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A Road Less Travelled? Touring Performers in Medieval and Renaissance Lancashire

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The history of entertainment before 1642 in the north west has been somewhat dominated by the drama of one location, the city of Chester, where a famous Whitsun Cycle of biblical plays can be traced through the sixteenth century until its suppression by religious reformers in the 1570s.¹ Admittedly, Chester was the most important town in the region at the time, the administrative centre for a county palatine, a port and market centre, bustling with varied crafts and trades, and, after 1540, cathedral city for the new diocese of Chester.² Beyond this cultural centre lay the northern counties of Lancashire, Westmorland and Cumberland, a region that seldom draws comment in accounts of medieval and renaissance drama.³ However, the dramatic records of all three counties have been published by the Records of Early English Drama series, and the 1991 edition for Lancashire by David George now provides a springboard for any study of early entertainment in that county, including this essay.⁴

One of the primary forms of early public theatre in the English provinces was the varied shows brought by a vivid array of touring performers – minstrels, players, bearwards, musicians, jesters, jugglers, acrobats, and puppeteers. Some of these entrepreneurial acts seem to have been local amateurs but many others had patrons, with obligations, as members of royal, noble or gentry households, to perform such services as their lord or lady requested. The latter class of performer travelled the length and breadth of the country to augment household income, but there were also some surprisingly ambitious trips undertaken by bands of civic waits such as those from Bristol in the south west, which show up as far away as Carlisle.⁵ Tracking this touring talent has become possible in recent years, with the further interest of comparing the relative popularity of performance routes and debating the underlying reasons for a road taken three or four centuries ago.

The intrinsic stimulation of newly available dramatic records for theatre

historians seems to be drawing a response beyond the discipline from others working on various aspects of urban and local culture in the period. Cultural history can also intersect usefully with recent developments in regional geography, where one modern writer defines 'region' as follows: 'it is a taxonomic and practical device used for characterizing and identifying, for different purposes and at different points in time, the common cultural, economic and social characteristics of varying communities, in both their local and broader spatial contexts and with some appropriate regard to the association, particularly in essentially pre-industrial times, with their natural environment. It is, in short, about the local and wider associations between people and places and people and people, partly recoverable from written descriptions, and in some cases from maps'.⁶

Using both available written records and period maps, my purpose now is to explore cultural associations between people and places in the Lancashire region before 1642, using touring performers as my lens. The earliest notices of locally sponsored entertainers come from outside the county, but nonetheless furnish evidence that the tradition of household retainers providing entertainment both in the patron's home and beyond at convenient times of the year was established in Lancashire by the mid-fifteenth century. A minstrel patronized by Sir John le Botiler was paid at York in 1448/9, within a year or so of payments to the minstrels attached to two Harington households, one resident at Hornby Castle in northern Lancashire and the other at Gleaston Castle in Furness, also in the county.⁷ The Botilers, lords of the manor of Warrington, resided at Bewsey, near Warrington and the only bridge across the middle and lower course of the Mersey in south-west Lancashire.⁸ How would the minstrels from these gentry households have made their way across to York and what was their cultural context in their home region?

In the mid-fifteenth century, Lancashire was still a remote and relatively underpopulated county. Much of its landscape was still wild, with hills and moorland to the north and along the eastern borders with Yorkshire, a lowlying undrained peatmoss plain in the south west where Liverpool is situated, and rivers running down from the Pennines carving up the landscape.⁹ Studies of the geographical distribution of wealth in England suggest that from the fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries Lancashire was the poorest or second poorest county in the country.¹⁰ Villages were thinly scattered and the incorporated boroughs few. At the end of the fifteenth century there were only four boroughs of any significance – Lancaster, Preston, Wigan and Liverpool – but even they

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were modest in size and not to be compared with major provincial centres like Coventry, York, Exeter or Bristol (Liverpool's population has been estimated at about 700 as late as 1565).¹¹ More significant than the boroughs were the landed gentry: 'one of the most consistent features of the history of this region was the dominating influence of the class of landholders, under the lead of the Derby family . . .' (after 1485).¹²

Perhaps it is not surprising, under these circumstances, that Lancashire lacks the rich sources of historical record that allow us to trace the development of cultural life in major towns such as York, Shrewsbury and Exeter. There are very few civic accounts surviving for its larger boroughs, even in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and no relevant accounts have been found for key market towns like Blackburn, Clitheroe, Ormskirk and Warrington.¹³ Family accounts of local nobility and gentry have unpredictable rates of survival in any county and Lancashire is not distinctive in lacking such archives for the medieval period. As a result we have no corroborative evidence of the minstrels attached to the Botiler and Harington households beyond their appearance at York in the mid-fifteenth century. The only late medieval records from the county which confirm local touring are the accounts of two prominent abbeys, Lytham in the Fylde district and Whalley in the Ribble Valley. The priors' accounts of the Benedictine priory of Lytham run from 1342 to 1534, seemingly a rich source but, because of their summary style, only useful to confirm that 'histriones' and 'ministralli' regularly made their way across the marshes, lured by the promise of performance payments, as well as room and board.¹⁴ Disappointingly, Cistercian Whalley's bursars' accounts are little different – individual payments to minstrels and sometimes bearwards are noted annually from 1485 through 1536, but without further identification by patrons' names (with a single exception).¹⁵

Despite the meagreness of the written record, we can catch a few glimpses of entertainment available to some privileged Lancastrians in the fifteenth century and how it became accessible to them. Minstrels were attached to private households by this time and although records are lacking in the north west generally in this period, the civic accounts of York prove that they travelled, perhaps in company with their patrons, as far as the Vale of York.¹⁶ Other performers, whether local or patronized, toured to *welcoming monastic* households in the Preston area on a regular basis and it would be surprising if they had not also visited other locations in the region along their main route. Where this and other main routes lay is another question that can only be tentatively answered from period map sources.

