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MYSTERY PLAYS AT NORWICH: THEIR FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Unlike the cycle plays of York and Chester, whose texts have survived and about which substantial documentary evidence exists,¹ the Norwich mystery plays are marked by a paucity of information regarding their nature and production.² Of the plays, two texts produced by the Norwich Grocers survive, as do descriptions of their pageant wagon, its properties, and expenses incurred in presenting the pageant wagon and play.³ Scholars have suggested that the roof bosses of Norwich Cathedral are visual evidence of the subjects treated in the plays,⁴ and municipal documents include a list of pageant subjects and the crafts that produced them,⁵ presumably in response to a proposal in 1527 that the pageants be allotted to all the guilds, not, as heretofore, only to St Luke's.⁶ The significance of the petition of St Luke's Guild to the Assembly that they be released from bearing the sole burden of "disgisinges and pageauntes" on Whit Monday has never been fully explored, inasmuch as the request has not been considered within the context that provided the occasion for its being made. From cathedral, municipal, and antiquarian documents such a context can be suggested. Accordingly, this paper advances a hypothesis, suggested by a study of the records of Norwich, concerning the growth of the plays of that city and also describes their decline by means of a chronology of events drawn from the documents.

In 1527, St Luke's Guild, traditionally the fraternal organization of painters and allied crafts,⁷ maintained "that wher of long tyme paste the sayd Gilde of Saynt Luke yerly till nowe haue ben vsed to be kept & holden withyn the Citie aforesaid the Mondaye in Pentecoste Weke at which daye & the daye next ffolowyng many & diuers disgisinges & pageauntes" were presented, their guild, impoverished by the financial burden, should be released from the necessity of sole production by an order giving "euery occupacion" of the City a pageant of its own.⁸

The "keeping of the gild" of St Luke, mentioned in the petition, refers to the practice of the members meeting together to attend Mass and a feast in honour of their patron saint on Whit Monday and, on the following day, to attend a Mass in commemoration of members who had died.⁹ St Luke's Day is October 18; that the gild in his honour was held during Pentecost Week instead may have been for a significant, if non-devotional, reason. The days on which the members of St Luke's Guild went in procession to their observances fell in the week of the largest fair in Norwich, the annual Pentecost Fair, held at Tombland, an open space just outside the Cathedral

precincts. Because of this great event, the city was full of people - as the Guild noted in its petition, without giving the reason: "by force wherof yerly at that tyme more than any other tyme of the yere the people of the countré haue abundauntly vsed to resorte to the said Citie". The Guild also pointed out to the Assembly that the city profited substantially from these people: "as well many merchaundises as vitaille . . . arn vttered and sold, to the grette . . . comfforte of the citezens". On the other hand, St Luke's Guild alone provided the entertainment and paid for the costs. Such costs might indeed, in all justice, be shared by those benefiting from the profits, but the Guild was in fact making a special point, elliptically, to the Assembly. The Fair was the oldest in the city, having belonged to the Priory from the cathedral's foundation in 1094-6, and from it the monks received rent for stalls erected - a sore issue with the townspeople for years. Since 1524, however, it had belonged to the City.¹⁰ There would seem, then, to be a legal as well as moral point to the petition for aid. Since the Fair was civic, so too should be the crowd-attracting ceremonies held in conjunction with it.

The fair-goers were provided in St Luke's procession with "disgisinges and pageauntes as well of the liff and marterdams of diuers and many hooly sayntes as also many other lyght and feyned figures and pictures of other persones and bestes". As well, the petition describes the Guild as "seruyng of the lord named the Lord of Mysrule at Tomland" on Whit Tuesday. Neither activity seems to have any connection whatsoever with the Guild's religious observances, but I would suggest that serving the Lord of Misrule is connected with another occurrence on the same day. The accounts of the sacrist of Norwich Cathedral include offerings made to the church: "de processione civitatis et patrie feria iij^a in ebdomada pentecost."¹¹ All crafts of Norwich were obliged by the Ordinances of 1449 to attend the Mayor on his ridings.¹² On Whit Tuesday, then, a large civic procession made its way through Tomland and the Fair to the Cathedral. Although the procession itself was, no doubt, of great decorum, the festivities associated with the Pentecost Fair seem to have included the reversal of this civic order in the character of the Lord of Misrule,¹³ supported by the members of St Luke's Guild who could make his reign memorable by means of their occupational skills.

