumbersome and strong.

PETER MEREDITH: That's certainly a possibility. They didn't want great timbers up there, but nevertheless the structure had to bear a considerable weight.

JEREMY MAULE: Four 'rappes', 1526 — an 'yren sett with iiij rappes'?

PETER MEREDITH: Four 'ropes'. The spelling of the 1526 inventory is appalling and has had its own offspring of problems. Johnston and Dorrell interpret 'chartt' ('Wants j chartt') as a 'cart'.<sup>24</sup> I don't think there's any doubt that it's a 'shirt', 'sark' cum 'shert', and a pageant waggon has been created out of it. The spelling is quite extraordinary: the 'Wesserons' for 'vizards', for example; and they spell 'rope' in three different ways; 'Rappes', 'repe' and 'Rope'. That 'yren sett with iiij Rappes' is so close to the description of the brandreth of 1433, that you can't believe Drawswerd didn't make use of the same method, if not actually the same objects, in the new pageant waggon.

DAVID PARRY: From the perspective of one who has actually stored waggons, I would suggest that if you're right in the kind of superstructures you're putting on top, then one of the reasons why iron was used it because it can be taken off and put on again much more easily and much less destructibly than wood. And left on, the size of the waggon multiplies the storage problems enormously.

PETER MEREDITH: I think it's another important point about iron, because one should remember that it is nails and wooden pegs that are being used on a wooden structure, not screws or bolts, and therefore the thing once put together cannot easily be taken apart. Whereas with an iron structure, you're using something which can either be taken off as a whole, or taken apart. The waggon superstructure we built at Leeds could be taken apart because we used bolts, but the Mercers don't seem to have done. The use of iron could produce rigidity in something which could nevertheless be taken apart. You've mentioned storage problems. We have a lot of miscellaneous information about the pageant houses, for example ('continet in latitudine quator vlnas regias & in longitude quinque vlnas regias & tria quarteria vnus regie'<sup>25</sup>). But it doesn't really help with the Mercers. We know their pageant-house was a pretty substantial building because they get daubers in, and then groundwallers: everyone



comes. It was tiled, and was clearly a building, not just an old shack out at Toft Green. But we don't know what size it was. They spent a fair bit of money on hinges, which perhaps suggests that the doors were large and put a lot of strain on the hinges; and they also spent quite a bit on doors, which perhaps also suggests they were large. But you're right, nevertheless; the problem of storing a tall pageant waggon is one reason why you'd want to take off the top — and also the wheels?

DAVID PARRY: Sure, once you actually take the wheels off, or lift the stage off the chassis, you can store the things in about a quarter of the space. We have ten or eleven waggons stored dismantled; if we'd tried to store the same number complete, it would have taken an enormous amount of room.

MEG TWYCROSS: What do you do, up-end them, or what — for storage?

DAVID PARRY: No, you lift the stage bolts, then the stage comes entirely off the chassis. The chassis is basically two axles and a ridge, on which you have some blocked pieces into which the next section, the stage, can be set down and be rigid. Once you've taken that off, whether it be a flat stage or a box frame, the ridge can be taken out and the axles stored with or without wheels. If you take the wheels off the axles, you save even more space. The whole thing really compresses down. If you have a pageant with a second storey, I think it could not really have been taken apart as much as that: a reason for large doors. Then it would have to be stored as a frame. But if you have something which is a much simpler pageant, on which you're using a very basic framing and curtaining, then the frame itself can be taken apart, and you can store it in a very small space.

JOHN MARSHALL: I think it is interesting that there is evidence in Yorkshire in the sixteenth century that farmers stored their wains by taking the wheels off, and stored them for the winter laid down on their sides.

PETER MEREDITH: It is true that if you store something for any length of time with the wheels on, you are continuing the pressure on the wheel in one place only, which must strain the wheel, and may be a further reason for taking the wheels off.

RICHARD BEADLE: But you'd want to leave it at an approximate height so you could get the wheels back on. I'm not too convinced by this idea about lowering the thing, when you take the wheels off, onto rollers.

DAVID PARRY: Well, it's very easy — with manpower. All it requires is a lot of bodies who each take a little bit of the weight; even with a big double-storey waggon. We did it with the Mercers' one in Toronto. You could just turn it on its side, because we had to get it out of the doors, and it really is quite easy to do. With one person in charge and a gang of people who can lift the weight, it's just a question of setting it on and off. It's much easier than you think.

## NOTES

All quotations from the York records are taken from *York: Records of Early English Drama* edited by Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 volumes (Toronto, 1979).

1. See their two articles: 'The Doomsday Pageant of the York Mercers, 1433' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 5 (1971) 29–34, and 'The York Mercers and their Pageant of Doomsday, 1433–1526' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 6 (1972) 10–35.
2. *York, REED* 55–6.
3. *York, REED* 24.
4. *York, REED* 95–6.
5. 'York Mercers' 18.
6. *York, REED* 95.
7. *York, REED* 73.
8. Our findings will be discussed in an article to appear in *Leeds Studies in English* next year.
9. *York, REED* 188–9.
10. *York, REED* 99–100.
11. *York, REED* 97.
12. *York, REED* 200.
13. *York, REED* 205.
14. *York, REED* 241–2.
15. See *MED hous(e* n.: especially the quotation under (b) (1391) 'Pro j hous pro le baner et j autre pro le pennon, xix scot'. Or *OED House* sb 2.
16. 'York Mercers' 19.
17. *York, REED* 272.
18. "'Item for a grone — iijd'" — records and performance' *Proceedings of First Colloquium, REED* edited Joanna Dutka (Toronto, 1979) 46–50.
19. *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* edited Norman Davis *EETS* SS 1 (1970) xxxv.
20. L.F. Salzman *Building in England down to 1540* (Oxford 1952) 290.
21. George Sturt *The Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge 1923) 100.
22. For example the *Belles Heures of the Duc de Berry* fol. 30. Reproduced in John Harthan *Books of Hours* (London 1977) 62.
23. "'Item for a grone'" 48–9.
24. 'York Mercers' 19–20.
25. *York, REED* 35.

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**THE YORK MYSTERY CYCLE AT TORONTO, 1977**

*This article is an edited version of the talk, which was illustrated with slides, given at the Lancaster meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1979, and includes comment and discussion from the audience.*

DAVID PARRY: We really took off at Toronto from the Leeds production of the York Cycle in May 1975, following a great lead, and were fortunate enough in getting the kind of financial backing to enable us actually to acquire waggons of our own: enough to put on the whole cycle of 47 plays at three stations with eleven waggons. We calculated the timing of the plays, and the recycling time to allow each waggon to be made ready for the next play in the sequence, that this would just about cover us. If we had increased the number of station, which would in many ways have been very interesting to do, we would no longer have been able to afford waggons to do it, because of course each additional station doesn't add just one waggon, it adds in point of fact about four or five. So we were able to work on eleven waggons, starting from scratch, and giving them some of the kind of devices which were not possible at Leeds, since we were able to work on them for quite a long time, and sort out some of the technical problems about their construction as we went along.