The mid-fourteenth century Gough map is the principal cartographic source of information for the road network across England in the period. It shows only one main road through Lancashire, entering the county in the south at Warrington from Newcastle under Lyme in Staffordshire and proceeding north, probably through Wigan, Preston, Garstang and Lancaster, to Kendal in Westmorland.¹⁷ Three hundred years later, when John Ogilby published his detailed 'strip' road maps in *Britannia* (1675), essentially the same road is recognizable as the main – indeed the only – north-south route through Lancashire.¹⁸ The only other road indicated on the Gough map divided at some point beyond Shrewsbury into two branches, one of which ran into North Wales, and the other to Liverpool on the Mersey. There are no cross-country routes indicated in this region of the north west, and just a glance at modern renderings of the medieval road network from the Gough and other period sources suggests that other parts of the kingdom were more inter-connected.¹⁹ No further evidence for north-western routes is provided by the four thirteenth-century maps drawn by Matthew Paris; his focus was on an itinerary from Dover to Newcastle, an eastern route through easier terrain that seems to have been favoured by many travellers, including entertainers, if surviving dramatic records are any indication.²⁰

Despite the lack of medieval cartographic evidence, there were some roads in the region that allowed communication with the north east, including York. The north-south route through Lancashire was established by the Romans, whose major roads are generally agreed to have remained in use, furnishing at least forty per cent of the medieval English road network.²¹ It seems likely, given the apparent traffic of touring entertainers in the Preston area as well as the existence of chartered market towns at Clitheroe, Preston and Kirkham, that there was a road through the fertile Ribble Valley to Preston and beyond into the agricultural Fylde district where Lytham Priory was located. In fact, evidence from an earlier period confirms this supposition. Much of this route was laid by the Romans to connect their station at Ilkley beyond Skipton in Wharfedale (Yorkshire) with an important fort at Ribchester in the Ribble Valley, through the Aire-Ribble gap, one of the lowest of the Pennine passes. This road continued west to Preston, Kirkham and the Fylde coast at Blackpool.²² The network of local roads traceable later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may well have derived from such old Roman roads, carved out of a sometimes difficult landscape by gifted engineers. Thus, another cross-country road that may have been used by the minstrels from Bewsey would have run to Manchester and then followed the Roman course over Blackstone Edge through Leeds and Tadcaster to York. This

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is much the same route as the second cross-country road, originating at Chester and running through Warrington and Frodsham to Manchester and beyond to York, drawn by Ogilby in 1675.²³ A renaissance road followed some of the same course from Manchester through Rochdale over Blackstone Edge but diverged from there through Halifax, Bradford, Otley and Wetherby into York.²⁴

Ogilby has one other northern route that may well have been in existence in the medieval period. This was a branch of the road east to York that originated at Lancaster, following the Lune Valley past Hornby Castle and then over Burn Moor to Clapham, Settle, Long Preston and Gargrave in the North Riding before joining the other road to York in Airedale at Skipton. If such a route existed in the fifteenth century, this would have been the most direct for minstrels from Hornby.

With only one medieval cartographic source and no further information for the north west in published renaissance road lists, tracing performers' routes on a Lancashire map must necessarily be speculative (see map).²⁵ Even along the main road north, there is more than one witness to the difficulty of the terrain and the vulnerability of the route during wet weather. An act of parliament passed in 1670 pays notice to what must have been an enduring problem: 'in the Counties of Chester and Lancaster there are many and sundry great and deep Rivers, which run cross and through the common and publick Highways and Roads within the said Counties, which many Times cannot be passed over without Hazard and Loss of the Lives and Goods of the inhabitants and Travellers within the said Counties for want of covenient, good and sufficient Bridges in the said Highways and Roads'.²⁶ Not many years later Celia Fiennes gave an eyewitness account of some of the hazards of touring the county: 'Preston is reckon'd but 12 miles from Wiggon but they exceed in length by farre those that I thought long the day before from Leverpoole; its true to avoid the many mers and marshy places it was a great compass I tooke and passed down and up very steep hills . . . I was about 4 hours going this twelve mile and could have gone 20 in the tyme in most countrys'.²⁷

Lancashire seems to have remained a county that presented the long distance traveller with some challenges that may have made it a less attractive destination. Certainly touring entertainers based in the south and Midlands might have found other directions more appetizing, especially given the dearth of well-populated towns and the relative poverty of Lancashire's economy.

Although the medieval dramatic records are few, a more representative, if still incomplete, selection survives from the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. From these we can deduce more about the place of touring entertainment in the cultural life of the county. By this time some economic and

social changes were occurring but in many ways Lancashire remained a relative backwater with a small population, few incorporated boroughs, and much the same travel conditions, although it is possible that the roads deteriorated somewhat as they did elsewhere in the kingdom with the increase in heavier traffic and the loss of monastic upkeep.²⁸ Chester remained the only major city in the region although woollen manufacture was beginning to transform the south-eastern section of Lancashire, bringing Manchester in particular into increasing contact with London and the port of Southampton and creating stronger bonds with other cloth communities in neighbouring Yorkshire. The new textile industry and coal-mining in the Wigan and Prescott area of the south west heralded prosperity to come in the next century, but for the most part Lancashire could still be characterized as a pastoral county, with more land being brought into use for cattle raising and sheep grazing although there were still large tracts of forest, undrained mosses and empty moor.