The ambiguity of the description of the disguisings and pageants as comprising "the liff and marterdams of diuers and many hooly sayntes as also many other lyght and feyned figures and pictures of other persones and bestes" (were the disguisings concerned with the 'saints' and the pageants with 'figures and pictures'? were the 'saints' biblical?) is matched by the uncertainty surrounding the words 'disguisings' and 'pageants'. Whether or not 'disguising' meant drama in sixteenth-century Norwich, 'pageant' did not. As will be shown below, the records, both guild and municipal, indicate that a pageant was a moveable representation of a person, legendary creature or location; the records suggest further that plays were connected with the pageants, taking place in or on or in company with them, so that when in certain documents the word 'pageant' is used, 'pageant with play' is meant.

What the "lyght and feyned figures and pictures" were cannot now be ascertained, but two of the figures displayed might well be indicated in the following items from the Chamberlains' Accounts of 1546, recording expenses for the celebrations attending the coronation of Edward VI: "Item to Robert Nycholles for his horses caryeng a pageant of kyng salamon about processyon xij d; Item to iij men that toke payn aboute the forsayd pageant and to ij men y^t bare the moremayde xx d".¹⁴ The existence of a "King Solomon" pageant perhaps supports the hypothesis that the bosses of the Cathedral vaults represent carved versions of pageant scenes, for the bosses of the eighth bay of the nave vault include a depiction of King Solomon.¹⁵ The "Mermaid" pageant might also be one of the "persones and bestes" spoken of in the St Luke's Guild petition. That pageant had been presented to the Corporation by Thomas Nicolls, a Cordwainer, in 1540: "Thomas Nicholas of his gode mynde hath gyuen to the commonaltie his pageant called the moremayd / the xxiiij^{tie} daye off maye . . .".¹⁶

Whether these two pageants were ever the property of St Luke's Guild is not known. The pageants that were used in the Guild's procession may have belonged to other guilds, for St George's Guild possessed its own emblems, banners, and figures of St George and the Dragon,¹⁷ or to individuals, and may have been borrowed or rented for use at the time of the procession, with the costs of refurbishing and setting them forth falling to St Luke's men; that the Guild of St Luke would be associated with pageants simply by virtue of the occupations it included is attested to by a payment of the London Ironmongers to that city's St Luke's Guild of Painters-Stainers in 1566 for costs incurred "for making of the pageant, and all manner of things incident to the same, as well the carpenters' as painter's work".¹⁸ On the other hand, the pageants may have been built by the members of the Guild and displayed by them until the allocation of pageants following the 1527 petition, for no other crafts are mentioned as possessing pageants until after that date: the first reference is to the Weavers, who in 1529/30 have a pageant of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹ The Tailors have a pageant in 1537; according to the early sixteenth-century list of pageants and crafts responsible for them, the Tailors produce the pageant of Abraham and Isaac.²⁰ The Cordwainers, in the same list, have a pageant of Moses and Aaron "with the children off Israell & Pharo with his Knyghtes". Cordwainer Nicolls' "Moremayd" would have been not an inappropriate decorative figure for the Red Sea pageant, similar, if not analogous, in that function to the "Griffin" of the Grocers' Paradise pageant.²¹

The basis of the allocation of the pageants to the various occupations usually bears a relationship to the economic and social status of each group. In the 1449 Craft Ordinances, a rule was set forth governing the order of the crafts when they attended the Mayor on his ridings: "þt crafte in which þe Mayr of þe cite for the tyme beyng is inrolled shall ryde and walke next afore the Mayr".²² The carrying out of this rule is seen in the lists of participants in the Corpus Christi processions of c.1449, c.1527, and c.1543, where the crafts from which the Mayors were chosen are in the position of honour at the end of the procession: the Mercers and Grocers (with their associated crafts) immediately precede the Mayor.²³ In the

list of pageants drawn up after 1527, the Mercers have the first, the Creation of the World; the Grocers are listed second, with Paradise; and the third pageant, "Hellecarte", belongs to some of the occupations of the Guild of St Luke. The writer of this list mistakenly followed the order of procession; recognizing his error in having Paradise precede "Hellecart", he corrected the numbering:

Primo Mercers ...
 iij Grocers ...
 ij Glasiers Steyners ...²⁴

At this point the lists diverge, for, seemingly, crafts sometimes chose, or were given, pageants suitable to their occupations; for example, the Goldsmiths, who varied between being third and fourth from the end in the Corpus Christi processions, contribute to Pageant IX, the Birth of Christ and the Three Kings of Cologne. Just as the wealthiest crafts are responsible for the opening pageants, a company that grew to prominence in the sixteenth century, the Worsted Weavers (fourth, sixth, and third last in the three procession lists), ends the series with the pageant of the Holy Ghost. This particular allocation of a pageant is noteworthy, for it marks the beginning of the usurpation by the Worsted Weavers of the place held by St Luke's Guild in the festivities of Pentecost Week: by 1531, the Weavers were holding their obit on Whit Monday, the day of the gild, that is, feast, of St Luke's Guild, though the Weavers had no feast.²⁵ By 1543, when new Craft Ordinances and a new Corpus Christi procession list were promulgated, the Worsted Weavers had their service and feast on Pentecost, their obit presumably on the following day, and their position was third last in the procession. The service and feast of St Luke's Guild, however, were relegated in the new Ordinances to the second Sunday after Trinity, and the Guild had fallen to sixth last in the procession,²⁶ the place held by the Weavers in the previous list.