Just a couple of points about the waggons themselves, in answer to some of the points people have been making in the discussion today: first, waggons are in fact remarkably easy to handle. Tight corners really are no problem. Even without a lever, you can pick up the end of the waggon, even if it's quite heavily loaded, or take the weight off the ground just enough to be able to slide it across.

Secondly, as Meg Twycross and Peter Meredith have pointed out, in their Lancaster and Leeds waggon productions, the standard twelve feet by six feet deck, which we also used, is remarkably large once you come to play on it. And when the street is used as well, the possibilities really are endless.

Again, it is relatively easy, with this traditional wooden barn-framing type of construction, to make even a two-storey waggon quite stable and robust, even if it has a superstructure eighteen feet or so above the ground, and is carrying actors on the waggon roof. It doesn't require more than four or five people actually to move it, unless it is going uphill: or of course when you have to take the top off to store it.

Lastly, one of the things that we hadn't realised before we started was that, because of the way in which the world and the stage work together once you are outside, which I'll say more about later, you only need to have the next waggon in your sequence a few yards off-stage, as it were, for it to be out of the audience's ken altogether. Therefore, the amount of time that it actually takes to shoot one waggon off, and pull another one

on, is minimal: literally at the most 20 to 30 seconds. What does take time – and again, this was something that we discovered in process of production – was the actual setting up once the waggon was in place. Certain plays have accoutrements which have to be put in position: some are listed in the records, like the Mercers' equipment discussed by Peter Meredith. Then there can be, possibly, steps down from the waggon; putting some kind of temporary support under the corners of the waggon, which we found was essential, because once there are a large number of people on the deck, and they start going out to the edges, the platform is not terribly stable. This is interesting in the light of earlier discussion as to whether the waggons had a steering axle or not, because it would in fact be easier to make the waggon more stable without propping, if it *wasn't* fitted with steering gear: having that at the front creates quite a lot of the stability problem.

This moving into position and setting up was, we realised, probably linked in some way with those long speeches at the beginning of many of the plays. First of all we thought, as I think many people have, that those speeches were to cover the arrival of the waggon. Then we realised that in most cases, the moving in was only a matter of a few seconds, unless it was one of those cases where, because of the relative timings of the sequence, there had to be a gap before the play got to the station. But the speech couldn't really be to cover the moving-in anyway, because the noise of the waggon coming into position, even on tarmac, is very considerable: on cobbles, it would have been a ludicrous competition for the human voice. So I don't think there is a case for the actor coming in ahead of the waggon, standing in the street, and starting his soliloquy. Quite apart from the noise, the effect of a new waggon coming into position is very dramatic in itself. The noise of course contributes to that, but as we are all very much aware, they did make changes to their waggons, and no doubt there was considerable competition among the Guilds to make something of a dramatic new impression, something that would really startle everybody else.

Once the waggon is in position, however, and things have to be set up, your actor can take over, and if he in fact starts one of those speeches as soon as the waggon has stopped, it works very well. This led us to suspect that there might be some connection with the matter that has been touched on very briefly, of professional and amateur playing, and the possibility that professionals were employed. The records here are not full enough to enable us to say with any certainty what the pattern was, but it is very much apparent, in casting and rehearsing these plays, that many of them are built for one, or perhaps two, large parts: strong acting roles, which because of the nature of some of the speeches require extremely competent actors if they are to be interesting. This, it seems to me, makes it at least possible that what might have been going on was the employment of a professional person in some of these roles: and that the plays are built very much that way, for one or more major roles, and

[Fig. 1: Waggon chassis before renovation

Fig. 2: Chassis with deck added

Fig. 3: Overhanging deck with pelmet

Fig. 4: Waggon with box frame

Fig. 5: *Fall of Man* waggon

Fig. 6: Testing lift mechanism

Fig. 7: *The Last Supper* indoors

Fig. 8: *Pentecost* with cutouts

Fig. 9: God ascends on lift

Fig. 10: Pilate and spectator

Fig. 11: *Last Judgment*

The Toronto York Cycle 1977

Photos by

Judy Kahrl, David Knight, Alexandra Johnston, Clarence Redekop, and John Wojtowicz

Fig. 12: Crucifying Christ

Fig. 13: Christ on the Cross

Fig. 14: *Harrowing of Hell*

Fig. 15: Devils in the fog



then a large number of smaller roles which the Guildsmen themselves would have taken.

Another phenomenon which we found fascinating was that people would follow a play round the circuit. They would see a play they liked at the first station, and they would go on to the next station, and if they liked it well enough, they would go on to the *third* station, and then they would race back to the beginning to see what they'd missed. This applied particularly to some of the more spectacular plays of the Cycle. It makes one wonder if some of the recapitulation in these opening soliloquies is not designed to bring up to date people who have in fact wandered off: not necessarily to follow a play round the circuit, but to go and get food, or go and make sure the children were O.K., or whatever. We had a craft fair going on at the same time, and food sellers, and people were wandering off, and then coming back, a bit later on. It's the kind of thing I suppose one should expect. The story does not change from year to year: the plot remains constant, people know what it is: they also know what the exciting points are in the Cycle.

It reminded me very much when it was happening of what I've seen of village performance of plays in India, where the performance will last the whole night. A whole family will come; the play will start about sunset, and go through until about eight o'clock the next morning; but they won't watch the whole thing; they'll go off to the teashop, and they've brought the baby, so they'll go to sleep with the baby for a while, and then when the drums start to indicate that something really exciting is about to happen, they'll wake up, and they'll watch a bit more, and then they'll go off to sleep again, or chat to their friends, or go off to the teashop again: and this is exactly what we observed happening with the audience at the Toronto site, and I suppose we should have expected it, but I don't think we did. There were of course the aficionados who just stood glued to the place, or to their seat, wet though it was, for as long as they could control their bladder or whatever. But certainly the general reaction, once people had realised how the thing operated, was that they could move in and out of what was going on.