The influence of local gentry in Lancashire has attracted much interest in recent years because of the role they played in resisting religious reform in the later sixteenth century.²⁹ Conservative and relatively isolated from the centres of administrative control, the county became infamous for its tolerance of recusancy, an attitude fostered by the gentry who held key positions as justices of the peace. Local landholders continued to be dominant in the region, characterized as follows: '... the first loyalty of many was to the Earl of Derby, or to some lesser local landholder, rather than to a distant monarch. Substantial gentry were thin on the ground, and only a narrow elite among them looked beyond the county for marriage partners, education or political preferment'.³⁰

The Stanley earls of Derby were pre-eminent in the region, the only higher nobility resident in the county. They held the powerful office of county lieutenant for almost a hundred years after its creation in 1551. Another minor peer, Lord Monteagle, was descended from a cadet branch of the Derbys and resided at Hornby Castle in the north. Below the peers in the county hierarchy were the gentry who took subordinate administrative posts such as deputy lieutenant, sheriff and justice of the peace. Phillips and Smith point out that even in this class, Lancashire had relatively few baronets and knights – by the start of the Civil War there were only seven baronets and six knights.³¹ The numbers of gentry were further augmented by those holding the lower ranks of esquire and gentlemen. It is evident that intermarriage, conservatism and distance from the capital would have made this county society insular and introspective. As Haigh notes: 'The ruling group in the county therefore formed a compact and inter-

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related coterie; the deputy lieutenants of Tudor Lancashire came from a circle of no more than ten families and they were all related'.³²

Is corroboration of this insularity to be found in the dramatic records? In this later period, as before, our primary evidence comes from household accounts rather than civic records. Although both Liverpool and Manchester have a few relevant records, there is little sign that their officials encouraged performance, either locally produced or touring, apart from the hiring of town waits. Liverpool's four notices of touring entertainers come from two years: 1574-75 and 1582-83, and three of these are for Lancashire-based troupes, the earl of Derby's and the Lord Monteagle's players.³³ Unlike some parishes in the south west, Liverpool became puritan, which may have been a factor in the apparent lack of interest in entertainment reflected in the Town Books, but it was also not as well-located as Manchester for attracting performers. But Manchester may not have had enduring appeal, for it was 'the largest, most prosperous, most economically developed and most puritan town in Lancashire'.³⁴ The Constables' Accounts, which only begin in 1613, have yielded very few entries, mostly for conveying unnamed visiting entertainers out of this puritan town.³⁵

We must therefore look to the accounts of the nobility and gentry in our search for touring performers and here we will not be disappointed. It is unfortunate that only one household book, with entries for 1587-90, survives for the leading noble family, the Stanleys, but it provides a distinctly different level of sophistication than the more numerous household accounts of the gentry families. No accounts have yet come to light from those holding the title of baron or baronet, but the rank of knighthood is represented by a brief household account for Sir Thomas Butler of Bewsey (1579-81); a rental book for Sir Richard Shireburn of Stonyhurst (1569-76); and household accounts for the Shuttleworths of Smithills and Gawthorpe (1583-1621). The lower gentry rank of esquire also has examples in the accounts of the executors of Robert Nowell of Read Hall (1568-80); household accounts both for Gilbert and Francis Sherrington of Wardley Hall (1581-1603) and for Thomas Walmesley of Dunkenhalgh (1612-54). There are also documents of related interest from the homes of Nicholas Assheton of Downham and Alexander Hoghton of the Lea.³⁶

Of immediate interest is the clustering of these households in the area of Preston and the Ribble Valley (see map). Stonyhurst, Gawthorpe, Read Hall, Dunkenhalgh, Downham and the Lea were all located in this part of Lancashire, on or near the old Roman road from Yorkshire to Preston. The Shuttleworth family had moved from Smithills near Bolton over the moor to Gawthorpe by

1606 so the entries are divided between those two different residences. Apart from the two Stanley residences in the south west, the only other clustering is in the Manchester area where Wardley Hall was situated and where Sir Thomas Butler appears to have made his only payment, on the move in 1579, to 'minstrels' patronized by Sir Edmund Trafford of Trafford Hall just west of the town.³⁷ The Manchester area is not on record as a favoured route for its households either, in fact. The Sherrington accounts have only a few entertainment payments at very modest levels over a twenty-three-year period and not one is to a patronized troupe. The highest reward was made to Robert Hewet, the chief wait of York, in 1583, the only other performers with an identification being the local players from Clitheroe who received 2s during the Christmas season in 1583/4.³⁸

Intriguingly, the route for which we have the most surviving evidence of travelling entertainment is therefore the one that we have been able to document but not trace on period maps. The Ribble Valley remains one of Lancashire's best kept secrets, not far from the main road north at Preston, but probably not considered a major cross-country route since the time of the Romans. Tucked away in beautiful landscape far from the surveillance of ecclesiastical authorities, it was chosen as a place of residence by some of the more prominent county gentry, many of whom became recusants or, like the Shireburns, 'church-Catholics' in the later sixteenth century. These were men who could afford to build imposing homes like Stonyhurst or Gawthorpe, thanks to the profits of high offices held under the earls of Derby. Sir Richard Shireburn, high steward and master forester of Bowland, was the fourth earl of Derby's household steward while Sir Richard Shuttleworth held a lucrative office as palatine judge in Cheshire.³⁹ Establishing a higher standard of living included private entertainment, largely provided by visitors. There is no evidence that the Shuttleworths employed their own household players although a troupe patronized by Shireburn's son Richard, a JP and sheriff of Lancashire in the early seventeenth century, showed up at Dunkenhalgh in 1628-29, the only record of their existence. Seventeenth-century accounts for this second Sir Richard are sadly lacking, but this isolated entry in the Walmesley accounts does indicate that the handsome hall still to be seen at Stonyhurst was used by performers. Both the Walmesleys and the Shuttleworths did employ pipers as part of their households.