When, before 1527, St Luke's Guild exhibited pageants on its gild days in Pentecost Week, was drama associated with these displays? That the pageants were divided among the various Norwich occupations after that date seems clear from the granting of the petition made by St Luke's Guild and the early corroborative evidence supplied by a note in the Worsted Weavers' documents previously cited.²⁷ That plays were associated with the pageants is suggested by the introduction to the Grocers' Play of 1533: [this] booke makyth mencion of y^e Story of y^e Creacion of Eve with y^e expellyng of Adam & Eve out of Paradyce the whiche Story apparteynythe to y^e Pageant of y^e Company of y^e forsayd craft of Grocery wherefor thys sayd Booke ys made for the sustentacion and Mayntenens of y^e same . . .".²⁸ If plays and pageants were considered together not only by the Grocers (the "Story apparteynythe to y^e Pageant") but also generally, the Guild of St Luke may very well have produced plays along with its pageants on its gild days. The Grocers, then, when the pageants (and plays, if this supposition is correct) were distributed among the crafts after 1527, could take over an already-existing play or provide a new one. They seemingly chose the latter alternative, otherwise, if they were merely using an old play that had been given them when the pageants and plays were distributed among the crafts,

they had not troubled until 1533 to enter with their other records the text of that play. This does not seem plausible, and, as Norman Davis remarks, "the surviving text is not much older than the date at which it was copied into the *Grocers' Book* [1533]".²⁹ The copying of the play into the Grocers' records took place after its first performance under their sponsorship.³⁰ Subsequent performances depended on the decision of the Assembly, into whose charge the productions had been put: all, some, or none could be mounted in any given year, but the performance days, as when St Luke's Guild produced the pageants, remained in Whit-week, as the Grocers' records testify. What then, of the customary appellation, "Corpus Christi" plays?³¹

That St Luke's Guild could bear the cost of exhibiting pageants during Pentecost Week and producing plays on Corpus Christi seems unlikely. Moreover, the only reference to a Corpus Christi play in Norwich, if it is such and not a generic appellation, is the remark made about Lord Suffolk in 1478 that "ther was neuer no man þat playd Herrod in Corpus Crysty play better and more agreable to his pageaunt then he dud".³² Corpus Christi was, however, an important civic event, as is evident in the returns made by the Norwich guilds in 1389. The Guild of Corpus Christi had a gild and procession, but not on the feastday. Instead, they were held on the octave of Corpus Christi because the Great Guild of the Annunciation had, to all intents, taken over the feastday for its own.³³ The reasons for this are several. The Corpus Christi procession began and ended until the 1540's at the collegiate Chapel of St Mary-in-the-Fields,³⁴ a church having strong connections with the city as a result of the Great Assemblies being held there.³⁵ The Great Guild itself appears to have been known as Le Bachery, the origins of which are not known, but which was probably composed of notable citizens, for it was influential politically and economically. It supported two chaplains at the College and a third at the Carmelites' Church, in addition to contributing annually to that Order and possessing property the value of which far exceeded that of any other guild.³⁶ Complaints against its power and influence were laid by the citizens in 1414 and 1443, until finally, in 1452, it seems to have merged with St George's Guild.³⁷ In its 1389 return, the Great Guild stated that its rules provided that the members should meet "ad ecclesiam Collegiatam predictam in festo Corporis Christi circa horam sextam ad procedendum reuerenter cum processione dicte ecclesie eundo et reuertendo humiliter", and that it was a custom on that feast for some object used for divine worship to be offered at the high altar. The Guild noted further that "quia tam propter huiusmodi doni oblacionem quam dictam solempnem processionem confratres et sorores predicti ad prefatam Collegiatam ecclesiam in dicta festiuitate Corporis Christi conueniant et accedant ac ibidem confluit populi multitudo ordinatum est quod dicta die festiuitatis omnes et singuli fratres et sorores antedicti simul prandeant et cum omnibus aliis deuote venientibus comunem refectionem habeant".³⁸

Thus, if at the end of the fourteenth century plays were produced on this important day in Norwich, as they were in other cities, they were probably under the jurisdiction of the Bachery, or Great Guild. The civic disturbances of the first half of the fifteenth

century and the part played by the Great Guild in them led finally to the seizure of the liberties of Norwich in 1447, to the Craft Ordinances in 1449 strictly regulating all the social and business affairs of the occupations, and to the disappearance of the Great Guild through the Settlement of 1452. Hereafter, its place as the Guild of the wealthy and influential was taken by St George's Guild, with which it merged: the outgoing Mayor became the Alderman of St George's Guild, city Aldermen were made members, as were all city councillors, if they so wished.³⁹