This is very important, because it relates very much to the context of outside performance. These plays are obviously part of the whole continuum of life. They are in effect the deeper reality of that life, being made present in time and space: something that is happening eternally. And this has a lot of implications as regards things which we normally regard as distracting if they happen in an inside theatrical situation, where we are normally separated from the stage by light, if not by the physical barrier that is set up for us. Here, if a dog runs across the set, and looks at the child in the cradle, or if a flock of geese go overhead honking, or if the weather itself obtrudes, which happened in Toronto, when we had the worst October weather in 95 years in what is normally a period of Indian summer, it doesn't matter.

There are, in fact, a surprising number of references to the weather in the plays. You can think of the more obvious ones, in the *Noah* play, for example, which brought the house down: but there are a number of them, and at first it's very disconcerting when the audience starts laughing when God talks, for instance, in the *Last Judgment*, about being shut out 'werie and wette'. The audience don't laugh quite as uproariously as at the other play, but it's something the actor has to take cognisance of, and control in the performance: but it's not something that obtrudes. The laughter is genuine, good, 'religious' laughter, in the sense that Kolve talked about it: it is a part of that same continuum.

Similarly the dog. We did a performance of the *Flood* in Middle English for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which was done on a waggon in a field at Guelph near Toronto, with the full sound effects of the waggon drawing up over cobbles, recorded on a superb sound system. At the moment when Noah released the dove, a whole flock of Canada geese went overhead honking. We had a live audience, and again, they just burst out laughing. It was entirely appropriate, at that particular moment, when the dove was released, as part of God's world. It didn't obtrude at all: but neither, I think, would it have obtruded if it had come at the wrong moment, if, for instance, it had happened a few minutes before the first bird was released. I had the impression that it really would have been quite in order for Noah to make some remark about the bird always coming in too soon. In fact, there was a very nice instance of that early on in the Cycle, with one of the more spirited performers in the Adam and Eve plays. In *Adam and Eve in the Garden*, Eve was being given the instructions about what her duties were, and what Adam's duties were, and it was pouring with rain, and freezing cold, and she was shivering, poor girl, and she said, 'We'll do *anything*, Lord, so long as you stop this rain'. It worked. It didn't obtrude: it became a part of this continuum, and I think it was entirely right in the context.

I have a picture here which illustrates one of the things about this continuum (Fig. 10). Here was a child who obviously wanted to sit down, but the conditions were extremely wet, and he didn't want to get his bottom wet, so he went and sat at the foot of Pilate's throne. It didn't obtrude at all, he just sat there: he wasn't a part of the action, but he was a part of the world it was all about: and like so many of those sort of things, it wasn't distracting in the least.

There was also of course the framing effect of the waggons, which is another interesting aspect of the way in which we relate to this world. In fact, although it is part of our world, although it relates to us in very contemporary terms, in ways which reach us in the heart as well as in the mind, nevertheless I think that one of the effects of the framing of these waggon stages is to give us something of the same effect that we get in late medieval art, where there is often action spilling out of the frames, but the frames are always there, with the sense that this is the inner reality of things.

David Parry then showed a sequence of slides illustrating the way in which the sometimes nearly derelict farmcarts bought for the production had been converted into pageant waggons. We illustrate some of these photographs, and some of the production, on pages 21–4.

FIG. 1 shows the sort of basic material we started with, a very scruffy-looking waggon, quite a low one, in fact, in this case.

FIG. 2 shows the next stage: this was to put a sort of box frame deck on the chassis. You can see how the deck overhangs the wheels. There seem to be indications in the records that in many cases curtains were hung to conceal the wheels, so the deck must project so as to clear them. This creates something of an instability problem if you start putting actors out at the edges of the stage, and if you have a large cast onstage, that's what you have to do. So in performance we used props which were put under the corners, and wedges which we knocked in at each station: something that could go on, as I said, during the actor's first speech.

FIG. 3 is a close-up of the same waggon, having been carved, having its first decorations applied. The curtain hangs from behind the pelmet.

FIG. 4 shows the same waggon with the box frame in place. These waggons had decks ranging between 3'6", the lowest one, and 4'5", the highest. That sort of construction, the waggon simply with a curtain frame on it, has a great amount of stability. We achieved it with bolts, but it could equally well have been done with pins. Later on, we wheeled one of them through downtown Toronto, and over onto Toronto island by ferry, over tramcar tracks and all kinds of terrain, and there appeared to be no real strain on that big frame.

FIG. 5 shows a finished waggon, decorated by one of the groups. All the groups knew exactly what they had in the way of resources. If they had the two-storey waggon, they all knew that it was provided with a trap door if they wanted to use it. They knew the height of the waggon, and the kind of extra units, in terms of stairs, or rises, or whatever they wanted, that were available to them, and exactly how the waggon was constructed. Many of them who had not in fact because of the distance had a chance to come and rehearse on the waggons, which is what we encouraged all the groups to do if possible, did a wonderful job of decoration.

FIG. 6 shows us testing one of the devices on the two storey waggon, the lift. We built this waggon with the life to be used in the *Judgment* play, the first *Creation* play, the *Harrowing of Hell* and a number of other plays in the sequence: not all of them necessarily required it, but because we only had a limited number of waggons, it had to be recycled through some of the other plays. I was playing God in the *Last Judgment*.

MEG TWYCROSS: What happens to your knees when you reach the roof?

DAVID PARRY: Well, now, this was our original design for the way the seat worked. And what happened was that, when I was actually sitting as God in the *Last Judgment* play, there was this gentle swinging. The seat was kept a couple of feet above the deck of the waggon. In this first production, I stood up, and stepped up and back onto the seat, and the ascension was taken standing up (Fig. 9). In the later performance, last September, we in fact used a seat, and the platform of the swing was on the deck. The seat was a stool with a curtain behind it, so that the whole effect was of a throne. As I was sitting on the stool, my feet were on the platform, and as the platform rose up, I stood up onto it. It went to within about nine inches of the hole in the roof, and then I simply stepped out onto the top deck. And really, after a bit of practice, it could be quite controlled, and quite smooth.

PETER MEREDITH: It was superb, it really was. It was one of those moments which took off completely. You knew it was going to happen, but it was absolutely magnificent.

DAVID PARRY: We were using an area called King's College Circle, at the heart of the old part of the University of Toronto campus, which is a large green circle with a road around it. The stations were positioned around it: we had a marshalling area in front of the Convocation Hall, a large round building we had as a rain safeguard, and in fact had to use on the Saturday.

