

**THORESBY AND LATER OWNERS OF THE  
MANUSCRIPT OF THE YORK PLAYS (BL ADDITIONAL MS 35290)**

By A.C. CAWLEY

*Thoresby's ownership*

Ralph Thoresby (1658-1725), the distinguished antiquary and author of *Ducatus Leodiensis* (1715),<sup>1</sup> owned the manuscript of the York plays (now B.L. Add. MS 35290) for about twenty years. We know that Henry Fairfax was its owner in 1695 from his inscription on a fly-leaf at the beginning of the manuscript (numbered 3): "H: Fairfax's Book 1695". We also know how it came into Thoresby's possession, for a note in Thoresby's hand on the back of the fly-leaf inscribed by Fairfax records that Fairfax gave it to Thoresby: "Donum Hon:<sup>mi</sup> Hen: Fairfax Arm: Rad.<sup>o</sup> Thoresby".<sup>2</sup> Henry Fairfax's gift is acknowledged at the end of Thoresby's short notice of the manuscript (see below), which is listed as item 17 (p.517) in "A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in this Musaeum". (This catalogue is part of the complete catalogue of the *Musaeum Thoresbyanum* included in *Ducatus Leodiensis*, pp.275-568.)<sup>3</sup>

---

*Manuscripts, Folio.*

517

- 
17. *Corpus Christi Playe* in antique *English Verse*, by *Tho. Cutler* and *Rich. Nandycke*; take a Taste of the Poetry in the *Crucifixio Christi*.

Sir knyghtis take heed hydir in hyc  
zee wootte your self als wele as I  
Has geven dome yat vis doote schall dye.  
Ien we are comen to Calvarie  
this dede on dergh we may nocht drawe  
howe lordis and leders of our lawe  
Sir all yare counsaile wele we knawe  
Iat ilke man helpe nowe as hym awe.

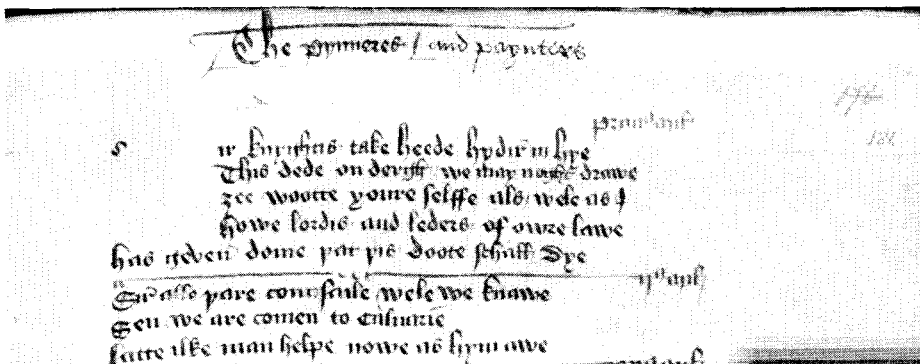
Some of the Trades themselves in the several Scenes are antiquated, as are the Names of others, *Bowers* and *Fletchers*, *Wef-feres*, *Cappers* (*Hatters* added in a later Hand) *Estrereners*, *Gyrdil-lers*, *Tylletbekkers*, *Spicers*, *Shavers*, *Parchmynners*, *Shermen* and *Wync-drawers* were of old, but *Merceres* added at the End as modern, *Richard* the Father of Bishop *Morton* of *Durham*, being the first of that Trade, at least in these Northern Parts of *Eng-land* (c). Don. Hen. Fairfax Arm.

The "*Hen. Fairfax Arm.*" named above as the donor of the manuscript was Henry Fairfax, second son of Henry, fourth Baron Fairfax.<sup>4</sup> As Lucy Toulmin Smith points out, the manuscript may have been in the hands of the Fairfax family for more than a century before it descended to Henry Fairfax: "Two Fairfaxes had been Recorders of York in the previous century, and many of the family sat on the Council of the North for reform of religious matters through the sixteenth century".<sup>5</sup> In addition to these associations of the Fairfax family with York, it may be noticed that Henry Fairfax's maternal grandfather, Sir John Barwick, was Recorder of York.<sup>6</sup> Henry Fairfax died in 1708, so that the York plays must have been given to Thoresby after 1695, when Fairfax wrote his name on a fly-leaf of the manuscript,<sup>7</sup> and before 1708.

In describing the manuscript as a *Corpus Christi Playe*, Thoresby is following the inscription (c.1600) "*Corpus Christi playe*" (repeated) on f.253. There is no indication that he realised its connection with York, unless his footnote reference (c) on p.517 of the *Ducatus* to "*Fuller's Worthies in Yorke, pag. 229.*" [London, 1662] is regarded as such.