How far did the visiting troupes travel to play in these residences and what would have been the attraction for their efforts? The best clues come from the accounts for the recusant Walmesleys of Dunkenhalgh and for the protestant Shuttleworths of Gawthorpe. Dunkenhalgh has been largely rebuilt over the

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centuries but Gawthorpe remains an impressive Jacobean mansion, on the outskirts of Padiham not far from Clitheroe.⁴⁰ Some differences between the two should be noted at the outset, while acknowledging that the relevant records for Dunkenhalgh run from 1613-42, those for the Shuttleworths at Gawthorpe from 1608-21.⁴¹ Within a similar time period, however, a greater number of patronized troupes seems to have visited the conservative household of Dunkenhalgh and a wider variety of performers from other named locations – players, musicians, fiddlers and waits.⁴² Of the sixteen patrons whose troupes made the journey between 1613 and 1636 (some several times), seven were probably Lancashire-based, four were the constantly touring royal companies (king's, queen's, Prince Charles' and the Lady Elizabeth's), and two had their seats in Yorkshire and held powerful offices in the north (Shrewsbury and Eure). Two other patrons had troupes that mostly operated in the north, perhaps because it was increasingly unusual to find performers sponsored by those holding the rank of baron in the early seventeenth century.⁴³ As members of the extended Stanley family, both could also count on the earl of Derby's indulgent influence. In fact, the north-western counties may have been altogether more welcoming for the players of Edward Sutton, Lord Dudley, whose seat was in Staffordshire.⁴⁴ The only other patron known was Derby's son-in-law, the earl of Huntingdon, whose piper appeared once in 1629/30.⁴⁵

The Lancashire patrons included the ubiquitous earl of Derby, Lord Strange (in the 1630s), Lord Monteagle, Sir Cuthbert Halsall (mayor of Liverpool in 1616-17), a Mr Warren (presumably John Warren of Woodplumpton in the Fylde just beyond Preston (and Poynton, Cheshire), the second Sir Richard Shireburn, and possibly a Sir Edward Warren of uncertain origin.⁴⁶ Their visits could occur at any time of the year, but there is a consistent pattern of local players appearing during the Christmas or Shrovetide season and being handsomely rewarded.⁴⁷ Such players mostly came from towns and villages in or near the Ribble Valley: Downham, Ribchester, Clitheroe, Whalley and Burnley. Were these players in the same category as those noted in Nicholas Assheton's journal entry for festivities at Downham Hall on Twelfth Day, 1617/18: 'At night some companie from Reead came a Mumming; was kindly taken: but they were but Mummings . . .?'⁴⁸ There are no further clues but what is apparent is that such patronage of performers strengthened the bonds of local community even as it must have impressed the visitors with the prestige of the patron and the opulence of his surroundings. Other locals came at intervals through the year – the players of Burnley and the waits of Preston and Lancaster. There is an impressive list of

musicians, often termed waits, from further away in the West Riding of Yorkshire: Wigglesworth in Ribblesdale; Bradford, Halifax, Leeds, and Wakefield along the route through the Pennines; and Pateley Bridge, Knaresborough and Ripon, north-east of Ilkley, all within a fifty mile radius. The only musicians to come from larger towns at a greater distance were the Durham waits who made the trip in 1619 and one troupe from the south, the Nottingham waits, who visited in 1631. The Walmesley household clearly relished plays and music, both 'professional' and amateur, but most of their performers originated in either Lancashire or neighbouring Yorkshire.⁴⁹

The same homegrown talent appeared at Gawthorpe, although the Shuttleworths recorded fewer visiting patronized troupes (7) and seem to have favoured musicians rather than local players at Christmastime. The three Lancashire-based patrons are already familiar – Derby, Monteagle and Mr Warren (probably of Woodplumpton) – as are the two Stanley relatives from Staffordshire, Dudley and Stafford. Only one royal troupe (Queen Anne's) made a tour stop in 1617/18 and it is possible that 'Mr Ratcliffe's' fiddlers of 1618 were patronized by Savile Radcliffe, JP of Lancashire in the period and the only West Riding patron, with his seat at Todmorden Hall near Halifax. The visiting local musicians are more limited in their variety also: neighbouring Padiham produced a piper and the town piper from Clitheroe came once as did the waits of Manchester.⁵⁰ Payments to musicians from the West Riding are fewer, but some of the same troupes included Gawthorpe in their circuit: Halifax, Wakefield and Leeds, as well as fiddlers from Heptonstall, on the moor beyond Burnley. Waits from as far away as Carlisle made their way to Gawthorpe, but the Durham waits had the longest journey. Their dated payment on 11 March 1617/18 when combined with other notices at Dunkenhalgh sometime after 14 February in the same year and at Carlisle between 21 December 1617 and 25 March 1618 gives us a rare indication of the extent of their itinerary.⁵¹ It is to be hoped that when the research survey of Yorkshire is complete we will also be able to piece together more detailed annual itineraries for some of the more active Yorkshire musicians from the Pennine area.