During this same period of the first half of the fifteenth century, the name of St Luke's Guild appears in the Norwich documents. If the Guild existed in 1389, its Guild Certificate has been lost. The first record of it is in a St George's Guild Account Roll of 1429/30 that contains a reference to an offering made to the Guild of St Luke.⁴⁰ These offerings do not continue after 1450. From 1464/65, St Luke's Guild makes offerings to the Cathedral; these go on till 1535/36.⁴¹ When the Great Guild disappeared in the mid-1450's, St Luke's Guild could have taken over the responsibility of the plays, if they already existed, because its situation in the mid-fifteenth century, as the records of offerings indicate, was probably the most secure in its history. For instance, the southern apsidal chapel in Norwich Cathedral was dedicated to St Luke in 1442,⁴² and during the 1469 visit of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, the "great chair" of the Guild was brought to one of the procession stations for use in a dramatic ceremony there. As Harrod comments, the chair seems, "by the money expended in treating the fraternity for lending it, and the care and labour bestowed upon its protection from injury, to have been a fabric of great magnificence."⁴³ Also, from about 1425, rebuilding and decoration of various sections of the Cathedral were taking place. Indeed, a notable school of glass-painting grew up in Norwich precisely at this time.⁴⁴ Moreover, St Luke's Guild, composed traditionally of painters-stainers, had expanded its membership to include the occupations allied with its men in the task of rebuilding the Cathedral. The absorption of other crafts occurred possibly when Richard Brasier, a bell-founder who cast the Cathedral's four bells, was mayor in the 1450's and 1460's;⁴⁵ his influence may have united the brasiers and bellfounders, at least, with the painters-stainers. The Cathedral's nave and choir were vaulted in the latter half of the fifteenth century.⁴⁶ The bosses that decorate the nave vault depict a sequence of Old and New Testament events paralleled implicitly in the list of pageants produced by all the crafts after 1527. The bosses and the pageants could thus have been contemporaneous and brought into being by the same group of crafts.

The early history of the plays may be as I have suggested; their demise can be set forth with more precision. The following chronology of the sixteenth-century performances and eventual disappearance of the plays is based on the Grocers' Accounts and municipal documents.

1527 St Luke's Guild, claiming to have held their gild on Whit Monday for "long tyme paste" and to have included pageants in their procession, petition the city for release from the

- excessive cost of the procession. Because Whit Monday falls within the week of the Pentecost Fair, which is under the jurisdiction of the City (*Liber Albus*, ff.14v-20r) and from which all the citizens benefit, the Assembly is asked to divide the pageants among the crafts of Norwich. The request is granted (*Assembly Proceedings*, ff.148v-149r, fair copies of the records in the *Assembly Minute Book*, 1510-1550, ff.120r-120v. All further references will be made to the *Proceedings*, which have been checked against the *Minute Books*).
- 1529 The Worsted Weavers record the making of the Pageant of the Holy Ghost (MS 21f(11), No.68).
- 1533 The Grocers' Play is copied into the Company's records (June 16, 1533). The Grocers' Pageant is played (Account, May 8, 1534).
- 1534 The Mayor's Court orders "by assent of the Tanners & Cordwaners that the Tanners shall ffynde iij persons to ther pageant that is to saye god in the bussh moises & aron & the carte therto" (Court Book 2, 1510-32, p.292; 6 May, 26 Henry VIII; quoted in *Notices . . . of . . . Pageantry*, p.7). The Grocers' Pageant is played; expenses are paid for Corpus Christi (Account, May 7, 1535).
- 1535 Expenses are paid for the Grocers' Pageant and for Corpus Christi (Account, May 18, 1536). The amount paid signifies that the play was performed; the various sums paid in later years indicate that when the pageant is said to go, the pageant with its play have been set forth.
- 1536 The Grocers' Pageant "[goes] not at Wytsonyde", though an assessment for the anticipated charges has been made. Some of this sum is spent on setting the pageant forth during the celebrations of the birth of Prince Edward. Corpus Christi is not mentioned (Account, April 27, 1537).
- 1537 The Grocers' Pageant probably goes, because both an assessment and charges are levied. (Account, May 19, 1538). Corpus Christi is not mentioned.
- 1538 Assembly Order of May 23: "This daye it is agreed that the pageantes shall goo this year on Pentecoste monday as they haue goon beffore in tymes paste" (*Proceedings*, f.184r). The Grocers' Pageant goes, and the Account includes charges that are larger than usual because "newe whelys & many other thynges y^t war in dekaye" have been bought (May 9, 1539). Corpus Christi is not mentioned.
- 1539 The Grocers' Pageant does not seem to have gone. The charges of Corpus Christi are mentioned as being placed under the responsibility of the Surveyors and are an entirely separate item from those of the pageant, making clear what was implicit in the previous entries: the pageants are set forth and the plays are performed on Whit Monday; Corpus Christi has only a procession in which the crafts bear banners ("for beryng of y^e Stremers on Corpus xi day, 2 d") (1534 Account).⁴⁷
- 1540 The Grocers' Pageant does not go: the members are assessed, but no charges are made (Account, April 27, 1541). The failure of the pageant to be shown in 1539 and 1540 echoes a larger issue: the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry

VIII. Because of their connection with religious houses, the guilds were also affected: "Wher as manye gildes haue bene holden with inne the cite of Norwich, wheroff some off them been nowe dissolued and some bene yet kept and not dissolued, to whyche gyldes been dyuers stocks of money belonging Enacted that all such summes of money belonging to eny gild dissolued shal be holy paid to the Mayer for the tyme beyng . . .".⁴⁸ The Grocers' Company was not yet concerned; in time, however, they too were to have their stocks confiscated.

- 1541 The Grocers are assessed, but charges are not levied. The supposition that when no charges are made their pageant does not go is verified by an order of the Mayor's Court, April 25, 33 Henry VIII (Court Book 4, 1534-49, p.54):

Pageantes Warned to be sette fforth atte pentecost:

In primis bochers
It. Bakers bruers Innekepers
It. Worstedweuers
It. Smythes

The pageants and plays these crafts were assigned in 1527 were the Resurrection, Noah's Ship, the Holy Ghost, and the Conflict of David and Goliath, respectively. The significance of this entry is obvious. No matter how unified or complete the text of a "cycle" of plays was as regards the subjects within it, a performance could include as many or as few plays as the supervising group desired. Thematic unity was not, then, a straitjacket for the plays, and the seeming problem of fitting the performance of a long cycle into one day could be solved by selecting the plays to be shown. This entry from Norwich is the only evidence that has come to light, so far as I am aware, of such a practice actually having taken place.

- 1542 The Grocers' Pageant goes; charges are also made for Corpus Christi (Account, May 5, 1543).

- 1543 The city sets forth new Craft Ordinances that regulate every aspect of the guilds' existence. Included are new gild (that is, feast) days: the Worsted Weavers are given Pentecost; the Mercers, Drapers, Scriveners and Hardwaremen, Corpus Christi; St Luke's Guild, the second Sunday after Trinity. The Grocers are stated to have "kept no gilde" (that is, had no feast) but to have paid their "certain" (or yearly stipend) to the chaplain at the Guild Hall (formerly Blackfriars). This item corresponds with entries in the 1546 Account of the Grocers covering the three previous years in which no Guild Assembly was called, confirming that the Grocers' Assembly and gild were held simultaneously. A new order of procession on Corpus Christi is also set out in the Ordinances.⁴⁹ The Grocers are assessed for that day; payments are not, however, clearly indicated. The pageant is not mentioned (Account, June 6, 1546).

- 1544 The Grocers are assessed for Corpus Christi (Account, June 6, 1546), but charges do not seem to have been made.

The Mayor's Court of May 17 notes:

This daye upon many consideracions declared aswell ffor

many charges leyde vpon the commonaltie & ffor the charges of xl ablemen ffor Warres to be sent to the kynges maiestie & also ffor the charges of the knyghtes mete & other vrgent causes apparant & ffor ease of pore people it is agreed that the Pageantes shalbe spared & left ffor this yeer (Court Book 4, 1534-49, p.216, printed in Hudson and Tingey, II, p.171, and Nelson, p.124).