Perhaps the most striking detail in Thoresby's notice is his ascription of the play to "*Tho. Cutler and Rich. Nandycke*". The names "Thomas Cutler" and "Richarde Nandycke/Nandicke" are both written several times in full on a paste-down at the beginning of the manuscript and once on f.253; "Thomas Cutler" appears three times on a fly-leaf at the beginning and once on a fly-leaf at the end; and the initials "TC" and "RN" occur on ff.89 and 92 respectively.<sup>8</sup> These names and initials in late handwriting (c.1600) may have belonged to men who were owners or readers, but there is no evidence whatever that they were the authors of the play.<sup>9</sup>

A comparison of Thoresby's transcription of the opening stanza of the Crucifixion play (York 35) with the same lines as set out in the manuscript (f.181)<sup>10</sup> suggests that his understanding of the text left a lot to be desired.



Thoresby (or his printer) has made nonsense of the passage by arranging two quatrains with alternate rhymes (*abababab*) as two mono-rhymed quatrains (*aaaabbbb*). Further, he omits the two speakers' names, and so reduces the dialogue to a continuous passage of verse. Nevertheless, his transcription of individual words, though by no means perfect, is at least as good as that of John Croft who published in his *Excerpta Antiqua* (York, 1797) a transcript of the separate York Scriveners' manuscript of the *Incredulity of Thomas* play.<sup>11</sup>

It is ironic that the manuscript of an entire *Corpus Christi* play should have been presented to Thoresby, in view of his Puritan hostility to plays and players. In 1680, at the age of twenty-two, he writes in his diary: ". . . going to see a play, whither curiosity carried me but fear brought me back. It was the first, and I hope, will be the last time I was found upon that ground".<sup>12</sup> On 31 December, 1713, he notes that he "Read and wrote all day, save usual attendance at church. Evening, had company of brother Thoresby's children to close up the year; was disturbed with foolish, or rather sinful mummings, and was perhaps too zealous to repress them. Lord pity and pardon!"<sup>13</sup> In 1722, some three years before his death, Thoresby writes: "The Vicar . . . particularly inveighed against plays, which reproof was the more necessary, because we have had in town a company of players six or eight weeks, which has seduced many, and got abundance of silver".<sup>14</sup> In an earlier part of his diary (Sept. 1702) he records that he saw a harvest pageant at Preston; but the absence of hostile comment suggests that what Thoresby saw was dumbshow and not a play with words:

We passed the river Ribble (which rises in the Yorkshire hills) to Preston, which was now extremely crowded with the gentry as well as commonalty, from all parts to the Jubilee, as we call it, but more rightly the Guild: we were too late to see the formalities, (the several companies in their order, attending the Mayor, &c. to church; and thence after sermon, to the Guild-house, to the feast, &c.) at the opening of the Guild, but were in time enough for the appendices, the pageant, &c. at the bringing in the harvest, ushered in by two gladiators in armour, on horseback, &c. The Queen discharged her part well, but the King was too effeminate. I was best pleased with a good providence that attended a fellow clad with bears' skins, &c., who running amongst the mob in the Low-street, by the churchyard, happily chased them away just before the wall fell, whereby their lives were saved. Had afterwards the company of several Yorkshire and Lancashire justices, with whom went to see the posture-master, who not only performed several uncommon feats of activity, but put his body instantly into so strange and mis-shapen postures, as are scarce credible, &c. Disturbed with the music, &c., that got little rest till three in the morning.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding Thoresby's strong disapproval of plays, it need not be supposed that he was upset by reading the volume of *Corpus Christi* pageants in his possession. Almost certainly he did not try to read them, or made very little sense of them if he did. His

opinion of the literary worth of the extract he gives from the York *Crucifixio* is sufficiently indicated by his invitation to "take a Taste of the Poetry in the *Crucifixio Christi*".

*Horace Walpole and later owners*

Thoresby's manuscript of the Corpus Christi play was so little regarded that in 1764, when his eldest son died and the Musaeum Thoresbyanum was auctioned by Whiston Bristow in a sale lasting three days (5-7 March), lot 41 on the third day - "Corpus Christi Playe, in antique *English Verse*, vide D.L. N<sup>o</sup> 17, p.517" - was bought by Horace Walpole (1717-1797) for £1.1.0.<sup>16</sup> (Cf. the price of the *Ducatus Leodiensis*, ordinary copies of which sold at £3.)<sup>17</sup> Nothing much is heard of the manuscript during the years of Walpole's ownership.<sup>18</sup> And yet, by the time the Strawberry Hill collections were sold by George Robins<sup>19</sup> on 25 April 1842 and "twenty-three following days, Sundays excepted", the Thoresby manuscript (lot 92 on the sixth day, described in the sale catalogue as "A folio volume, written upon vellum, of Old English Poetry, from the library of R. Thoresby, very curious") had jumped in value from £1.1.0 to £220.10.0. This was the price paid by the bookseller Thomas Rodd, acting on behalf of Benjamin Heywood Bright, to whom he sold the manuscript for £235.<sup>20</sup> Bright died in August 1843 and his library was sold in the following year. In Sotheby's sale catalogue of his manuscripts, 18 June 1844, the information is published for the first time (both on the title-page and in the description of lot 277) that the manuscript in question contained the "Miracle Plays" of York. The B.L. Dept. of MSS copy of this sale catalogue (P.R.2 A.12, p.34) informs us that the manuscript fetched £305 and (in a marginal note in Sir Frederic Madden's handwriting) that it was sold to "Thorpe for Rev Thomas Russell Aft.<sup>ds</sup> sold to Lord Ashburnham". According to Madden, Russell "sold it to Lord Ashburnham for £350" (see Appendix for pencilled footnote to Madden's *Journal*, Tuesday 18 June 1844, p.155).