The pattern of Gawthorpe payments can also be compared with those of the same family's other household at Smithills, located closer to the Pennine route through Manchester and the main road running through Wigan. Surviving records for Smithills cover more years than those for Gawthorpe, but the diversity and number of the payments is noticeably less.⁵² The seven patrons of the visiting troupes differ as well. The musicians of three local patrons, Sir Edmund Trafford

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and his son Edmund of Trafford Hall and John Atherton of Atherton Hall (a few miles south-west of Bolton) played at Smithills between 1586 and 1587, when Atherton and the Traffords were JPs with Shuttleworth.⁵³ Lord Monteagle's son-in-law, Lord Morley, also sponsored a troupe of players who came in 1586.⁵⁴ Perhaps because of Shuttleworth's high office in Cheshire or because this residence was so close to the Cheshire border, Smithills attracted the players of Sir Peter Legh of Lyme Hall just south of Manchester as well as his musicians and those of another Cheshire patron, William Tatton of Wythenshawe Hall, similarly located. It is striking that these visits cluster in the same 1580s period; the only patronized troupe to visit in the 1590s was the earl of Essex's men, a national troupe that seldom appeared in the north during the decade.⁵⁵

The local performers who included Smithills on their tour were also limited, although there are more correspondences. The four Lancashire-based troupes were all described as players, their visits falling within the Christmas period or a week later in one case. The players of Downham in particular were encouraged by the Shuttleworths in the 1590s, coming to Smithills three times. Otherwise undocumented players from Preston, Blackburn and Garstang, all on or near the main road north, also paid visits. The other Lancashire performer was a minstrel from Leigh near Bolton. The five West Riding musicians and players all came from locations along or near the Pennine route to York – Rochdale, Elland, Halifax, and Pontefract – or, in James Hewet, the wait's case, from York itself in 1591. Neighbourly affiliations with Cheshire are represented by payments to players from Nantwich (another Christmas visit), the Chester waits, and a vaguely titled troupe, 'playeres which came furthe of cheshire'.⁵⁶

It would seem, therefore, that Smithills may have been on a less popular route than Gawthorpe – and possibly that the older Shuttleworth had less time or inclination for entertainment at home outside the Christmas season, given his administrative responsibilities. The performance space at Smithills should not have been a deterrent and may indeed have been more accommodating to performers than has sometimes been thought. Despite its charm now, the well-known medieval hall would then have been considered a smaller, outmoded space with a central open fireplace. It seems unlikely that a host of Shuttleworth's status would have preferred this hall to the more modern and congenial withdrawing room, which was distinguished by some of the earliest linenfold panelling in Lancashire, as well as by its more generous dimensions and fashionable bay window.⁵⁷ Gawthorpe Hall is a grander space, however, and Shuttleworth's nephew Richard responded to his inheritance with hospitality on a scale to match

the house.

A few miscellaneous records from other households bolster the case for a thriving local culture in the Ribble Valley area. Sir Thomas Hesketh's minstrel, may have come from Hesketh's residence at Martholme, manor house of Great Harwood, to neighbouring Read Hall, in 1569, the only performance payment noted in the brief accounts surviving for the Nowell family. The same Hesketh may have inherited two players in 1581 from Alexander Hoghton of the Lea, a residence near his other home at Rufford Hall; if players under Hesketh's patronage were referred to in an ambiguous, unpunctuated MS entry for 1587, they were the only gentry troupe noted in the Derby Household Book. The other possible inheritor of the two players, Fulke Gyllom and William Shakshafte, was Alexander's brother Sir Thomas, residing at Hoghton Tower, also in the Preston area.⁵⁸ Neither the Heskeths of Rufford nor the Hoghtons of Hoghton Tower have left behind records to further illuminate the fate of the two players whose identities have drawn increasing attention from scholars willing to speculate about the possibility of Shakespeare spending some of his formative years in Lancashire.⁵⁹

The most active touring troupes based in Lancashire were undoubtedly those with the earl of Derby as their patron. The fourth earl of Derby's players, musicians and bearwards toured widely beyond the county and across the country, guaranteed a welcome because of their patron's prestige as one of the most important peers of the realm. The only notices within the county are two mentioned previously at Liverpool, but most of the detailed accounts for the Ribble Valley area postdate Henry Stanley's death. It is, however, intriguing that neither the players of the fourth earl or the equally active troupe of his heir, Lord Strange, appeared at Smithills or Wardley, which have some household accounts for their period (1572-94). Certainly they must have performed at the three Derby residences in Lancashire – Knowsley, Lathom and New Park – especially because the family was present for much of the year.⁶⁰ Henry, Lord Derby, preferred to keep an independent court in the north west rather than play the courtier to the queen like so many of his other noble contemporaries. The four years covered by his Household Book reveal a quality of entertainment on a consistently higher level than the haphazard mix of amateur and 'professional' music and drama enjoyed by members of his retinue in the Ribble Valley area. Although this was the period of his active service on privy council when the family was absent for considerable stretches of time in London, between 1587 and 1590 Derby, his family, friends and guest officials, saw performances at home by some of the best

troups in the country.⁶¹ Hesketh's men, if they played at Knowsley, was the only one based in Lancashire. Derby's homes near the main road north attracted four visits by the queen's men (sometimes for more than one performance), one by Essex's, and one by Leicester's (two performances). In addition, the players who performed at Christmas 1588/9 and in February 1589/90, and possibly at Christmas 1587/8, must have been one of the Stanley troupes.⁶² There are no references made to the performances by amateur local entertainers which characterize the accounts of the Walmesleys and Shuttleworths.