- 1545 The Grocers pay for Corpus Christi and also for dates, almonds, and perfumes for their painted and gilt Griffin (Account, 1546), ordinarily set on the top of their pageant wagon. The dates and almonds seem usually to have been decorations for the Tree of Paradise. The Account does not firmly indicate if the Griffin goes on Corpus Christi, but because only fivepence is spent, the complete pageant wagon with play are obviously not involved. The Griffin may even be a survivor of the "bestes" from the St Luke's procession.
- 1546 The pageants do not go: "The pageants nor any of them shall not be sette fforthe this year at the tyme appoynted & accustomed & that Mr Maior shall not be dampnyffied ffor non setting fforthe by fforce off eny acte theroff in ade to the contrarye etc." (Proceedings, 4 June, 38 Henry VIII, f.215r). The order suggests that the pageants were popular enough to make their non-appearance a matter for public complaint. The Grocers in their Assembly this year formulate ordinances for their company. Among the officials they elect are "2 Surveyo^{rs} for setting forth of y^e Processyon on Corpus X^d day, & for y^e Pageant y^f it go forth y^e next yere". This entry again indicates that the Corpus Christi procession and the performance of the pageants were on two separate occasions. The Griffin has become, however, a part of the procession (Account, June 12, 1547).
- 1547 The Grocers' Accounts fail until 1556. The Assembly on May 11 of this year agrees "that the pageantes shal not be sette fforthe this yeere vpon diuers & many vrgent causes & considerations declared ffor & in the same" (Proceedings, f.218v, printed in Nelson, p.125).
- 1548 The pageants are rejected again: "setting fforth pageantes this yeere ben differryd vpon diuers consideracions" (Proceedings, 11 May, 2 Edward VI, f.225v; printed in Hudson and Tingey, II, p.126, and Nelson, p.125). The order is made permanent as a result of an Assembly of July 13: "It is graunted & enacted that all guylde stokkes whatsoever therbe withyn this Citie shalbe employde towards the ffyndyng ffeyeng [cleansing] of the Rever of the same Citie The stok of the compenye of Saynt Georg onely except because now employed to the poore" (Proceedings, f.226r; printed in Hudson and Tingey, II, p.126). Without their monies, the Guilds are unable to mount pageants.
- 1554 In this first year of Queen Mary's reign, the crafts are ordered to reorganize: "It is commanded by Mr Mayer that all occupacions and craftes being w^tin this citie shall nomytate and chose seuerally their hedmen and wardeyns accordyng to the awncient custome hadde and used amonges the same".⁵⁰

Grocers' Accounts resume in 1556, 1557, and 1558. Since no date is given, whether they refer to the previous or the current year's expenses cannot be determined. They all make payments for a Corpus Christi procession that included the Griffin as well as an Angel, and additionally in the 1557 and 1558 Accounts, a tree garnished with fruit and sweetmeats.

- 1563 The Grocers' Pageant is ordered to be prepared for the coming mayoralty inauguration. The item concludes: "y^e surveyo^{rs} shall furnysh [the pageant] & prepare a devyce ageynst y^e day (Grocers' Assembly, May 13, 1563). Would the "devyce" be speeches or verses to accompany the pageant wagon?
- 1565 The Assembly of April 13 orders: "Souche Pageauntes that wer wont to go in this cittie in the tyme of Whitsonholydages shalbe sett furthe by occupacions as in tymes past haue been usyd" (Proceedings, f.121v; printed in Hudson and Tingey, II, p.135, and Nelson, p.133).
- In obedience to this order, the Grocers inventoried their pageant's properties, and a new play was written with an alternative introduction if the Grocers were to begin the series of plays. Except for the remarks concerning the decay and eventual dismemberment of the pageant wagon as recorded in the *Grocers' Book*, nothing more is heard of the Norwich plays.

In the preceding pages, an account of the growth, flourishing and disappearance of the mystery plays of Norwich, I have suggested that the plays may have been under the supervision of the Great Guild until it amalgamated with St George's Guild in 1452, and that the plays, during this time, may have been performed on Corpus Christi. In the second half of the century, the plays may have been transferred to the sponsorship of St Luke's Guild, the members of which were involved in the rebuilding and decoration of sections of the Cathedral, in particular the vaulting of nave and choir. The Guild maintained the plays till 1527, performing them either on Corpus Christi or on Whit Monday when the Guild celebrated its patron on that day. The change from Corpus Christi to Pentecost week could have occurred, however, as late as 1524, when the Pentecost Fair was handed over by the Cathedral Priory to the City, and the latter recognized the financial value of holding both plays and fair on the same day. The plays were made a civic responsibility in 1527, with all the crafts contributing to their production from that time. They were performed intermittently until 1565, their last public show.