*Rev. Thomas Russell*

The Rev. Thomas Russell, who is the weak link in the later pedigree of the manuscript, requires a paragraph to himself. Although it is difficult to identify him with certainty, he is probably the Russell listed in *DNB* under "RUSSELL or CLOUTT, THOMAS (1781?-1846), independent minister"<sup>21</sup> and in the British Museum general catalogue of printed books under "RUSSELL (THOMAS) M.A., pseud. [i.e. THOMAS CLOUTT]". Letters written by this Russell (from the same address as that given in *DNB*: Penton Row, Walworth, Surrey) are preserved in the Bodleian Library: a letter to Francis Douce, 20 Feb. 1828 (MS Douce d. 86, f.158), and more than thirty letters to Sir Thomas Phillipps, who refers to his correspondent as the "Rev. Thos. Russell".<sup>22</sup> Most of these letters are on the subject of money lent to Phillipps,<sup>23</sup> and indicate Russell's difficulty in getting his money back on time. One letter dated 25 Dec. 1845 confirms his year of birth as 1781: "At the age of sixty four, it singularly happens, that in no form as plaintiff, defendant or witness have I ever appeared in any court of law from the highest to the lowest".<sup>24</sup> Another letter dated 25 Sept. 1844 establishes the fact that he

bought books and manuscripts: "I have bought rather largely at the sale of the Duke of Sussex's Library [31 July 1844], and payment must be made on the 3rd. and 5th. of October . . . . I have the Barlowe MSS bought at the late Countess of Mansfield's sale at Richmond, and a chartulary I think you would like, which I should be disposed to give you for the payment of one of the other bills before it is due by the date upon it".<sup>25</sup> The same Russell is evidently referred to in a letter dated 2 December 1846 from Thomas Rodd, bookseller, to Lord Ashburnham:

The other collection I alluded to is that of a Dissenting Minister of the name of Russell - The chief strength of it consists in curious old English books relating to the Reformation, with some fine and curious specimens of Old English Poetry and General Literature. As he was not in sufficiently good circumstances to entail it without doing injustice to his family, there can be little doubt of its coming to the hammer.<sup>26</sup>

Since it is unlikely that in the mid-nineteenth century there was more than one Rev. Thomas Russell who collected books and manuscripts on a large scale, it seems safe to infer that Madden's Rev. Thomas Russell is the *DNB* Thomas Russell.

However, Madden's two statements that the manuscript was bought by Thorpe for Russell, who in turn sold it to Lord Ashburnham, are apparently in conflict with other evidence. Madden himself in a footnote (dated July 1844) added to his *Journal* entry for Wednesday 24 April 1844, p.75, makes no mention of Russell: "It was purchased for 305£ (against myself) by Thorpe the bookseller for a person [Lord Ashburnham written above in pencil] whose name is concealed". More significantly, there is no mention of Russell in Ashburnham MS 4323 (a volume containing titles of books and manuscripts purchased for the Ashburnham collection, prices paid and from whom acquired, 1827 to 1877) which, under the year 1847, records that the manuscript of the York Miracle Plays (App.<sup>x</sup> CXXXVII) was purchased from Thorpe for £305.<sup>27</sup> Given this confusion of evidence, it is hardly surprising that the *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum 1844-1899* omits Russell in its account of the later pedigree of the manuscript; or that de Ricci's *Bibliotheca Britannica* (under B.M. Add. 35290) first gives the Earl of Ashburnham as the owner of the manuscript after Thorpe's purchase of it in 1844, and then crosses out Ashburnham's name and writes: "Rev. Thomas Russell coll.; the Earl of Ashburnham coll., App., n.137".<sup>28</sup>

