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THE CHESTER WHITSUN PLAYS: DATING OF POST-REFORMATION PERFORMANCES FROM THE SMITHS' ACCOUNTS

By JOHN MARSHALL

In a recent article on the Chester plays Lawrence Clopper¹ drew attention to the problem of accurately dating the earliest Smiths' account for the Whitsun plays as it appears in the seventeenth-century transcription made by Randle Holme (BL MS Harl. 2054). The account in question (ff. 14^v-15^r) is dated 1554 in the left margin, and again following the names of the stewards for the year. Clopper points out (p. 51) that if this was the date the entry would seem to be out of sequence, and that a later account is also dated 1554 (ff. 15^v-16^r). He suggests that Holme may have mistakenly transposed the last two numerals of the date as he did with another account, although in the latter instance the error was corrected. This would give an entry date of 1545 and as the usual procedure was to date accounts from the Smiths' Company election day - the first Sunday after the feast of St Peter (29 June)² - the Whitsun play expenses would refer to a performance in 1546. This date is supported by the Mayors list in BL MS Harl. 2105, but is not included in the BL MS Add. 29777 list, which refers to a performance in the mayoral year 1553-54, and in all other years for which Smiths' play accounts exist (1560-61, 1566-67, 1567-68, 1571-72, 1574-75). In view of the apparent infrequency of performance in post-Reformation Chester it would be pleasing to have more than the possibility of a scribal error as evidence for redating the Smiths' account as 1545-46.

In order to determine the actual date of the earliest play account it is necessary to establish the dates of the other accounts which surround it. The series begins with an undated entry (f. 14^v) headed by a list of company members who had paid quarterages for the year to their stewards, "Io harrison & Simon founder". From this list of thirty-one members the names of fourteen can be found in the Rolls of the Freemen of the City of Chester.³ To become a member of a Chester guild or company it was generally necessary to have served an apprenticeship of at least seven years with a Freeman of the city and then to have taken up one's own freedom.⁴ Thus the members listed should all be Freemen and the dates of their admission give some indication of the approximate period of this account. The dates range from 1506 to 19 August, 1545 with half of those dated falling in the 1530's. It would therefore appear that the account refers to a year sometime about 1545.

Further evidence for dating comes below the list of names, in the comparatively brief account for the year, with the expenditure "at william locker dinner viij^d" (f. 14^v). It was apparently a

custom of the Smiths to celebrate a man's freedom of the city and his coming in to the company with a dinner.⁵ William Locker was made a Freeman on 26 September, 1544 and in all probability the consequent celebration would have taken place at some time during the Smiths' year 6 July, 1544 to 4 July, 1545. The difficulty in establishing this as the year of the first account in the series is the date, 19 August, 1545, given for the freedom of "urian rither" (Ryder) whose name appears in the list. Although this date is only six and a half weeks later than the end of the year suggested for the account it seems unlikely, but not impossible, that Urian Ryder would have been received into the company before taking up his freedom, especially as the list does not include the names of William Locker and Robert Hancoke, both made Freemen in 1544. The penultimate name in the list, directly below "urian rither", is "geo hedmaker maker of Arrow heads". This was doubtless an alias for George Linson, the only headmaker listed in the Freeman Rolls, who was franchised on 26 September, 1544, the same day as William Locker. The Smiths tended to include the names of new members at the end of their lists after those of widows.⁶ This is the position in which "urian rither" and "geo hedmaker" appear, although "Io midleton", the last member listed, was made a Freeman as early as 1539. From this limited evidence it seems that "geo hedmaker", following the usual procedure, was admitted to the Smiths' Company and paid quarterages in the year in which he was made a Freeman, 1544. William Locker became a member of the company later that year, as the payment at his dinner indicates, and was, therefore, not included in the quarterage list. The seemingly premature admission of "urian rither" into the company may have been due to exceptional circumstances or, because the name appears to have been one of family tradition occurring three times in the Freeman Rolls between 1545 and 1640, the name in the first account list may be that of an earlier Urian Ryder than the one franchised in 1545, possibly his father.⁷ In spite of this difficulty the year 1544-45 seems the most likely date for the opening account.