There is little other extant evidence of what we can assume was a noble household with a sophisticated appetite for theatre. William, the sixth earl, was especially inspired by a love of drama. Chambers quotes letters of 1599 relating that his enthusiasm was such that he was 'busy penning comedies for the common players'.⁶³ A letter also survives from Derby himself to show that he was willing to use his influence to secure performance opportunities for the earl of Hertford's men at Chester (a city somewhat inhospitable to players by this time), before their return to Lathom for the Christmas season.⁶⁴

Did his fervour extend to the establishment of a playhouse at Prescot, part of a manor leased by the Stanleys neighbouring the Derby seat at Knowsley?⁶⁵ If this building was indeed a purpose-built playhouse for theatre, then it is one of the first on record in the provinces, the others being the Wine Street playhouse in Bristol (dated c. 1604), a later private playhouse in Redcliffe Hill, also in Bristol, known from the 1638 will of Sarah Barker, and a short-lived playhouse at York in 1609.⁶⁶ The small town of Prescot is not to be compared with the major cities of York and Bristol in this period as a mecca for touring companies or as a cultural capital for its region. There are no known performances at this playhouse and it seems to have had a very brief existence if such it was. Its builder, Richard Harrington, died in February 1602/3, so it must have been built between 1592, when the manor survey book (which fails to mention it) was drawn up, and 1602. By 1609 it had been converted into a house for habitation.⁶⁷ Was it an experiment for a theatre-loving earl or was it some other sort of entertainment place? It must probably remain an enigma. We are on more secure ground with the touring activities of the sixth earl's players, who made regular visits to the proud new residences of his loyal retainers in the Ribble Valley area for the years on record there from 1609 on. But like his father's troupe, this Derby's men did not confine their travels to the north west. They appear across the country, as far south as Barnstaple in Devon and Norwich in East Anglia. Their patron had national prominence and his players worked in a more sophisticated context as a result.

Only Monteagle's troupe had a range of travel beyond the north west that could be compared, but their touring seems to have concluded by 1616 while Derby's continued at least as late as 1635-36.⁶⁸

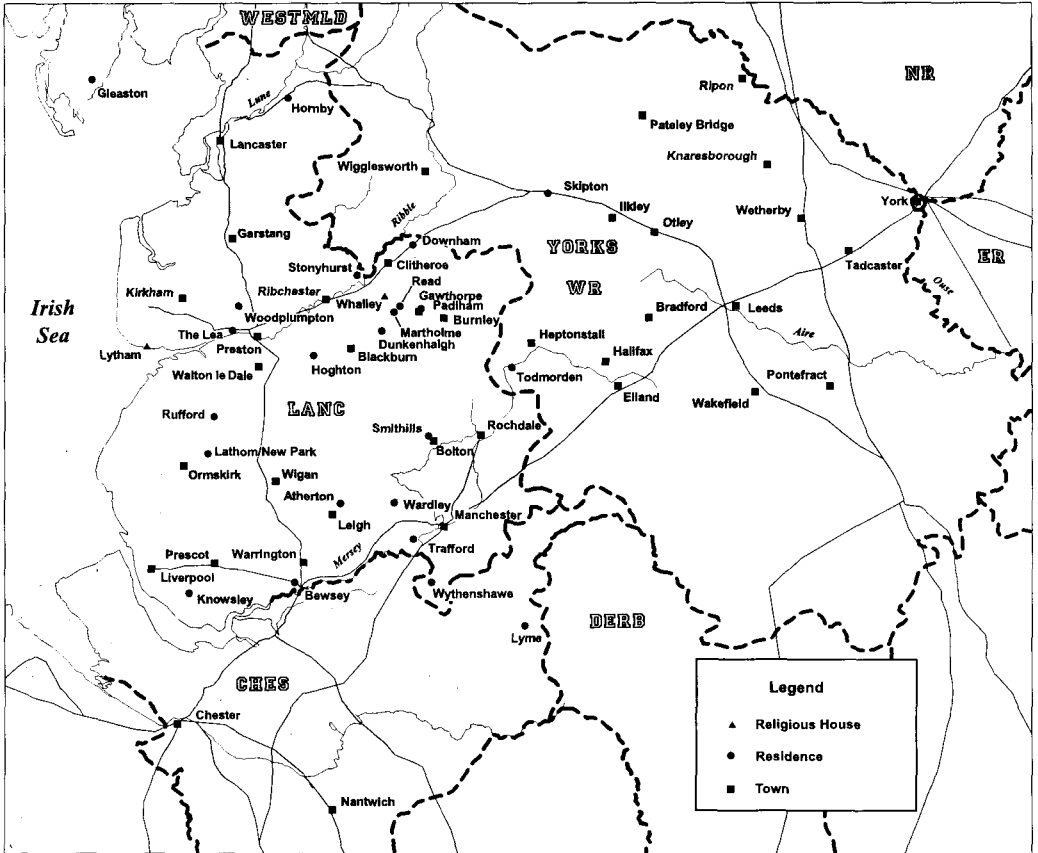
Given the assembled evidence, our conclusion must be that these troupes of the resident nobility were unusual in their wider frame of reference. The survey of surviving records of touring performance corroborates the image of Lancashire as essentially introspective and self-contained. The troupes of the gentry, like most of the amateur performers, circulated within the county, with only a few venturing beyond their home region into the West Riding or further north into Cumberland. It is striking that so far there have been only three notices found of Lancashire-based performers other than the Derby and Monteagle troupes further south (the Wigan and Lancaster waits at Nottingham and Preston waits at Coventry).⁶⁹