Until further evidence comes to light, it would seem best to accept Madden's statement that the Rev. Thomas Russell was the owner of the York manuscript between Thorpe's purchase of it in 1844 and Lord Ashburnham's purchase of it in 1847. Nevertheless, in view of the evidence of Ashburnham MS 4323, we are entitled to wonder whether Sir Frederic Madden was wrong to interpose Russell as an owner of the manuscript between Thorpe and Ashburnham. One way of reconciling Russell's ownership with the evidence of Ashburnham MS 4323 is to assume (in the absence of evidence) that after Russell's death in 1846 the manuscript was purchased again by Thorpe, and that he sold

it in 1847 to Lord Ashburnham for £305. This assumption is, however, acceptable only if Madden was wrong in stating that Russell sold it to Lord Ashburnham for £350. In any event, it is a matter of fact that the manuscript of the York plays was purchased for the Ashburnham collection in 1847 and that it is listed as "York Miracle Plays" in Ashburnham MS 4328 (a catalogue of printed books and manuscripts in the Ashburnham collection, 1851-2), where it is described in four columns as "V[ellum], XIV.[th cent.], fol. A[ppendix] 64".<sup>29</sup>

One more sale completes the pedigree of the York manuscript: on 1 May 1899, at Sotheby's sale of a portion of Lord Ashburnham's manuscripts, the "York Miracle Plays" (lot 85) were bought for the British Museum by Quaritch for £121.<sup>30</sup> Thus Sir Frederic Madden's wish that this important manuscript should be bought for the National Collection (*Journal*, 18 June 1844, p.156) was at last fulfilled.

#### *The increase in value of the manuscript*

The threehundredfold increase in the market value of the York volume between 1764 (£1.1.0) and 1844 (£305) was not due to inflation alone. Before 1764, when Horace Walpole bought the folio of the York plays from Thoresby's library so cheaply, only six English medieval religious plays had been published: [John Stevens] the first five plays of the N-town cycle (1722), and [Henry Bourne] the Newcastle Shipwrights' play (1736). But between 1764 and 1844 there was a revival of interest in "Gothic poetry", and the medieval biblical plays of England became better known and more highly valued.

By the end of the eighteenth century the following plays had been published: [Thomas Hawkins] the Digby Killing of the Children (1773); [*History and Antiquities of the City of York*] the York Incredulity of Thomas (1785); [John Brand] the Newcastle Shipwrights' play (1789); and [John Croft] the York Incredulity of Thomas (1797). The publication of two Noah plays - the N-town cycle play in 1722 and the Newcastle play in 1736 - may help to explain why "Noah's Ark" was known to the mythologist Jacob Bryant (1715-1804). In 1788 he entertained Miss Burney and Mrs Delany with the following remarks on this "strange composition":

Next he spoke upon the Mysteries, or origin of our theatrical entertainments, and repeated the plan and conduct of several of these strange compositions, in particular one he remembered which was called "Noah's Ark", and in which that patriarch and his sons, just previous to the Deluge, made it all their delight to speed into the ark without Mrs. Noah, whom they wished to escape; but she surprised them just as they had embarked, and made so prodigious a racket against the door that, after a long and violent contention, she forced them to open it, and gained admission, having first contented them by being kept out till she was thoroughly wet to the skin.

These most eccentric and unaccountable dramas filled up the chief of our conversation: and whether to consider them most with laughter, as ludicrous, or

with horror, as blasphemous, remains a doubt I cannot well solve.<sup>31</sup>

During the first four decades of the nineteenth century several more medieval plays were published by individuals or by learned societies: [Thomas Sharp] the Coventry plays (1817), 1825, 1836); [James Markland] two of the Chester plays (1818); [Francis Douce] the Towneley *Juditium* (1822); [William Hone] extracts from the N-town plays (1823); [Thomas Sharp] the Digby plays (1835); [John Payne Collier] *Five Miracle Plays* (1836); the Surtees Society edition of the Towneley *Mysteries* (1836); [William Marriott] *A Collection of English Miracle-Plays* (1838); [James O. Halliwell] the N-town plays (1841); and [Thomas Wright] the Chester plays (1843-1847). Indeed, by 1844 the only Corpus Christi cycle not yet published, as a whole or in part, was the manuscript volume of the York plays.

#### *Sir Frederic Madden's identification of the manuscript*

Before 1844 it was not known for certain that the Thoresby-Walpole manuscript was a cycle of York plays. In 1843 Robert Davies, the town clerk of York, writes: "It unfortunately happens that only a single drama of the York series [i.e. the separate manuscript of the *Incredulity of Thomas*] has escaped destruction".<sup>32</sup> Also in 1843 Thomas Wright, the first editor of the full Chester cycle, writes: "I think it probable also that other sets [of plays] exist: one said to be the oldest yet known, was brought to light at the Strawberry Hill sale, and it is sincerely to be hoped that it will be published".<sup>33</sup> It has been mentioned above that the first published identification of the ex-Thoresby volume as a cycle of York plays appears in Sotheby's catalogue of Bright's manuscripts (18 June 1844). But the credit of making this identification must go to Sir Frederic Madden,<sup>34</sup> head of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum from 1837 to 1866. Madden's *Journal* (Tuesday 23 April 1844, p.73) informs us how he confirmed his earlier conjecture that the manuscript "contains the York Series",<sup>35</sup> and how he collated it with the text of the York *Incredulity of Thomas* play printed in Croft's *Excerpta Antiqua* (1797).<sup>36</sup> The identification of the manuscript as the "York Miracle Plays" in the 1844 sale catalogue of Bright's manuscripts was no doubt based on information provided by Madden, and this new knowledge must have considerably enhanced its value.