The two-line entry (f. 14^v) which follows this account, and is separated from it by a roughly drawn line, is not an independent account. The entry is undated and reads:

stuards of the ocupation Rich scryvnⁿer & gilbert knoys
the Iurnymen payd yearly to Company & smyths keep their
booke.

It is unlikely that these two stewards actually followed those of the first account as Gilbert Knowles was not made a Freeman, and therefore not a member of the company, until 25 March, 1550. Intriguingly their names appear again as stewards in the later account marked 1554 (ff. 15^v-16^r). Although it was not unknown for the same stewards to take office in more than one year - Hugh Stocken and John Doe undertook it on four occasions - it certainly seems to have been uncommon. It is, then, quite possible that this entry is related to the later account dated 1554 and that in its present position it is misplaced.

The second account in the series, immediately following the two-line entry, is the one in question here. It consists mainly of Whitsun play expenses which, in themselves, are of little help in determining the account year. The only payment of possible significance to the date is, "we gaue to barnes & the syngers iij^s 4^d" (f. 15^r). It would be misleading to assume that this is a reference to Sir Randle Barnes, a minor canon of Chester Cathedral,⁸ merely from the evidence of his name also appearing in the play accounts for 1561 and 1568. Thomas Barnes, thought to be the father of Randle, was organist at Chester Cathedral from 1551 to about 1558, and for some years earlier was a conduct or singing man in the choir.⁹ In view of the payment being made jointly to "barnes & the syngers" - later accounts always enter separately Randle Barnes, the organist, and the singers - and the omission of a title or christian name, I am inclined to think that the account refers to Thomas Barnes at a time before he became organist in 1551.

Evidence for more precise dating is found in another payment, not related to the play expenses, in the same account:

we gaue symeane ffounder more then the shat came to iij^d.
(f. 14^v)

Collection of the "shot" would normally have been the responsibility of the stewards, who in this account are recorded as "Robert handcock & william locker".¹⁰ Simon Founder was one of the stewards for the first account in this series, for which I have suggested the date 6 July, 1544 to 4 July, 1545. The payment made to him appears to have been for money he was personally owed by the company, probably when they drank more than they paid for, and it would be reasonable for the stewards of the following year to reimburse him. In this sequence the account would then be for the year 5 July, 1545 to 3 July, 1546, providing Whitsun play expenses against a performance in 1546. The date is confirmed by the receipt in the same account "of Io perciuall for stock Cardmaker in mane xx^d" (f. 14^v).¹¹ John Percyvall, made a Freeman on 18 July, 1531, is one of only seven cardmakers that can be positively identified in the Freeman Rolls between 1506 and 1568. Two of them were made Freeman in the same year, 1552 - the only two in fact between 1542 and 1565 - and at least one of them would have been apprenticed to John Percyvall.¹² Masters were required to enrol their apprentices at the first meeting of the company after taking them on and if, as seems likely, the money received was in connection with the enrolment of one or both of the apprentice cardmakers franchised in 1552, the receipt would be recorded in the account seven years earlier, namely 5 July, 1545 to 3 July, 1546.¹³

The account (f. 15^r) which follows the play expenses gives further support to this date. The year 1547 is written in the left margin, below 1574 which is crossed through, and again in the account, on a line with the date in the margin, after "for lights on Corpus Christi day". Of greater significance is the entry in the same account:

howse

Spent at Rich Anderton Alderman when the kinges dyrrige
was xvj^d. (f. 15^r) ^

This would seem to be a reference to the death of Henry VIII on 28 January, 1547.¹⁴ The expense would therefore have been incurred during the year 4 July, 1546 to 2 July, 1547; the year immediately after that proposed for the first Whitsun play account. The marginal date 1547 clearly refers to the year in which Corpus Christi day fell during the period of the account. The next account (f. 15^r) can be dated, by the receipt of money from "Io ball" who was made a Freeman on 10 May, 1548, with some certainty as the following year 3 July, 1547 to 30 June, 1548. With the exception of the misplaced two lines the opening accounts seem to provide an unbroken sequence of four years from 6 July, 1544 to 30 June, 1548 which include Whitsun play expenses for a performance in 1546.