Piecing together what clues we have, it seems that culture in Lancashire's few small urban centres was poorly developed, apart from an interest in hiring town waits. The county was famous in the period for its pipers, however, and the wealth of local musicians on tour in the region bears witness to a lively, if modest, musical life in the smaller towns and villages. William Harrison, a local preacher, spoke out vehemently on the subject in 1614: 'Moreouer I cannot but lament, and with grieffe of heart complaine, that still in this part of the countrey, the course of religion is exceedingly hindered, the fruites of our labours greatly frustrated, the Lords Sabboth impiously profained, by publike pyping, by open and lasciuious dancing on that day . . . That pyping should put downe preaching: that dancing should draw the people from their dutie: That for one person which we haue in the Church, to heare diuine seruice, sermons and catechisme, euery pyper (there being many in one parish) should at the same instant, haue many hundreds on the greens'.⁷⁰

There appear to have been amateur players too, from villages like Downham and Whalley, perhaps mummers, confident of a welcome at the homes of neighbouring gentry. Unlike the more ambitious bands of Yorkshire musicians, the Lancashire local performers seem to have been content to play within a limited sphere – although we do not yet have access to research results from Yorkshire, the absence of Ribble Valley performers from the substantial accounts of Kendal and Carlisle to the north is notable.⁷¹ Intriguingly, the most active region for cultural exchange, both between neighbouring gentry households and across the different levels of local society has proved to be the Ribble Valley, off the best-known roads in the north but perhaps, as a shelter for recusants, more

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inclined to nurture traditional forms of entertainment than puritan Manchester and likeminded smaller settlements in the south east, despite their location near a principal cross-country route through the Pennines. The old Roman road through the Ribble Valley may not have competed with better populated routes in other parts of the kingdom as a lure for national troupes, but it served the entertainment needs of its local residents better than may have been previously suspected.⁷²



Cartography: C.A. Robinson

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Map indicating locations of the places mentioned in the text.

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NOTES

¹ See further David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays*, Studies in Early English Drama 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) and *Chester*, ed. Lawrence M. Clopper, Records of Early English Drama (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) for the dramatic records.

² See, for example, T.W. Freeman, H.B. Rodger, and R.H. Kinvig, *Lancashire, Cheshire and the Isle of Man* (London: Nelson, 1966), p. 45 and C.B. Phillips, and J.H. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (London: Longman, 1994), pp. 37-38.

³ References to English counties in this essay define them according to their historic boundaries. Thus, the changes brought by legislation in the 1970s and '80s to Lancashire, especially the Liverpool, Greater Manchester and Furness areas, are irrelevant to my purpose.

⁴ *Lancashire*, ed. David George, REED (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). The records for Cumberland and Westmorland were edited by Audrey Douglas in *Cumberland/Westmorland/Gloucestershire*, ed. Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield, REED (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

⁵ See *Cumberland/Westmorland/Gloucestershire*, pp. 78, 81.

⁶ R.A. Butlin, 'Regions in England and Wales c. 1600-1914', *An Historical Geography of England and Wales*, ed. R.A. Dodgshon and R.A. Butlin, 2nd ed. (London: Academic Press, 1990), p. 225. Butlin (224) also cites the essential features of the 'new' regional geography which developed in the 1980s as defined by A. Gilbert, remarking on the trend 'away from visible attributes of an area to its invisible ones, the relations that link individuals and institutions within the region; and toward the interpretation of the region as a process which, once established, is continually reproduced and gradually transformed through practices' (in 'The New Regional Geography in English and French Speaking Countries', *Progress in Human Geography* 12.2 (1988), p. 212).

⁷ It is possible, although the entry is somewhat opaque, that a minstrel patronized by Sir Richard Tunstall of Thurland Castle near Hornby in the north also made his way across to York in 1447. For all entries from the period 1447 to 1449, see *York*, ed. A.F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, REED, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), I, pp. 69-76. The richly detailed accounts for this short period are unusual for York, which must have been a mecca for touring performers, judging by this all-too-brief glimpse. Sadly, most of the York civic accounts for the next hundred years are lost or summary.

⁸ The bridge was built around the end of the thirteenth century along the main route into Lancashire. See Roy Millward, *Lancashire: An Illustrated Essay on the History of the Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955), pp. 70-71.

⁹ Among several detailed accounts of Lancashire's contrasting and somewhat

inhospitable geography are the following: Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), pp. 87-92; F. Walker, *Historical Geography of Southwest Lancashire before the Industrial Revolution*, Remains Historical and Literary connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester, Chetham Society n.s. 103 (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1939; rpt. 1968); and Freeman, Rodgers, and Kinvig, *Lancashire, Cheshire and the Isle of Man*, especially pp. 42-51.

¹⁰ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance Lancashire*, p. 20 and note 4, provides further references.

¹¹ *Historical Geography of Southwest Lancashire*, p. 45.

¹² *Historical Geography of Southwest Lancashire*, p. 62. For the rise of the Derby earls in the later fifteenth century, see Barry Coward, *The Stanley Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby 1385-1672* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1983), p. 112.

¹³ For further detail, see *Lancashire*, pp. xiii-xv, liii-lxxix. David George found no relevant borough accounts for Lancaster, Preston and Wigan, and for Liverpool, the primary source recording the actions of the mayor and burgess assembly is three Town Books running from 1550-1671. Although not an incorporated borough in the period, Manchester was the largest town in Lancashire, with between 1500 and 2000 inhabitants in the mid-sixteenth century (John K. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History 1558-1939* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), p. 12). The Constables' Accounts, which only begin in 1613, have yielded very few entries, mostly for conveying visiting entertainers out of this puritan town.

¹⁴ See *Lancashire*, pp. 114-27.