It was a very open site, which was unfortunate, in one way: it seemed to be the best kind of compromise we could arrive at, on the particular campus we have at Toronto, but in terms of investigating some of the spatial qualities of the Cycle, it obviously was unsatisfactory, and I think the performances at York by the Lords of Misrule, and of the Cycle at Leeds, and the Lancaster play in the Nuffield Theatre Studio, some of these managed much better in that respect. But it was what we had. It was intended that the fair should occupy the whole of the centre area of the Green, but the weather pushed the fair people into the outer reaches of the Convocation Hall.

The actors and technicians pushed the waggons, and the smaller pieces of scenery on wheels, like Pilate's throne, from station to station, and one of the things that gathered momentum as the production went along was the audience participation in this sort of technical thing: 'Can we join in pushing? Let's help push!', and they did. They would have done all kinds of things had we let them. You could see the Angels pushing the *Creation* waggon along with members of the audience: a nice mix of sacred and secular.

FIGS. 12 and 14 give some idea of how the audience set themselves up. Our intention had been that the bleacher seating at the back, which went in a kind of arc, should form the back rows of the seating for the whole, and that the grassy area should

be filled up with people sitting in front, and as close to the waggon as the action of the play would permit. This didn't happen because by the time we started on the Saturday, the grass was a marsh. So people didn't sit there, which again gave the unfortunate impression of the space which we were intending to use in front of the waggons.

It was a large audience, very difficult to estimate the exact number, because people were coming and going all through the Saturday and Sunday, but it was certainly in excess of 4,000, and it may have been up to the 6,000 mark. The hall we went into midway through the Saturday when it rained holds just under 2,000 people, and it was pretty well full.

When we were driven inside by the weather, we took one waggon completely apart, took it inside the hall, and put it together again. What we discovered was that, far from the production taking longer outside, it took a great deal longer *inside*, because things had to be reset. And even with minimum prop requirements, I think this would always be true, if one tried to perform inside, as I think Alan Nelson has suggested. And a play like the *Entry into Jerusalem* was of course a great pity to bring inside, since it is such a wonderful opportunity for a great procession.

FIG. 7 shows the inside performance. The audience came right around to the edges of the waggon, but the effect was very much of being in a theatre. There was in fact a dog which came inside, and the effect of the dog was funny in the wrong sort of way. It was obtrusive, and it eventually had to be led out.

The play is the *Last Supper*. It shows some of the variety of staging that was produced. The director used two steppings, one at each end, so that a very nice horseshoe effect was obtained. It doesn't take up much more space, and would certainly be possible in the street. This is one of the plays, again, which has a single dominating figure throughout. If you had a bad Christ in the *Last Supper*, the play totally falls apart. They had an average group of actors for the rest of the cast, a superb Christ, and it was a very fine play.

The play of the *Purification* also had an ingenious and very effective piece of staging. They devised a wonderful triptych, in which the centre piece was a revolve, carrying a carved angel which turned into a real speaking one, which worked remarkably well.

The play of *Pentecost* was also very ingenious, and I must say we were horrified when we first saw what they were planning to do: they supplemented their live actors with five apostles painted on the backcloth: but somehow the effect was not nearly as incongruous as it might have been (FIG. 8): the intention was clear from the start, and as the play went on, you focussed on what was happening. The windows at the back opened to reveal the top halves of two angels who spilled tongues of fire and scrolls with the prophecy, *And it shall come to pass in the last days ...*

On the second day we were able to move outside again. FIG. 12 shows the *Crucifixion*. Christ is being nailed to the Cross on the ground, and then (FIG. 13) pulled up onto the waggon. For reasons of stability they pulled the waggon round, end on to the audience.

MEG TWYCROSS: How far did the shaft of the Cross go down below stage level?

DAVID PARRY: Not down to the ground, as I recall. They devised a socket for the end of the shaft, and then simply braced the Cross against the end of the waggon.

MEG TWYCROSS: And the weight of the waggon was heavy enough to balance it?

DAVID PARRY: Yes, you can see from the picture that the weight of the waggon counterbalances the weight of the Cross at this end. They achieved the effect of height they wanted by giving you the height from the top of the Cross all the way to the ground, because this gives you the height of the waggon added in as well. You have this sheer vertical effect on the end view. It works very well, very powerfully.

When the soldiers were crucifying Christ, they laid him down on the ground in front of the waggon. This was one of the few plays which the audience could in fact surround entirely, as you can see from the photograph. However, as the audience built up and up during the second day, they would go anywhere to see the play, including right round behind. You can see in FIG. 14 how far they extend, to almost behind the back of the Hellmouth. Extraordinary, some of them couldn't have seen very much at all. But they were watching other things too; how the swing was operated from behind, how the devils got down the ladders with claws on, and so on: there were so many interesting things to watch, all of which were part of this continuum of what was going on, and probably some of the people who stood around behind to watch at the first station went around and watched a bit at the front for the second station, and so on.

We used the two-storey waggon for the *Harrowing of Hell*. We used all three levels extensively here: Hell Pit, on ground level, into which Satan falls finally; Limbo on the deck; and then the traditional Hell Castle on top, on which Satan and his minions rage. You can see the devil coming down from his castle into limbo on a swing. He finished up going down through the trap door which is immediately below him, forced into the Pit by Christ. This was a much more crowded waggon, because in fact the posts were set into the stage deck quite a bit in order to achieve a proper stability.

We tried to have a big explosion when the souls were released from Limbo, but in fact, for the first two times the conditions were so damp that the powder didn't ignite. At the last station we decided, 'Well, we'll just throw the whole lot in', and in fact it went off, and the effect was quite extraordinary, just like the old London fog (FIG. 15)

and the devils running in and out of it, half seen, half unseen, until it cleared. The effect of total confusion was exactly what we had required, though it was something we had hardly foreseen.

And so to the end of the Cycle. FIG. 11 shows the *Last Judgment* waggon. The height of my head there is just under eighteen feet from the ground, so the total height of the waggon is just about twenty-one feet, possibly twenty-two. Nobody actually travelled on it, we went down and then came up again. It was a pretty stable waggon, but I think even so, we would have had problems with that.

It was mainly Sandy Johnston's reconstruction of the waggon, with some pushing by myself and the wainwright towards tidying up some of the practical difficulties Peter Meredith was talking about this morning. The angels here are given quite a different arrangement from her earlier reconstruction. Nobody knows quite where the angels really did go, and this certainly proved a wonderful backdrop, despite the angel on top, which unfortunately hit a low hanging branch on its way round, and the head thereafter drooped instead of standing up. We had a Hellmouth which was attached to and swung out from the end of the waggon, made of canvas, so that as soon as the waggon drew into its station, the arm swung out, and it was just propped there.