The following, fifth, account in the series (f. 15^v) is short and undated and not necessarily a continuation of the 1544-48 sequence. The five items in the account give no clear indication of the date although the payment "to S^r Io smyth for the Reggenall ijd" is of some interest in connexion with the plays. The account which comes after it is also undated in the manuscript (f. 15^v), but it can be fairly accurately dated from other sources. A Chester City Record Office MS TAO/1, dated 4 November, 1555, lists the monthly contributions to be made in that year by company members towards the construction of the much needed new haven at Neston.¹⁵ This document when listing the Smiths' contributions (f. 10^r) names their stewards at that time as Richard Barker and Hugh Stocken.¹⁶ The Smiths' accounts record these two as stewards together only once, in the second of the undated accounts on f. 15^v; the final entry of which is "spent on friday goinge to m^r maior about the hauen vjd". This is the first reference to the haven in the Smiths' accounts and as it appears that Richard Barker and Hugh Stocken were stewards in November, 1555 the undated account is almost certainly for the year 30 June, 1555 to 4 July, 1556.

The Smiths' contributions to the new haven also play a part in determining the year of the following account which Randle Holme had some difficulty in dating (f. 15^v). He was unable to decipher the final numeral in the year and after his copy of the date wrote "I conseaue 1556". If Holme's copy of the numeral is accurate then 6 is certainly the most likely reading,¹⁷ but problematically the entry also includes the date of the election day as 4 July. The only year in which the fourth fell on a Sunday - the usual election day - between 1546 and 1574, and for which other verifiable accounts do not already exist, was 1557.¹⁸ This means that, providing the election procedure was the same as in other years, the account is either for the year 1556-57 (as indicated by the year), or the following year 1557-58 (as indicated by the day and month). The earlier year is supported by the payment in the account made "to m^r maior to the hauen xx^s". The monthly contributions to the new haven, referred to in connexion with the preceding account, were for the year beginning on the last Sunday of November 1555.¹⁹ Payments would therefore be expected from the Smiths during the latter part of their account year 30 June, 1555 to 4 July, 1556 and the first

part of the year 5 July, 1556 to 3 July, 1557. Many of the companies seem to have paid regularly at first but then chose to make lump sum payments to cover more than one month's contribution.²⁰ It is probable that the twenty shillings paid by the Smiths was just such a lump sum, possibly for the period between July, 1556 and November, 1556, in which case the most likely date for the account is 5 July, 1556 to 3 July, 1557. This date not only follows the year of the account above it, but it is also worth noting that the last day of the preceding year would have been 4 July. The original scribe may have been responsible for the simple error of beginning the new year with the date of the previous day;²¹ an error which Holme unwittingly transcribed.

Following this account is the later entry marked 1554 (ff. 15^v-16^r). Although the date is written in the left margin (f. 15^v) and again after "payments" at the top of f. 16^r it is doubtful whether the entry is in fact for that year. One of the items in the account is "payd at the Aldermans buryng v^s 8^d" to which is added, what appears to be Holme's own comment, "this was William huntington by other booke". If this is a reference to the burial of William Huntington the account could not possibly be for the year 1554-55 as Huntington is named as an Alderman of the Smiths' Company in the new haven contribution list dated 4 November, 1555.²² A later date than 1554-55 for the account is also suggested by the record of receipts, probably in connexion with admittance to the company, from "Ienkyn ap Rees xvj^s" and "Ric barker in part xij^s vj^d" (f. 15^v). John ap Ries was enrolled as a Freeman on 20 January 1556 and Richard Barker during the mayoral year 1557-58.²³ Neither, therefore, is likely to have been mentioned in a Smiths' account before 1556. Considering particularly the date of Barker's franchise and the year of the preceding account, the more probable date for the entry marked 1554 is 4 July, 1557 to 2 July, 1558. The date of the next account (f. 16^r) would seem to confirm this as it apparently follows chronologically. The year 1558 is written in the left margin and the account records "Rec of Tho Towers smyth that day he was sworne brother 4^{li} vj^s viij^d". Thomas Towers is the last name in the Freeman Roll for the mayoral year 1557-58 which suggests that he would have been "sworne brother" of the Smiths' Company at some time during the account year 3 July, 1558 to 1 July, 1559. From this entry the remaining accounts continue in an unbroken sequence until the year ending 5 July, 1578.²⁴