#### *The secrecy of successive owners*

We know from the entry in Madden's *Journal* dated Wednesday 24 April 1844, p.75, that he was afraid of Bright's manuscript of the York plays falling into the hands of "a second Mr. Bright, and shut up from the public", and that he believed his fear was justified when Thorpe bought it for a person whose name was kept concealed. As late as 1871 W.C. Hazlitt felt obliged to observe: "[the York plays] have had a most unfortunate destiny in being secreted by successive owners".<sup>37</sup> This criticism bears hardest on Thoresby who at least published a short notice of the manuscript in his possession: a notice which has only to be compared with Drake's list of the

guilds performing the Corpus Christi play in York<sup>38</sup> in order to establish that Thoresby's manuscript contains the York plays. But it is true that knowledge of Thoresby's volume diminished rather than increased during the years of Walpole's ownership, so that the manuscript correctly described in Bristow's catalogue of 1764 as a "Corpus Christi Playe" (following the *Ducatus* description) became simply "A folio volume . . . of Old English Poetry" in the 1842 catalogue of the Strawberry Hill sale. The manuscript did not become much better known under subsequent owners - Bright,<sup>39</sup> Russell, and Ashburnham<sup>40</sup> - until in 1885 the 5th Earl of Ashburnham gave the Clarendon Press permission to publish Lucy Toulmin Smith's fine edition.



APPENDIX

Extracts from Sir Frederic Madden's Journal for 1842 and 1844 containing references to the manuscript of the York plays<sup>41</sup>

Wednesday 6th. [April 1842] [Journal for 1842, p.72]  
I forgot to notice, that among the MSS. I looked yesterday [when he visited Strawberry Hill and glanced at some of the manuscripts for sale] at the one described in the Catalogue as "Old English Poetry," from Thoresby's. It is in good preservation and contains a series of the Miracle Plays, similar to those of the Widkirk, Coventry and Chester collections. It is written on vellum, about the middle of the 15th. cent. I should have supposed them to be the York series, from their coming from Thoresby's library, but the language does not seem to bear that out.\* Possibly they may be another copy of the Coventry series; but I shall look at them again on [p.73] the day of sale.

\* [footnote] It is the York Series. See Journal for April, 1844.

Thursday 28th. [April 1842] [p.94]  
Looked again at the MS. of *Mysteries* from the Thoresby collection, and ascertained that it was not a copy of the Coventry series, but quite a distinct series.\*

\* [footnote] The MS. contains the York Series of Pageants. See a full description of it in Journal for April 1844.

Saturday 30th. [April 1842] [p.98]  
Lot 92. Volume of Old English Mysteries, from Thoresby's collection. 220.10.0 Rodd, on commission, but I know not the party. [Madden later added in smaller handwriting and different ink:] It was for Mr B.H. Bright. Rodd told me this after Mr B's death, in Aug<sup>t</sup>. 1843.

Tuesday 23rd. [April 1844] [Journal for 1844, p.72]  
Rodd called, and brought me, to my great satisfaction, the MS. of the Miracle Plays purchased by Bright at Walpole's sale.

[p.73] In the evening looked into the MS. of the Corpus Christi Plays, which I had not an opportunity of doing, when at Strawberry Hill. This series has been incorrectly ascribed in Sharpe's "Dissertation on the Pageants" etc. etc. 1825 to Leeds, but I soon ascertained the fact (what I had before conjectured, and mentioned to Collier) that this MS. contains the York Series, supposed to be lost, with the exception of one play, printed in Crofts' "Excerpta Antiqua," etc. 1797. p.105 "from an original MSS. (not the present Volume) amongst the Archives at [p.74] Guildhall, York." This play

was performed by the Scriveners, and I collated the text printed in Croft, with the Thoresby MS. and found it agree, except that the former has several variations, probably from being a later copy. Read through also the Account of the York Corpus Christi Play, added at the end of "Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York," by Mr Davies, etc. 1843. who laments the loss of the plays in the MS. now before me. Many curious particulars are here recorded which to the future Editor of this Series, (for no doubt, these plays will be printed, sooner or later) will be of considerable use.