And one of the fortuitous events that we were granted was at the second station, when after this monstrously vile weekend, just at the point of the ascension of the 'brandreth of iren', the sun came out, very low in the sky, and gave this sort of beam effect onto God and the Angels in the heavens. It was quite extraordinary. And made it all worth while.

*David Parry was Artistic Director of the Toronto York Cycle production.*

*For further accounts and appraisals of the production, see:*

Alexandra F. Johnston 'The York Cycle: 1977' *University of Toronto Quarterly* 48 (Fall 1978) 1-9.

'The York Cycle at Toronto: October 1st and 2nd, 1977' *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 20 (1977) 107-122; reviews by David Bevington, Kathleen Ashley, Peter Meredith, Gail MacMurray Gibson, and Thomas Hahn.

*Poculi Ludique Societas, Toronto*

### TORONTO: THE PAGEANT WAGGONS

*This piece is reprinted from the programme of the Toronto York Cycle by kind permission of the authors.*

One of the first steps taken by the York Cycle planning committee was acquiring and building the pageant waggons. Whereas the city of York could have waggons built to order, a modern production of the Cycle must use what is available. The two rubber-tired hay waggons used in this production were the easiest to locate. Hay waggons in running condition can be found in any rural area. The more authentic, wooden-wheeled waggons are more difficult to locate and harder to restore, but as this year's pageant illustrates, the result makes it well worth the effort.

Wooden-wheeled waggons can be located by advertising in rural papers, by visiting country secondhand stores, and by simply inquiring among rural residents. Since it is difficult to determine the cash value of old waggons, it is wise to set an outside limit. A waggon in exceptional condition, with box, original paint, and sound wheels, could cost Canadian \$200. However, all that is necessary is the running gear of the waggon (see DIAGRAM) which can be purchased more reasonably. The reach and tongue can be replaced, and the box can be built.

Once a waggon is located, the wheels are checked for broken spokes, rotten felloes, and loose rims. Bolsters must be sound, and the standards in good condition. Some shake in the wheels is normal, but too much play is undesirable. One should note that the twisted wheel means a rotten axle. The wheels should sit square to the front of the waggon.

Before the actual building of the pageant waggons can begin, a few basic repairs are necessary. All rotten surface wood is scraped, and rotten pieces repaired with hard wood, using the old pieces as patterns. All bolts in good condition should be tightened: if they are too rusted, they should be replaced. Axles are well greased and the rims made secure.

Building begins with framing the stage. A box 12 to 16 inches high must be constructed before the deck can be installed. This box is necessary since the back wheels are always larger than the front. The deck must be level, yet high enough to clear the wheels. All of the framing should be secured with 3 or 4 inch ardo (spiral) nails. If the waggon box is 12 feet long and 40 inches wide, the following materials are needed: two 12' 2-by-12, one 8' 2-by-12, and four 14" 2-by-4. The diagram shows the simple framing technique. The 12' box is centred on a 9' reach (i.e. an equal distance over the front and back axles). The four pieces of 14" 2-by-4 are nailed





## DIRECTORY

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Readers who would like their names included in the next issue of the Directory are asked to fill in and return the form enclosed with this issue of *Medieval English Theatre*.

Please note that we have only included publications to do with medieval drama. It does not represent the person's entire opus.

Dr. J.J. ANDERSON

Department of English, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, *Manchester*, M13 9PL.

*Interests:* All aspects of medieval drama.

*Publications:* with A.C. Cawley 'The Newcastle Play of *Noah's Ark*' *REED Newsletter* 1977: 1, 11–17.

*Working on:* An edition of the Newcastle dramatic records for REED.

Dr. Richard AXTON

Christ's College, *Cambridge*, CB2 3BU.

*Interests:* English literature, early medieval to Tudor.

*Publications:* with John Stevens *Medieval French Plays* (Blackwell, 1971).

'Popular modes in the earliest plays' in *Medieval Drama* edited by N. Denny *Stratford-on-Avon Studies* 16 (Arnold, 1973).

*European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (Hutchinson, 1974).

'The Folk play in Tudor interludes' in *English Drama: Forms and Development* edited by M. Axton and R. Williams (Cambridge UP, 1977).

Edited *Three Rastell Plays* (*Four Elements, Calisto and Melebea, Gentleness and Nobility*) (D.S. Brewer 1979, forthcoming).

*Working on:* General editorship with Marie Axton of a series of old-spelling Tudor interludes – Medwall, Bale, etc – for D.S. Brewer.

At a very rudimentary stage: study of dramatic language and verse forms in ME plays.

Dr. W.J.R. BARRON

Department of English, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, *Manchester*, M13 9PL.

*Interests:* Production of medieval drama in forms acceptable to modern audiences without falsifying the original values.

*Publications:* 'Mystery Plays' in *Webster's New World Companion to English and American Literature* edited by A. Pollard (Compton Russell, London International Press, London, 1973).

*Shepherds and Kings: a Medieval Mystery for Advent* compiled and translated from the English Mystery Cycles (RADIUS, London 1979, forthcoming).

Dr. Richard BEADLE

St. John's College, Cambridge, CB2 1TP.

*Interests:* Medieval Drama in East Anglia, the York Cycle.

*Publications:* 'Plays and Players at Thetford and Nearby, 1498–1540' *Theatre Notebook* (1978).

'The East Anglian Game-place: an opportunity for further research' *REED Newsletter* 1978: 1, 2–4.

'Dramatic Records of Mettingham College, Suffolk, 1403–1527' (forthcoming).

*Working on:* An edition of the York Cycle.

With Peter Meredith, a description and facsimile of B.L. Add. Ms. 35290 (the York Plays).

Mrs. Margaret BROWN

7 Foxthorn Paddock, Badger Hill, York, YO1 5HJ.

*Interests:* Performance of medieval drama, particularly as related to other branches of medieval art.

*Working on:* Mrs. Brown is in charge of the photographic collections of York Minster Library, and of the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York.

Philip S. COOK, B.A., M.A.

Department of Drama, University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL.

*Interests:* medieval drama, especially morality plays.

*Working on:* 'Accessible' texts (suitable for acting purposes) of the English moralities – *Castle of Perseverance*, *Pride of Life*, *Wisdom*, *Mundus et Infans*, together with acting, staging, and production notes.

Clifford DAVIDSON, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of English, The Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, USA.

*Interests:* Drama, especially medieval English.

Co-editor, *Comparative Drama*; Executive Editor, *Early Drama, Art, and Music*.

*Publications:* edited *Studies in Medieval Drama in Honor of William L. Smolden* (1974, reprint of special issue of *Comparative Drama* 8, 1).