The series of Smiths' accounts can, then, be dated with some certainty as follows: 6 July, 1544 to 30 June, 1548 (ff. 14^v-15^r), and 30 June, 1555 to 5 July, 1578 (ff. 15^v-21^v) with one short undated account (f. 15^v) falling between the year ending 30 June, 1548 and the year beginning 30 June, 1555, and possibly following in date the 1544-48 sequence or coming immediately before the 1555-78 sequence. From this discussion it can be seen that the accounts are not in a disordered state as has been previously thought; none are out of sequence, although two lines are probably misplaced and the accounts for the early 1550's are missing, while others are undated and both entries marked 1554 are inaccurately dated.

The revised dating of the earlier accounts means that play expenses are found in the following years, those in brackets refer

to the dates given in the margin by Randle Holme:

- 1545-46 (1554) ff. 14^v-15^r.
 1560-61 (1561) ff. 16^r-17^r.
 1566-67 (1567) ff. 18^r-18^v.
 1567-68 (1568; at the beginning of the account after the stewards names is written "ix yere of our Reyne", confirming that the account began in 1567) ff. 18^v-19^r.
 1571-72 (about 1571; this is possibly an incomplete account as no mention is made of the stewards for the year and only play expenses are entered) f. 19^v.
 1574-75 (1574; after the stewards names and the election date 4 July, 1574 Holme writes "by this it should be 1575", presumably referring to the year of performance as he does when dating the other play accounts) ff. 20^v-21^r.²⁵

All but the first date are supported by the Add. 29777 Mayors list which also mentions a performance in 1554. Lawrence Clopper (p. 51) suggests that the scribe of Add. 29777 may have taken his information about the plays from Harl. 2054 and incorporated this inaccurate date into his Mayors list. The reverse seems more likely. Add. 29777 is probably a late sixteenth-century manuscript²⁶ and consequently the scribe could not have taken his information from the Smiths' accounts in Harl. 2054 which were transcribed by Randle Holme (probably the second) in the seventeenth century. It is, however, possible that Holme used Add. 29777, or more probably its original source, to establish or confirm the dates of the play expenses when copying them from the Smiths' account book.²⁷ This would have been straightforward for performances between 1561 and 1575 where the accounts run in an unbroken and fairly well dated sequence. Holme would then have been left with the remaining reference in the Mayors list to a performance in 1554 which he mistakenly associated with the earlier play account. Possibly the original account was undated, or marked correctly as 1545 which Holme, influenced by the Mayors list, took to be an error. If there was a performance in 1554 he would not have been able to find the appropriate Smiths' expenses, as the account for 2 July, 1553 to 30 June, 1554 is missing. Similarly the possibility of a performance in 1550, which has been suggested by Clopper from the surviving Shoemakers' play account, goes unrecorded in the absence of a Smiths' account for the relevant year.²⁸ It is perhaps worth mentioning here that there is no evidence in the accounts for an individual performance of the Smiths' pageant in 1576 as has been suggested by Chambers and, more recently, Nelson.²⁹ Their evidence is based on an error of transcription, first made by Morris, from the 1576-77 account:

Payd on our plas at Ald. Montforts on Midsomer Eve xvi^d.³⁰

The expense was actually incurred when the Smiths -

payd an ouer plus at Alderman mounforts on midsomer eue
xvj^d. (f. 21V)³¹

They were paying an overplus, an additional sum of money, not financing their play. Thus the Smiths' accounts provide evidence for post-Reformation performances of the Chester plays only in the years 1546, 1561, 1567, 1568, 1572, and 1575, although it is possible that the missing accounts for the early 1550's might reveal performances in 1550 and 1554.