Wednesday 24th. [April 1844] [p.75]

In the evening looked over Sharp's book on the Coventry Mysteries, Drake's *Eboracum*, and compared the lists of the Corpus Christi series of Plays, of 1415 and a few years later, given in Drake and Davies, with the Thoresby MS. As I anticipate that this volume may come to the Museum, or, at all events, that the Contents will be printed at no great interval of time, I shall not take the trouble to make any detailed remarks on the volume, but for fear that it may be purchased by a second Mr. Bright, and shut up from the public,\* I shall here annex a list of the Plays, as they occur in the MS. I should premise, that the volume is a stout quarto, written on vellum, in a neat hand of the latter half of the 15th. century, with some insertions, and notes, in a hand of the 17th [sic] (probably in Queen Mary's time 'or in 1569' when the plays were corrected for representation - See Davies, pp.263, '269'.) The Order of the Plays in the MS. and the names of the [p.76] Trades, agree with the lists given by Drake, *Eboracum*, App. p.xxx and Davies, p.233, except where otherwise specified.

\* [footnote] My fear was too true. It was purchased for 305£. (against myself) by Thorpe the bookseller for a person [Lord Ashburnham written above in pencil] whose name is concealed, and who gratifies his own selfishness by depriving the public of the benefit of the MS. July, 1844

[pp.76-86 Here follows a numbered list of the plays as they occur in the manuscript. The name of each guild performing the play is given first, followed by the opening verse, the number of pages, and the subject of the play.]

[p.86] The remark of Thoresby, in describing this MS. when in his possession, that the name of *Merceres* "is modern, Richard the father of Bp. Moreton of Durham, being the first of that trade, at least in these northern parts of England," is false, since as Bp. Morton died in 1659. at the advanced age of 95. his father could hardly have exercised the trade before 1530. whereas the mystery of *Mercers* was extant in 1473. (See Sharp, p.77.) and the title in the MS. is in the same old hand that has written the text. Thoresby is also mistaken in ascribing the pageants themselves to Tho. Cutler and Rich. Nandycke, whose names are signed on a fly-leaf at the end of the MS. and to whom it probably belonged . . . . This book was given to

Thoresby by Henry Fairfax, & it was purchased by Walpole at the sale of Thoresby's library, in [space left blank].

Tuesday 18th. [June 1844] [p.149]

Rodd called at ten o'clock, and we proceeded to discuss our proceedings at the sale [p.150] of Brights MSS . . . . The MS. of the Miracle-Plays, the most important of all remained to be decided on. The Bodleian library did not mean to bid for it, therefore the field was clear to the Museum, unless some competitor as yet unknown should come forward. Rodd wished exceedingly to secure the publication of the Plays to himself, and made me the following proposition, which I agreed to.

1. That as a reserved price (viz. 150 gns.) had been put by the Executor on this MS. Rodd would himself purchase the volume for this or a higher sum up to 200£.
2. That the volume should remain in his hands, or be considered his property, until the contents had been printed, after which the MS. should be ceded to the Museum at a price not exceeding 180£. or as much lower as it was purchased for.
3. That I should edit the volume for Rodd in the same form as the Chester and Coventry Mysteries, for the remuneration of 100£. [p.151] By this arrangement the MS. will be secured to the Museum at a moderate price, Rodd will have the benefit 'and merit' of the publication, Mr. Halliwell will be kept in the background, and I shall put 100£. in my pocket; besides obtaining the credit of Editor of a volume anxiously looked for. This was our well-concocted (as we thought) and judicious plan, but the result was fatal to our hopes.

[p.155] 277. York Miracle Plays. £305.0.0!!! Purchased by Thorpe on commission, against Rodd and Sir F.M.

The volume was put up at 100 gns. by Rodd, and soon rose to 150. Rodd then went on, bidding very liberally against Thorpe (for Payne had no commission for it) up to 230£. when he gave it up. I then came forward, and having the money, thought it my duty to make an effort to secure the volume for the public. The biddings proceeded, with some little delay up to 295£. when as a last offer I named 300£. Thorpe immediately advanced 5£. in addition, and the MS. was his. I am exceedingly mortified at this unlooked for interference. No one as yet knows for whom the MS. is purchased,\* but I trust the owner will not lock it up, in imitation of Mr. Bright.

\* [pencilled footnote] It was bought for the Rev. Mr Russell, who sold it to Lord Ashburnham for £350.

[p.156] The competition excited a great deal of interest, and I received the compliments of many present at the bold attempt I had made to place the volume in the National Collection. I did not get home till half past six o'clock, excessively wearied both in body and mind.

Wednesday 19th. [June 1844] [p.156]

A long paragraph appeared in the Morning Chronicle (written probably by Collier) relative to the sale, in which the Museum is praised for their competition 'in my person' for the *Miracle Plays*.