*Drama and Art: an Introduction to the Use of Evidence from the Visual Arts for the Study of Early Drama* EDAM Monograph Series I (Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1977).

With David O'Connor *York Art: a Subject List of Extant and Lost Items relevant to Early Drama* EDAM Reference Series I (Medieval Institute Publications 1978).

‘The Unity of the Wakefield *Mactacio Abel*’ *Traditio* 23 (1967) 494–500.

‘An Interpretation of the Wakefield *Judicium*’ *Annale Medievale* 10 (1969) 104–19.

‘The Digby *Mary Magdalene* and the Magdalene Cult of the Middle Ages’ *Annual Medievale* 13 (1972) 70–87.

‘The End of the World in Medieval Drama and Art’ *Michigan Academician* 5 (1972) 257–63.

‘Thomas Aquinas, the Feast of Corpus Christi, and the English Cycle Plays’ *Michigan Academician* 7 (1974) 103–10.

‘Civic Concern and Iconography in the York Passion’ *Annual Medievale* 15 (1974) 125–49.

‘The Realism of the York Realist and the York Passion’ *Speculum* 50 (1975) 270–83.

‘After the Fall: Design in the Old Testament Plays in the York Cycle’ *Medievalia* 1 (1975) 1–24.

‘Death and his Court: Iconography in Shakespeare’s Tragedies’ *Studies in Iconography* 1 (1975) 74–86.

‘Northern Spirituality and the Late Medieval Drama of York’ in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom* edited E.R. Elder (Kalamazoo Cistercian Publications 1976) 125–51, 204–8.

With Mona Mason ‘Staging the York *Creation, and Fall of Lucifer*’ *Theatre Survey* 17 (1976) 162–78.

‘From *Tristia* to *Gaudium*: Iconography and the York-Towneley *Harrowing of Hell*’ *American Benedictine Review* 28 (1977) 260–75.

‘Early Drama, Art, and Music: A New Project’ *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 20 (1977) 91–94.

*Working on:* a book or series of articles on the aesthetics of medieval drama.

An edition of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*.

Dr. Nicholas DAVIS

Departments of English Language and English Literature, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, L69 3BX.

*Interests:* Medieval/Tudor/Jacobean drama, especially continuities over this period. Thesis centred on the Lollard *Tretis of myraclis pleyinge*, and has a special interest in polemic against the drama.

*Working on:* the King Game, in its various forms, and its possible relations to written drama.

Dr. Diana DEVLIN

12 Nevern Square, Earls Court, London, SW5 9NW.

*Interests:* Medieval and Renaissance theatre and drama.

*Working on:* *London Theatre Guide 1575–1642* at Bear Gardens Museum and Arts Centre.

John R. ELLIOTT, Jr.

Associate Professor of English, English Department, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13210, USA.

*Interests:* Modern productions of medieval plays.

*Publications:* with Graham A. Runnalls *The Baptism and Temptation of Christ: A Newly Discovered French Passion Play* (Yale UP, 1978).

*Working on:* *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (forthcoming).

Dr. Peter HAPPE

6 Vicarage Road, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6EG.

*Interests:* Morality plays, the Vice.

*Publications:* 'The Vice and the Folk Drama' *Folklore* (1964).

'Tragic Themes in Three Tudor Moralities' *Studies in English* (1965).

*Tudor Interludes* (ed) (Penguin, 1972).

*English Mystery Plays* (ed) (Penguin, 1975).

*Four Morality Plays* (ed) (Penguin — at press for 1979).

The Vice: A Checklist and an Annotated Bibliography' *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* (forthcoming for 1979).

*Working on:* *The Complete Plays of John Bale* (ed) for D.S. Brewer, *Cambridgeshire Art* for EDAM.

Professor Reginald W. INGRAM

University of British Columbia, 2075 Westbrook Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1W5.

*Interests:* Medieval drama, drama generally (especially Shakespearean) with a bent to the theatrical; music and drama; music and literature.

*Publications:* 'The Use of Music in English Miracle Plays' *Anglia* 75 (1957) 55–76.

'Gammer Gurton's Needle: comedy not quite of the lowest order' *Studies in English Literature* (Spring 1967) 257–68.

"To find the players and all that longeth therto": Notes on the production of medieval drama in Coventre' in *The Elizabethan Theatre V* edited by G.R. Hibbard (Macmillan, Canada, 1974) 17–43.

*Working on: Records of Early English Drama 4: Coventry, Medieval Dramatic Entertainments at Coventry; Hampshire; exploratory for REED during sabbatical 1979–80.*

Professor Alexandra Johnston

Records of Early English Drama, 85 Charles Street West, Toronto, M5S 1K5, Canada.

*Interests:* Medieval drama

*Publications:* edited with Margaret Rogerson: *Records of Early English Drama I York: Introduction and Records; II York: Appendices, Translations, Endnotes, Glossary and Indexes* (Toronto, 1979).

With Margaret Dorrell 'The Doomsday Pageant of the York Mercers: 1433' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 5 (1971) 29–34.

With Margaret Dorrell 'The York Mercers and their Pageant of Doomsday: 1433–1526' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 6 (1972) 10–35.

'The Procession and Play of Corpus Christi in York after 1426' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 7 (1973–4) 55–62.

'The Plays of the Religious Guilds of York: the *Creed Play* and the *Pater Noster Play*' *Speculum* 50 (1975) 55–90.

'The Guild of Corpus Christi and the Procession of Corpus Christi in York' *Medieval Studies* 38 (1976) 372–84.

'The York Cycle: 97' *University of Toronto Quarterly* 48 (1978) 1–9.

'Medieval Drama in England: 1966' *Queen's Quarterly* 74 (1967) 78–91.

'A Medieval and Renaissance Dramatic Records Project' *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 18 (1974) 105–6.

'Yule in York' *REED Newsletter* I (1976) 3–10.

'York Notes' *REED Newsletter* 1976: 2, 9–11.

'Research in Progress' *REED Newsletter* 1976: 2, 16.

'*The Medieval English Stage*' review article of book by Alan H. Nelson in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 44 (1975) 238–48.

'Medieval Drama: the York Cycle in the Fifteenth Century' a videotape made with Margaret Dorrell Rogerson for the series sponsored by the Centre for Medieval Studies (1972).

*Working on:* Edition of the Berkshire Records for REED: various articles connected with those records.

Pamela KING

Centre for Medieval Studies, King's Manor, University of York, York, YO1 2EP (forwarding address).

*Interests:* Staging of medieval plays with York *Lords of Misrule*. Mystery cycles, especially doctrinal and comparative angle. Ministry plays with particular attention to *Lazarus*.