NOTES

- ¹ Lawrence M. Clopper, "The Chester Plays: Frequency of Performance", *Theatre Survey*, 14 (1973), 46-58.
- ² The accounts which are fully dated with the day, month, and year indicate that the stewards' election day fell on the first Sunday after the feast of St Peter. The account for 1563-64 (f. 17^r) is more explicit: "the sunday after st peters day which is 4 Iuly in the 5 yeare of Q Elz is 1563/ was chosen stuarths of the smethyes & peauterers Io ball & Rich Newall". By 1592 the election day had been moved to the "munday next after s^t peters day" (from the Orders, Articles, and Agreements of the Smiths also transcribed by Randle Holme in BL MS Harl. 2054, f. 24^r).
- ³ *The Rolls of the Freemen of the City of Chester: Part I, 1392-1700*, ed. J.H.E. Bennett, *The Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, 51 (1906). All admission dates given in this article are taken from this source. The Smiths' Company members whose franchise is not recorded were probably admitted in the mayoral years 1508-10, 1511-20, 1521-22, 1523-26, 1528-30, or 1534-36 for which no records survive. See p. xiii. The mayoral year in Chester began on the Friday following the feast of St Denis (9 October).
- ⁴ Frank Simpson, "The City Gilds of Chester: The Smiths, Cutlers and Plumbers' Company", *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological, and Historic Society for the County and the City of Chester and North Wales*, 20 (1914), 5-121 (pp. 44-45).
- ⁵ The custom is not mentioned in the Orders, Articles, and Agreements of the Smiths but the accounts provide evidence of its occurrence. The most obvious example is in the 1562-63 account (f. 17^r, dated 1563 in the margin), "of gye Cromen for entrance xx^s his dinner 33^s 4^d". Guy Curmyne, smith, was enrolled as a Freeman in the mayoral year 1562-63. Examples of a similar practice can be found in the Articles of the Gild of Ringers, Bristol, and the Ordinances of the Gild of Tailors, Exeter, where new members were required to provide a breakfast. See *English Gilds*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, EETS, OS, 40 (1870), pp. 290 and 316.
- ⁶ Company lists also occur for the years 1560-61 (f. 16^v), 1566-67 (f. 18^r), 1567-68 (f. 18^v), and 1574-75 (f. 22^r); all years in which the plays were performed.
- ⁷ The omission of the father's name from the Freeman Rolls could be explained by the missing records listed in note 3.
- ⁸ Joseph C. Bridge, "The Organists of Chester Cathedral: Part I, 1541 to 1644", *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological, and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, 19 (1913), 63-90 (p. 69).
- ⁹ Bridge, p. 66.
- ¹⁰ The stewards of the Smiths were responsible for most of the company's financial matters as their oath indicates:

I will be obedient to the Aldermen of my Company for the tyme beinge and will/ dilligently & duly apply myne office as I ought to doe & will make true account/ of all receiptes & payments which I shall be charged withall duringe the tyme/ of my beinge steward of the sayd Company so helpe me

god & holy dome and by the Contents of this booke.

(Harl. 2054. f. 23^r).