NOTES

- 1 See the forthcoming volumes of York and Chester material in the series *Records of Early English Drama* to be published by the University of Toronto Press.
- 2 Alan H. Nelson's *The Medieval English Stage* (Chicago, 1974) includes an overview of drama in Norwich. Though intriguing in much of its discussion, his argument is based on incomplete and, in some instances, inaccurate readings of the records he has used.
- 3 Robert Fitch, "Norwich Pageants. The Grocers' Play", *Norfolk Archaeology*, 5 (1859), 8-31; Norman Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, EETS, supplementary series 1 (1970), pp.xxii-xl and 8-18; Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, MS 21f(11), No.68, transcriptions from the Grocers' records made by John Kirkpatrick in the early eighteenth century and differing in some respects from the printed versions of the same documents. See also F.I. Dunn, "The Norwich Grocers' Play and the Kirkpatrick Papers at Norwich", *N & Q*, 19 (1972), 202-3.
- 4 M.D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge, 1963), pp.87-104; Alan H. Nelson, "On Recovering the Lost Norwich Corpus Christi Cycle", *Comparative Drama*, 4 (1970), 247-9; M.Q. Smith, "The Roof Bosses of Norwich Cathedral and their relation to the Medieval Drama of the City", *Norfolk Archaeology*, 32 (1961), 12-26.
- 5 Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, Old Free Book, f.162r (the foliation is that of the book; if numbered consecutively, this leaf should be f.142r); printed in Davis, pp.xxix-xxx, and William Hudson and J.C. Tingey, eds., *The Records of the City of Norwich*, II (Norwich and London, 1910), p.230. All manuscript references are to MSS in the Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, unless noted otherwise; my thanks are given to the County Archivist, Miss Jean Kennedy, for permission to publish transcriptions from the documents in her care.
- 6 Assembly Proceedings, Book 2, 1491-1553, ff.148v-149r; printed in Davis, pp.xxvii-xxviii. The Proceedings are fair copies of the Minute Book entries; the petition in the Minute Book, differing only slightly, is printed in H. Harrod, "A few Particulars concerning early Norwich Pageants", *Norfolk Archaeology*, 3 (1852), 6-8.
- 7 See Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, ed. Herbert Thurston and Donald Atwater, IV (London, 1956), pp.142-3 and Helen Roeder, *Saints and Their Attributes* (London, 1955), p.21. Only one guild dedicated to St Luke is mentioned in the 1389 Guild Certificates, that of the Painters of London (Herbert F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919), p.236). In 1543, the Norwich guild comprised the pewterers, brasiers, bellfounders, plumbers, glasiars and painters (stainers) (Liber Albus, ff. 172r-172v); the two lists of crafts are printed in Hudson and Tingey, II, pp.310-3. In the list of pageants, the glasiars and stainers are allied with scribes, parchment-makers, carpenters, gravers, carriers, collar-makers (and wheelwrights, who are added later than the actual date of copying of the list) to produce Hellcart.
- 8 Assembly Proceedings, 2, ff.148v-149r.
- 9 See the guild certificates in J.C. Tingey, "The hitherto Unpublished Certificates of Norwich Gilds", *Norfolk Archaeology*, 16 (1900), 267 and 305; Hudson and Tingey, II, pp.284-5 and 297-8.

- 10 Liber Albus, ff.14v-20v; Hudson and Tingey, I, p.325; II, pp.cxxxvii-cxxxix. Along with the liberties of the fair, the Prior surrendered some of the ground both within and outside the precinct to the city in return for the sum of 500 marks. The jurisdictional and financial disputes were thus resolved to the satisfaction of both sides, and the fair seems to have continued as the major civic fair until the nineteenth century.
- 11 Norwich Cathedral, Sacrist's Rolls. A procession at Pentecost makes offerings from 1439/40 (Roll 287), but not until 1464/5 (Roll 299) are the participants mentioned.
- 12 Hudson and Tingey, II, p.288. See also pp.123-4 for an order for this riding in 1539.
- 13 Some idea of the display may be gained from the description of John Gladman, a merchant "who seems to have played the part of 'King of Misrule' annually at the Shrovetide Carnival", (*Victoria History of the County of Norfolk*, ed. William Page, II (London 1906; repr. Folkestone, 1975), p.320, n.5), and others in a near-rebellion of 1443: "his hors trapped with tyneseyle and otherwyse dysgysyn things crowned as King of Kristmesse . . . , afore hym eche moneth disgysd after ye seson yerof, and Lenten cladde in white with redde herrings skinnes and his hors trapped with oyster shelles . . ." (Hudson and Tingey, I, p.345). See also Nelson, p.123.
- 14 F.249r, printed in *Notices and Illustrations of the Costumes, Processions, Pageantry formerly displayed by the Coporation of Norwich* (Norwich, 1850), p.13, and Nelson, p.125. Pageants for royal occasions were produced in the fifteenth century as well: see Francis Blomefield, *An essay towards a topographical history of the county of Norfolk*, II (London, 1806), p.124. These two pageants were carried by horses and by men; the grocers of Norwich had a pageant described as "a howse of waynskott paynted & buylded on a Carte with fowre whelys", with a "square toppe to sett over ye sayde howse", a "Gryffon gylte with a fane to sett on ye sayde toppe", "a bygger Iron fane to sett on ye ende of ye Pageante", "iiij^{xx} iij small Fanes belongyng to ye same Pageante", and "3 paynted clothes to hange abowte ye Pageante". Men or horses were used to draw this pageant, as the payments and inventories indicate (MS 21f(11), No.68).
- 15 Smith, 15.
- 16 Court Book 5, 1540-1549, p.4; printed in Hudson and Tingey, II, p.168, and Nelson, p.124.
- 17 Mary Grace, ed., *Records of the Guild of St. George in Norwich, 1389-1547*, Norfolk Record Society, IX (1937), pp.16-7; Nelson, pp.121-2.
- 18 W. Carew Hazlitt, *The Livery Companies of the City of London* (London, 1892), p.577.
- 19 MS 21f(11), No.68.
- 20 Chamberlains' Accounts, 1537-47, f.12r; Old Free Book, f.162r. This list of pageants may represent a completely new departure for the city. Saints' lives and deaths, whatever these may have comprised and however they were presented, may have been replaced by the crafts with episodes from the Old and New Testament. I am not convinced, however, that the word 'saints' must, of necessity, exclude biblical personages; furthermore, Norwich was familiar with biblical pageants long before the sixteenth century; on the occasion of the visit of Queen Elizabeth Woodville to Norwich in 1469, a pageant of the Visitation was mounted (Chamberlains' Accounts, 1470-1490).