*Working on:* Apocryphal precedents for Lazarus' account of Hell; sepulchre and cadavers.

Professor Gordon KIPLING

Department of English, University of California, *Los Angeles*, California 90024, USA.

*Interests:* Medieval and Tudor drama, especially 'triumphs': Royal Entries, Lord Mayor's Shows, and so forth.

*Publications:* *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance* (University of Leiden Press, 1977) — has chapters on the Tudor disguising, the Tudor mimetic tourney, and the 1501 Royal Entry of Katharine of Aragon.

'Triumphal Drama: Form in English Civic Pageantry' *Renaissance Drama* NS 8 (1977) 37–56.

*Working on:* A book on the Triumph, including Royal Entries, Lord Mayor's Shows, Pope-burning processions, and 'costume' triumphs such as those enacted before the performance of *The Triumph of Peace*.

An edition of the narrative account of the wedding festivities for Prince Arthur and Katharine of Aragon in 1501, based upon all available substantive texts, together with supplementary materials.

David LEVEY

Department of English, Potchefstroom University for C.H.E., *Potchefstroom*, South Africa, 2520.

*Interests:* Medieval mysteries and moralities.

*Working on:* *The Castle of Perseverance*.

John MARSHALL

Drama Department, King Alfred's College, Sparkford Road, *Winchester*, SO22 4NR.

*Interests:* The staging of the Corpus Christi Cycle, with particular emphasis on Chester.

*Publications:* 'The Chester Coopers' Pageant: *Selles and Cathedra*' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 8 (1975) 120–128.

'The Chester Whitsun Plays: Dating of Post-Reformation Performances from the Smiths' Accounts' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 9 (1977) 51–61.

'Players of the Coopers' Pageant from the Chester Plays in 1572 and 1575' *Theatre Notebook* (forthcoming).

*Working on:* 'The Pageant Carriage of the Chester Whitsun Plays: 1546–1575' M.Phil. Thesis.

Jeremy MAULE

55 Rochester Road, Kentish Town, I NW1.

*Interests:* Mystery and morality plays, and religious literature in late medieval England.

*Working on:* Mystery plays typologies — M.A. dissertation.

*Le Mireur des Enfants Ingratz*, particularly mise-en-scène.

Peter MEREDITH

School of English, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT.

*Interests:* Medieval drama, unlimited.

*Publications:* 'Nolo Mortem and the Ludus Coventriae Play of the Woman Taken in Adultery' *Medium Aevum* 38 (1969) 38–54.

With Stanley J. Kahrl *The N-Town Plays, a facsimile of British Library MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII*, introduction, *Leeds Texts and Monographs — Medieval Drama Facsimiles* IV (Leeds, 1977).

'A Reconstruction of some Textual Problems in the N-Town Manuscript (BL MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII)' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 9 (1977).

'Medieval Entertainments' in *The Medieval Adventure*, edited by Stanley J. Kahrl and Joanne Kantrowitz (Braziller, New York, forthcoming).

'Item for a grone — iijd: Records and Performance', a paper delivered at the REED Colloquium 1978, to be published by the University of Toronto Press.

'A Critical Analysis of the Production of the York Play at Leeds, 1975' to be published in *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*.

*York Mystery Plays*, a tape-slide sequence, (Hearne and Jobson, York, 1976).

*Working on:* *The York Cycle, a facsimile of British Library Add. MS 35290*, introduction (with Richard Beadle), *Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles* (due 1979/80).

Dr. David MILLS

Department of English Language, University of Liverpool, Modern Languages Building, Chatham Street, I, L69 3BX.

*Interest:* All aspects of medieval drama, but especially (i) textual and literary criticism, (ii) Chester Mystery Cycle.

*Publications:* 'Approaches to Medieval Drama' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 3 (1969) 47–61.

'Some Possible Implications of Herod's Speech, Chester Play VIII, 153–204' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973) 131–43.

'The Two Versions of Chester Play V: Balaam and Balak' *Chaucer and Middle English: Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins* edited Beryl Rowland (London 1974) 366–7.



‘Concerning a Stage Direction in the *Ludus Coventriae*’ *English Language Notes* 11 (1974) 162–4.

With R.M. Lumiansky *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Facsimile of MS Bodley 175 Leeds Texts and Monographs Medieval Drama Facsimiles* (Leeds 1973).

With R.M. Lumiansky *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Vol. 1 Text* EETS SS 3 (London, 1974).

With R.M. Lumiansky ‘The Five Cyclic Mss. of the Chester Cycle of Mystery Plays: a Statistical Survey of Variant Readings’ *Leeds Studies in English* NS 7 (1973) 95–107.

With R.M. Lumiansky *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Facsimile of Huntingdon MS 2* (at press).

‘The Staging Diagrams of the Cornish *Ordinalia* and *The Castle of Perseverance*’ for *Local Maps and Plans from Medieval England* (at press).

*Working on:* Entries for ‘Ranulf Higden’, ‘Chester Plays’, ‘Medieval Drama’ for *A Dictionary of the Middle Ages*.

With R.M. Lumiansky: *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Vol. 2* for EETS.

With Peter McDonald: ‘The Drama of Religious Ceremonial’ for *The Revels History of Drama* series.

‘The Structure of the Chester Cycle’ (article).

Dr. Paula NEUSS

Department of English, Birkbeck College, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX.

*Working on:* An edition of Skelton’s *Magnificence* for the *Revels* series.

An edition of the Cornish *Creacion of the World* for Garland Publishing – a revision of her University of Toronto thesis – and an article on the same subject.

David O’Connor

Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, King’s Manor, York, YO1 2EP.

*Interests:* Relationship between medieval drama and art. Production of medieval plays.

*Publications:* with Clifford Davidson *York Art: a Subject List of Extant and Lost Items Relevant to Early Drama* *EDAM Reference Series I* (Western Michigan University, 1978).

With J. Haselock ‘The Stained and Painted Glass’ in *A History of York Minster* edited by G. Aylmer and R. Cant (Oxford, 1977).

*Working on:* a doctoral thesis on ‘The Fourteenth Century Glass in the Nave of York Minster’ and preparing a volume on the Minster glass for the *Corpus Vitrearum* series. Iconography of medieval drama, especially the York Cycle.

David PARRY

Poculi Ludique Societas, c/o Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, 39B Queen's Park Crescent, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A1.

*Interests:* All aspects of early drama, especially practical experiments with staging methods and general theatrical techniques in the medieval and early Renaissance theatre.

*Publications:* 'The York Cycle at the University of Toronto' *REED Newsletter* 1977: 1.