- ¹¹ A stock-cardmaker was one who made large wool cards fastened to wooden supports, *OED*, s.v. Stock-card.
- ¹² From the evidence of the Freeman Rolls it appears that the only other master cardmaker who could have taken them on at the time was Randle Persivall, franchised on 17 November 1541. It is worth noting that he is not included in any of the Smiths' Company lists, nor is Fulke ap Richard Owen one of those made a Freeman in 1552. The other cardmaker admitted in 1552, Randle Lawton, is named in the lists from 1560-61 onwards. The play lists attached to both the early and late Chester banns (see *The Trial and Flagellation with Other Studies in the Chester Cycle*, ed. W.W. Greg (Oxford, Malone Society, 1935), pp. 130-132 and 160-163.) associate the Cardmakers with the Skinners, Hatters, Pointers, and Girdlers but the Harl. 2054 accounts clearly show that they were regarded as part of the Smiths' Company in the second half of the sixteenth century.
- ¹³ The earliest surviving instructions for the enrolment of Chester Smiths' apprentices are contained in an early seventeenth-century agreement:
- It is agreed by Consent of the Company the 7th of January 1611 that/ euery brother that taketh any apprentice that he Come to Inroule him in the/ meetinghouse at the next meetinge after vpon forfaite of euery his doinge/ the Contrary to be payd to the stuards to the use of the Company vs.
- (Harl. 2054. f. 24^v)
- Examples of guild ordinances which allow for the master to pay the apprentice's enrolment fee are found in *English Gilds*, pp. 183 and 316.
- It should be pointed out that if 1545-46 is the year of the account, Robert Hancoke and William Locker were elected stewards only a year after they were made Freeman. Although this seems unusual, so too was it for both stewards to have been made Freeman in the same year. It is impossible to tell whether the circumstances of the 1545 stewards' election were extraordinary or whether similar choices were more common in the years before 1544 for which there are no surviving records. Interestingly the Chester Goldsmiths seem, as a matter of policy, to have appointed the most junior member of the company as steward. See Maurice H. Ridgway, *Chester Goldsmiths: from early times to 1726* (Altrincham, 1968), p. 11. Thus the Smiths may have resorted to their most junior members in years when volunteers for the office were not forthcoming.
- ¹⁴ Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage: Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays*, (Chicago, 1974), p. 167, suggests the possibility that the scribe mistook a reference to the death of Edward VI for a reference to the death of his father. If this was the case, as Edward died on 6 July, 1553, the account would be for the year 2 July, 1553 to 30 June, 1554, not 1552-53 as Nelson states, and ought to include Whitsun play expenses for 1554 if the Add. 29777 list is accurate. The redating of the account as 1553-54 would also disrupt the sequence of the early accounts. Both kings, as Prince of Wales, were sometime Earl of Chester but considering the position of the entry and the record of "Itm for syngynge to the king's dirige" in the Cathedral Treasurer's Accounts for 1547 (see R.V.H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral: From its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London, 1958), p. 18) the death of Henry seems the more likely reference.
- ¹⁵ I would like to thank Miss A.M. Kennett, Chester City Archivist, for providing information concerning this MS. For discussion and transcription of the MS see Edna Rideout, "The Chester Companies and the Old Quay",

Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 79 (1927), 141-174.

16 Rideout, pp. 167-168.

17 Holme's copy of the numeral appears thus 6̄.

18 The fourth of July fell on a Sunday in the years 1546, 1557, 1563, 1568, and 1574. An account for the year beginning 4 July 1546 has already been established; in any event this would have been an unlikely year as John Ball, one of the stewards for the year in question, was not enrolled as a Freeman until 10 May, 1548. Accounts for the years beginning in 1563, 1568, and 1574 are all dated with the full 4 July election date which leaves 1557 as the only year with a Sunday, 4 July, unaccounted for.

19 After each company list of members the total monthly contribution is given, followed in most cases by a note similar to that at the foot of the Smiths' list, "the first paymentt ys the last sonday of november" (Chester City Record Office MS TAO/1, f. 10^r).

20 Rideout, p. 146.

21 A similar error occurs in the 1569-70 account (f. 19^r) where the election day is given as 4 July when, following the usual method of dating, it is more likely to have been Sunday, 3 July.