NOTES

- 1 The sub-title reads: "or, the Topography of the Ancient and Populous Town and Parish of Leedes, and Parts Adjacent in the West-Riding of the County of York". Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (Oxford, 1956), p.48, describes it as "a good old-fashioned local history with any amount of pedigrees".
- 2 See Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., *York Plays* (Oxford, 1885), pp.xii-xiii; also the *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum 1894-1899* (London, 1901), p.238.
- 3 The *Musaeum Thoresbyanum* has a separate title-page on which the year 1712 is included in the title, while the publisher's imprint at the foot of the page has 1713. Item 17 is reproduced by permission of the Brotherton Librarian (Mr Dennis Cox) from a large paper copy of the *Ducatus Leodiensis* in Leeds University Library. In Thoresby's own annotated copy of the *Ducatus* (now in the library of the Thoresby Society, Leeds) he has written *van* in the right margin opposite *Estrereners*. The intended effect of Thoresby's correction was probably to change the word to *Estrevaners* or *Estrevanners*, the latter being the emended spelling given by Thomas Whitaker in his new edition of Thoresby's book (Leeds and Wakefield, 1816), *Musaeum Thoresbyanum*, p.73.
- 4 Not "Henry Fairfax, dean of Norwich", as Allen T. Hazen states in *A Catalogue of Horace Walpole's Library*, 3 vols. (London and New Haven, 1969), II, 415. That the inscription "H: Fairfax's Book 1695" is in the handwriting of Henry Fairfax, son of Baron Fairfax, is confirmed by its identity with the signature of the same Henry Fairfax on a warrant dated 14 March 1695/6 in Add. MS 38848, f.13v. (This information was communicated to me by Mr W.H. Kelliher, Department of Manuscripts, The British Library.)
- 5 Smith, *op.cit.*, p.xii.
- 6 See D.H. Atkinson, *Ralph Thoresby, the Topographer*, 2 vols. (Leeds, 1885, 1887), I, 89.
- 7 Fairfax may still have been its owner in 1697: at least there is no mention of it among Thoresby's books and manuscripts in the *Catalogi Librorum Manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1697), II, 229.
- 8 See Smith, *op.cit.*, p.xiv; *Catalogue of Additions*, pp.237-8. Further information about these names and initials has been afforded by personal inspection of the manuscript and by the good offices of my colleague, Peter Meredith, who together with Richard Beadle is preparing a facsimile edition of Add. MS 35290 to be published in *Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles*.
- 9 Sir Frederic Madden (*Journal*, Wednesday 24 April 1844, p.86) points out Thoresby's mistake in attributing the plays to Thomas Cutler and Richard Nandycke. See Appendix.
- 10 Reproduced by permission of the British Library from Add. MS 35290, f.181.
- 11 Croft's text is based partly on the transcript of the Scriveners' play first printed in *The History and Antiquities of the City of York*, 2 vols. (York, 1785), II, 128-32. See A.C. Cawley, ed., "The Sykes Manuscript of the York Scriveners' Play", *Leeds Studies in English and Kindred Languages*, 7 and 8 (1952), 45-80.

- 12 Joseph Hunter, ed., *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby*, 2 vols. (London, 1830), I, 50.
- 13 *Ibid.*, II, 198.
- 14 *Ibid.*, II, 341.
- 15 *Ibid.*, I, 389.
- 16 This information is taken from one of two copies (Safe A.7) of Bristow's sale catalogue in the library of the Thoresby Society, Leeds, by kind permission of the Thoresby Society.
- 17 Atkinson, *op.cit.*, II, 263.
- 18 *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 54 (London, 1784), 103, refers to "Thoresby's MS. of Corpus Christi play . . . now in Mr. Walpole's possession".
- 19 The auctioneer George Robins published an elaborate catalogue for the Strawberry Hill sale, on the second title-page of which he described the sale as "the most distinguished gem that has ever adorned the annals of auctions". Robins' catalogue was parodied in *Specimen of the Catalogue of the Great Sale at Gooseberry Hall* (B.L. 786 k 37), which describes the sale as "The most brilliant feather that has ever adorned / The cap of an auctioneer".
- 20 The price paid by Rodd, as well as the information (in Madden's hand in the right margin) that Rodd was buying "for B.H. Bright Esqr.", will be found in a British Library copy of the Strawberry Hill sale catalogue (P.R.1. G.13, p.61). The price paid by Bright is given in the description of lot 277, "YORK. MIRACLE PLAYS", in the sale catalogue of Bright's manuscripts in 1844 (B.L. P.R.2. A.12, p.34).
- 21 *The Baptist Magazine* for 1846 lists Thomas Russell as a Congregationalist minister and a member of the Congregationalist Board; it adds the year 1807, which is probably the date of Russell's ordination. I owe this information to Mr W.H. Kelliher.
- 22 These letters were kindly brought to my attention by Mr Timothy Rogers (Dept. of Western MSS, Bodleian Library), who is compiling an index to the papers of Sir Thomas Phillipps. The letters from Russell to Phillipps which I have examined are contained in folders marked MS Phillipps-Robinson c.470 (1839), ff.238-41; b.139 (1840), ff.135-58; c.476 (1841), ff.86-96; c.480 (1842), ff.71-8; d.132 (1844), ff.81-2; c.493 (1845), ff.79-91; c.496 (1846). Mr Rogers is inclined to believe that this Thomas Russell is the same man whose name appears in the following sale catalogues: (1) a Puttick & Simpson sale catalogue of 2 Jan. 1848 of "Rev. T. Russell Portraits . . . art books", and (2) a Puttick & Simpson sale catalogue of 1 Feb. 1848 of prints of the late Thomas Russell M.A. (copy in Bodley).
- 23 For Russell as an assignee of bonds made by Phillipps, see A.N.L. Munby, *The Formation of the Phillipps Library from 1841 to 1872*, Phillipps Studies 4 (Cambridge, 1956), p.6.
- 24 MS P.-R. c.493, f.90.
- 25 MS P.-R. d.132, f.82.