- 21 The Griffin mentioned *passim* in the Grocers' Accounts was probably the emblem of the Grocers' Company; see the Grocers' Account for 1557: "payd to 3 lads that bare the Gryffon, Arms, and Grocery" (MS 21f(11), No.68). The Grocers of London, an amalgamation of the Spicers and the Pepperers, had griffins on their coat of arms (W. Carew Hazlitt, *The Livery Companies of the City of London* (London, 1892), pp.141, 189). The 'perfumes' for the griffin of the Norwich Grocers, see below, were probably the expression of the creature's legendary attribute of a spicily fragrant breath and of the Guild's historical identity. Although I cannot suggest any such close relationship between the Cordwainers and their mermaid pageant, Nelson's comment, p.124, that to connect the mermaid with the pageant "is patently absurd", shows a somewhat single-minded notion of pageant decorations.
- 22 Hudson and Tingey, II, p.288.
- 23 Old Free Book, f.162r; Liber Albus, f.172v; see also Hudson and Tingey, II, pp.111 and 312.
- 24 Old Free Book, f.162r.
- 25 Hudson and Tingey, II, p.114.
- 26 Hudson and Tingey, II, pp.297-8 and 311-2.
- 27 MS 21f(11), No.68.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Davis, p.xxxix.
- 30 The play was entered on June 26, 1533 (Fitch, p.11). Whit Monday fell on June 2 that year, Corpus Christi on June 12. The Account is dated May 8, 1534 (Fitch, p.24; Davis, p.xxxii). See also MS 21f(11), No.68. Nelson, pp.130-1, does not clarify the matter of the dates when charges were levied and paid. Accounts presented at Assemblies, except that of 1547, refer to the previous year's expenses.
- 31 Nelson, pp.131-5, argues that the plays were performed on Corpus Christi and were not moved to Pentecost week. His interpretation of the post-1527 evidence is not tenable. See the chronology below.
- 32 Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, ed. Norman Davis, II (Oxford, 1976), p.426. Nelson, p.131, believes that this comment is "the earliest probable reference to dramatic plays in Norwich". Such a statement seems highly conjectural, at best.
- 33 Tingey, 296-301.
- 34 Old Free Book, f.162r; Tingey, 296.
- 35 Blomefield, II, p.115.
- 36 Tingey, 277.
- 37 For a history of these charges and the replies made to them see Hudson and Tingey, I, pp.lxxix-cl. See also Grace, pp.10-14.

- ³⁸ Tingey, 296-8.
- ³⁹ Grace, p.13.
- ⁴⁰ St George's Guild Account Rolls, Roll of 1429-30.
- ⁴¹ Norwich Cathedral, Sacrists' Rolls, numbers 298-334.
- ⁴² Information received from the Norfolk and Norwich Record Office.
- ⁴³ Henry Harrod, "Queen Elizabeth Woodville's Visit to Norwich", *Norfolk Archaeology*, 5 (1894), 35.
- ⁴⁴ Christopher Woodforde, *The Norwich School of Glass-Painting in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1950), especially pp.161-82.
- ⁴⁵ Blomefield, II, pp.118 and 123; see also Grace, pp.43-5, 47-53 and Canon Gilbert Thurlow, *Norwich Cathedral* (Norwich, n.d.), n.p.
- ⁴⁶ Thurlow, n.p.; John Britton, *The History and Antiquities of the See and Cathedral Church of Norwich* (London, 1816), pp.25-6, 65; John Harvey, *English Medieval Architects* (London, 1954), pp.101-3.
- ⁴⁷ See above, n.31.
- ⁴⁸ Hudson and Tingey, II, p.124.
- ⁴⁹ Hudson and Tingey, II, pp.310-3.
- ⁵⁰ Hudson and Tingey, II, p.175.