22 Rideout, p. 167.

23 This Richard Barker was probably the son of the steward with the same name who held office in 1555-56. The elder Richard Barker is named in the Smiths' quarterage list for 1544-45 (f. 14^v) and his death before the 1560-61 list of members (f. 16^v) was drawn up may be inferred from the inclusion in that list of "Rich barker wife". The latter list also contains the name "Rich barker" but this is almost certainly a reference to the Richard Barker made a Freeman in 1557-58.

24 Between the accounts for 1572-73 and 1573-74 (f. 20^r) Holme writes "1573 accounts wants" but he was misled by the dating of some accounts with the year in which they began and others with the year in which they terminated.

25 The 1575 performance was not at Whitsun but at Midsummer. See Rupert H. Morris, *Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Reigns* (Chester, nd), p. 319 for the relevant Assembly Book Order.

26 Add. 29777 is a vellum roll (29ft., 8½ins. x 8 ins.) which lists the Mayors and Sheriffs of Chester from 1326 to 1584. It is imperfect at the end and, at some time possibly continued beyond 1584, although originally the list may have been terminated at 1579. The roll is joined after this date and whilst the arrangement of entries remains the same, there is a distinct change in the secretary hand, suggesting that the second scribe may have been bringing the list up to date. The manuscript was probably prepared, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, for William Brereton of Brereton as at the beginning of the roll are the arms of Chester (a sword between three garbs - the arms used before, and on some occasions after, the grant of the present arms in 1580) and the initials W.B. set below a drawing of a briar and a tun. In the *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1854-1875*, 2 vols. (London, 1877), II, p. 721, it is suggested that the initials W.B. may denote "William Bird, Mayor in 1580, or William Baxter, alias Meo, Sheriff in 1588"

but this takes no account of the Brereton rebus. William Brereton (1550-1630) who, in 1586, built Brereton Hall, was knighted in 1588, appointed Muster Master for Cheshire, 1595, and created Baron Brereton of Leighlin, Co. Carlow, in the Irish peerage on 11 May, 1624. In 1571 he married Margaret the daughter of Sir John Savage of Clifton (later of Rock Savage) who was Mayor of Chester on three occasions; 1569-70, 1574-75, and 1597-98. This was the Sir John Savage who had to answer to the Privy Council for authorizing, when Mayor in 1574-75, what proved to be the final performance of the Chester plays, in contempt of an inhibition and letters prohibiting the plays from the Archbishop of York and the Lord President of the North. See Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries End: An Investigation of the last Days of the Medieval Stage* (New Haven, 1946), pp. 80-83. There were others with the name William Brereton living in Cheshire during the second half of the sixteenth century, but none were as notable as Sir John Savage's son-in-law, nor so likely to possess a Chester Mayors list. Biographical details of William Brereton may be found in: George Ormerod, *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, 2nd edn. revised and enlarged by T. Helsby, 3 vols. (London, 1882), III, pp. 85-89.

Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates 1600 to 1678, ed. John Paul Rylands, *Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, 6 (1882), pp. 34-35.

Joan Beck, *Tudor Cheshire* (Chester, 1969), pp. 30-31.

- 27 There is evidence that Holme used Mayor's Books to corroborate dates and events in his writings about Chester. He remarks upon their poor condition in BL MS Harl. 2056, (f. 1^v), and in his brief notes on the history of Chester and the Smiths' Company (Harl. 2054) he writes "maiors books" in the left margin, presumably indicating his source, followed by:

likewise it appereth by diuers manuscripts that ^{only} the sayd
occupations of smythes etc/ Ioyned all in one Company:
played about 4 August 1498 their play called/ the purification
of our lady before prince Arthur at Abby gate & high Crosse.

(f. 25^r)

- 28 Clopper, p. 52, derives the year 1550 from the dates of the accounts which surround the Shoemakers' play expenses.

- 29 E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols. (London, 1903), II, p. 355. Nelson, p. 162.

- 30 Morris, p. 322, n. 1.

- 31 Lawrence Clopper makes a similar point in his unpublished notes on the Smiths' accounts. I am grateful to Peter Meredith for drawing my attention to this.