- 26 Ashburnham MS 3563, East Sussex Record Office. See F.W. Steer, *The Ashburnham Archives: A Catalogue* (Lewes, 1958), p.51.
- 27 This information was sent to me by Mr A.A. Dibden, County Records Officer for East Sussex, in whose archives Ashburnham MS 4323 is kept. Mr Dibden has asked the pertinent question, "Do we need a Thomas Russell?"
- 28 Seymour de Ricci's index of owners of manuscripts, which is housed in the Palaeography Room, University of London Library. I am indebted to Miss Joan Gibbs for sending me a xerox copy of de Ricci's slip headed "B.M. Add. 35290".
- 29 In the East Sussex County Record Office. Cf. the privately-printed *Catalogue of the Manuscripts at Ashburnham Place 1853* (London: Printed by Charles Francis Hodgson), where the manuscript is described in four columns as "V[ellum], Fol., XIV[th cent.], A.[ppendix]".
- 30 See the sale *Catalogue of a Portion of the Collection of Manuscripts known as the "Appendix", made by the late Earl of Ashburnham*, 1 May 1899 (B.L. SCS 1165). £121 must be regarded as a bargain price for a manuscript which had been sold to Lord Ashburnham for more than three hundred pounds. However, Sir Frederic Madden obviously thought £305 (paid by Thorpe in 1844) an exaggerated price, for in his *Journal* (Tuesday 18 June 1844, p.155) he writes: "£305.0.0!!! Purchased by Thorpe on commission, against Rodd and Sir F.M."
- 31 Charlotte Barrett, ed., *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, 4 vols. (London, 1893), II, 443-4. It will be noticed that Bryant's account of "Noah's Ark" is not a description of either the N-town or the Newcastle Noah play.
- 32 *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York* (London, 1843), pp.237-8.
- 33 Thomas Wright, ed., *The Chester Plays*, 2 vols. (London, 1843, 1847), I, v.
- 34 I wish to thank Mr W.H. Kelliher both for this information and for his valuable service in introducing me to Madden's *Journal*. It may also be noticed that a "Rev Mr. Garnett, of the British Museum" is referred to as an authority on the manuscript in the description of lot 277 ("York. Miracle Plays") in Sotheby's sale catalogue of Bright's manuscripts (B.L. Dept. of MSS P.R.2 A.12, p.34).
- 35 For Madden's earlier observations on the manuscript see *Journal*, Wednesday 6 April and Thursday 28 April 1842, pp.72, 94. It may also be noticed that the Strawberry Hill sale catalogue, 1842 (B.L. P.R.1. G13, p.61), has the words "(the York Mysteries)" inserted, probably in Madden's hand, above the words "Old English Poetry" in the description of lot 92.
- 36 See note 11. Madden also observed (*Journal*, Tuesday 23 April 1844, p.73) that Thoresby's manuscript of the Corpus Christi play was incorrectly ascribed by Sharp to the city of Leeds; see Thomas Sharp, *A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries anciently performed at Coventry* (Coventry, 1825; repr. E.P. Publishing Limited, 1973), p.141.
- 37 W.C. Hazlitt, ed., *Wharton's History of English Poetry*, 4 vols. (London, 1871), II, 224.

- 38 Francis Drake, *Eboracum: or the History and Antiquities of the City of York* (London, 1736), Appendix, pp.xxix-xxxii.
- 39 It is known that Bright was very secretive about his book purchases; see W. Hilton Kelliher, "The Warwick Manuscripts of Fulke Greville", *British Museum Quarterly*, 34 (1969-70), 109.
- 40 The 4th Earl of Ashburnham (1797-1878) was notorious for denying scholars access to his manuscripts. Sir Frederic Madden (quoted by Munby, *op.cit.*, p.26), wrote to Phillipps on 28 October 1850: "His Lordship is a dog in the manger, & allows no one to consult them".
- 41 Bodleian Library MSS Eng. hist. c.155 (1842) and c.157 (1844); extracts published by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.