'The Season's Round: the Calendar and Folk Tradition' *For What Time I am in this World* (Toronto, Peter Martin, 1977).

'Mumming' *For What Time I am in this World* (1977).

Edited with Kathy Pearl *Nice Wanton, Poculi Ludique Societas Performance Texts* (Toronto, 1978).

*Working on:* Performance editions of John Heywood, *The Pardoner and the Friar*; *Mankind*; *The Castle of Perseverance*, a full-text modernisation (with Alexandra Johnston).

A fulltime programme with the PLS.

Mrs. Meg TWYECROSS

Department of English Language and Medieval Literature, University of Lancaster, Lancaster, LA1 4YT.

*Interests:* medieval drama, especially the late medieval English mystery plays, in their literary, iconographic, and devotional setting. The York records. Practical experiments in medieval staging techniques.

*Publications:* "Places to hear the play": pageant stations at York, 1398–1572' *REED Newsletter* 1978: 2, 10–33.

'Playing the Resurrection' (in *Festschrift* for J.A.W. Bennett, forthcoming).

*Quem Quaeritis*, videotape (University of Lancaster Media Service Unit, 1978).

*Working on:* 'The Chamber at the Common Hall Gates' (article). Possible analogues to medieval English pageant waggons. The English mystery plays and affective piety. Medieval acting style.

Dr. Michael J. WRIGHT.

Department of English, Australian National University, P.O. Box 4, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia.

*Interests:* mystery plays, especially the *Ludus Coventriae*. The nature of comedy in the mystery plays.

*Working on:* a students' edition of the *Ludus Coventriae*.

## REPORTS ON TWO MYSTERY PLAY PRODUCTIONS IN 1979

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**Three Mystery Plays:** *Mactacio Abel* (Wakefield),  
*Noah* (Chester),  
*Abraham* (Northampton) DURHAM 7<sup>th</sup> July 1979.

The three plays put on to celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City of Durham were confessedly done mainly for fun and not as a serious experiment in staging — and there is nothing wrong in that — but they did provide an interesting demonstration of the effect of physical surroundings on this kind of open-air drama. The organiser and director, John McKinnell, had borrowed three brewer's drays, complete with Shire horses and bowler-hatted drivers, and the plays were performed, if not actually processionally, at least one after the other in four different locations in the town, to the ordinary Saturday shopping crowds. It so happened that each of the stations was rather different in terrain and conditions from the others, and the two at which I saw the plays, at the end of Framwellgate Bridge, and in the Market Square, were highly contrasted.

The narrow street of Framwellgate, with its tall buildings over-looking the players (God spoke from the upper window of a furniture shop) cramped the audience together more, so that it was harder to see what was going on: but it also seemed to focus the action more than did the open space of the Market, and the acoustics were much better. In the Market, words and actions tended to get dissipated. The audience, many of whom obviously weren't expecting any of this, and were a bit mystified ('by, he's got a dove: it must be Noah!') were intrigued rather than enthralled, which must always be the case when the religious side of the festive setting is missing, so that it was harder to hold their concentration, though it was noticeable that in the narrow street setting you had to crane and wriggle a bit to see, and this paradoxically made you concentrate harder. It was much easier to wander off, in every sense, in the Market.

The text was modernised, but even so, it was noticeable that *Noah*, with its more compact rhythm and rhyme scheme, was generally felt in the audience to be the most successful: possibly because the action was more patterned, and the climaxes more obviously contrived. It was much more difficult to follow the more subtle ebb and flow of the *Mactacio* and *Abraham*, though the actors in all three were equally competent. It was also noticeable, and this is something modernisers have to take into account, how the rhymes helped to hold the attention, and how strangely lost one felt when, occasionally, one didn't happen. With the distractions of Saturday going on all round you, strongly marked patterns, physical as well as aural, were needed to hold the attention.

The horses, though probably unauthentic — they had to take a massive run at the cobbled hill, hooves clattering, as the crowds scattered — gave the proper sense of ceremony and occasion, as did the uniformly tabarded musicians: and for a moment, the procession of *Abraham*, with its red and black liveries and *Agnus Dei* banner, reminded me of that other processional festival that passes over the same route, the Durham Miners' Gala.

MT

The medieval plays performed at Coventry in the ruins of the old cathedral were a composite group consisting of the two Coventry pageants and a series of excerpts from the other cycles, which took the story up to the *Resurrection*. The Shearman and Tailors' pageant and the Weavers' pageant formed the opening. They were played on three raised levels, one to the North (Joseph's house, Herod's court, 2'–3' up), and two to the South (the stable at Bethlehem and the Temple at Jerusalem, approached by steps and somewhat higher, in the old Cappers' chapel), with movement between, across the floor of the old nave, punctuated by speeches delivered from the bases of the demolished columns. The audience was free to move with the action (which it did), and one moment you were within the reach of Herod's grotesque scimitar, the next watching the Christ child through a sea of heads, and then being startled by a shepherd above your right shoulder. Not quite the feeling of the juggernaut pageant waggon, perhaps, but certainly exciting, and giving reality to the Digby play type of audience movement from station to station, without the actual 'fynally of this stacon thus we mak conclusyon' direction. Herod deserves special mention; he was properly horrifying and very funny, and he filled his rages with exactly the right amount of mouthing and frothing – though he didn't fulfil the famous stage direction. The amplification of Gabriel to give an other-worldly quality to his voice merely intruded a modern public address system into a well-created medieval atmosphere.

The text seemed largely uncut but the transference of the speeches of the prophets to the shepherds in the Shearman and Tailors' pageant gave a slightly unreal effect of learned yokels – though no odder, I suppose, than the prophecies in the Towneley shepherds' mouths.

The rest of the performance gradually swung the action round to the East end for the *Crucifixion* – a well-managed episode with a cross pivoted on two short uprights, and a very effective use of the conjuror's technique of showing off his implements (in this case nails) to add the sense of entertainment to that of a job well done. Altogether well worthwhile and a clear proof that the combined episode technique of the Coventry pageants works well and remarkably smoothly.

**PM**

#### THE TOWNELEY CYCLE AT WAKEFIELD

The whole of the Towneley Cycle is to be performed in the open air on a fixed stage outside the West door of Wakefield Cathedral on the weekend of 28–29 June 1980, as part of the Wakefield Festival. It will be played by a number of local groups (one, or in some cases two or more pageants per group). It is also possible that after playing on the fixed stage the pageants will move on to perform on a waggon stage in the precinct. The text will be a new one prepared for this production (if it's ever finished, that is). There will be seating and space for standing, as at Leeds in 1975.

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