¹⁵ See *Lancashire*, pp. 128-44. The single exception is 1531 when the Princess Mary's troupe is singled out (142). The only break in the annual run of these accounts is 1506-08.

¹⁶ Thomas Harington, for example, was a JP for the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1448, one of the two years when his minstrels were recorded at York (see *York*, p. 72, and Elza C. Tiner's 'Patrons and Travelling Companies in York', *REED Newsletter* 17:1 (1992), 16). The Yorkshire West Riding collection being edited for the REED series by Barbara D. Palmer and John M. Wasson may provide further evidence of touring medieval entertainers in one adjacent county, but the records of Chester, Cumberland and Westmorland are meagre before the sixteenth century and have so far furnished no records of medieval performers on tour.

An isolated account roll for Thomas, Lord Stanley, in 1459-60, provides further evidence that another Lancashire household retained the services of entertainers, in this case a piper and trumpeter (see *Lancashire*, p. 179).

¹⁷ This is the same road north outlined in Grafton's 1570 *Abridgement of the Chronicles of Englande* entitled 'The high wayes from any notable towne in Englande to the Citie of London. And lykewise from one notable towne to an other . . .' (STC: 12151). A facsimile of the Gough map has been published with an introduction by E.J.S. Parsons, *The Map of Great*

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Britain circa A.D. 1360 Known as the Gough Map (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1958). See also Frank M. Stenton's seminal article on the medieval road network, 'The Road System of Medieval England', *Economic History Review* 7 (1936), 1-21.

¹⁸ For readily accessible versions of these strip maps, see the facsimile publication, *Ogilby's Road Maps of England and Wales from Ogilby's 'Britannia', 1675* (Reading: Osprey Publications Ltd., 1971), plates 37, 38, 88, 89.

¹⁹ See, for example, Brian Hindle's reconstructions, derived from the Gough and Matthew Paris maps, as well as his research into royal itineraries, 'Roads and Tracks', in *The English Medieval Landscape*, ed. by Leonard Cantor (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1982), pp. 193-217. P.T.H. Unwin contrasts the 'clustering of routes radiating out from the main towns such as York and Lincoln' with certain parts of the country such as Wales, Devon, Cornwall and the north west which were 'poorly served' ('Towns and Trade 1066-1500', *An Historical Geography of England and Wales*, p. 145).

²⁰ For details of Matthew Paris' maps, see Hindle, 'Roads and Tracks', pp. 196-97.

²¹ See Hindle, 'Roads and Tracks', pp. 193, 196.

²² For all Roman roads in the north west see Ivan D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd ed. (London: John Baker, 1973), pp. 358-99.

²³ Ogilby's road (plate 89) passes through Eccles and Manchester to Rochdale and then over Blackstone Edge to Halifax, Elland, Leeds, Tadcaster and York.

²⁴ See the list at the end of Grafton's 1570 *Abridgement of the Chronicles of Englande*.

²⁵ Renaissance road maps are surprisingly few and there are none for the north west. Instead we must rely on road lists printed at the end of chronicles like Grafton's.

²⁶ As quoted by William Harrison, 'The Development of the Turnpike System in Lancashire and Cheshire', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 4 (1886), 82-83. For more on the Lancashire rivers, roads and bridges, see Walker, *Historical Geography of Southwest Lancashire*, pp. 10-11, 72-75 and Appendix A.

²⁷ *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes 1685-c. 1712*, ed. Christopher Morris (London & Sydney: Macdonald and Co., 1982), p. 163.

²⁸ See, for example, Walton, *Lancashire*, pp. 7-29 and Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 5-65.

²⁹ For a detailed study of Catholic resistance in the region, see especially Haigh's influential work, *Reformation and Resistance*.

³⁰ Walton, *Lancashire*, p. 7.

³¹ *Lancashire and Cheshire*, p. 13.

³² *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 89.

³³ See *Lancashire*, pp. 41, 46. Deference to the Lancashire patrons is clear in the rewards paid: Lord Derby's players (10s) and bearward (6s 8d); Lord Monteagle's (10s 4d). One of the

most active national troupes patronized by the earl of Oxford, by contrast, receives a mere 3s 4d.

³⁴ R.C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 11 and following.

³⁵ See *Lancashire*, pp. 67-69. None of these players has a patron named. Manchester was a seigneurial borough in the period so it lacks corporate records. The extant Court Leet and Manor Rental Books have no entries relevant to touring entertainment nor do the Collegiate Church Accounts.

³⁶ All references to these sources come from *Lancashire*, pp. lxxxi-xciii, 145-212 and will henceforth be given in the text by date.

³⁷ David George notes that the Traffords are known to have patronized a minstrel as early as 1539 when he was indicted for assaulting someone (*Lancashire*, p. 351).

³⁸ For more biographical details on Hewet's career, see Eileen White, 'Hewet, the wait of York', *REEDN* 12.2 (1987), 17-22. He also visited Smithills in 1591. Hewet presumably would have followed the traditional route to the Manchester area via Rochdale through the Pennines.

³⁹ See Barry Coward, *The Stanley Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby*, p. 90.

⁴⁰ According to Nikolaus Pevsner, the present building at Dunkenhalgh is mostly early nineteenth century (*Lancashire: The Rural North* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), p. 102).

⁴¹ Household accounts are missing for 1603-04, 1606-08 and 1613-16 in this period (*Lancashire*, p. lxxxviii).

⁴² Seventeen different groups of local entertainers visited Dunkenhalgh compared with Gawthorpe's nine, in addition to performances by the troupes of sixteen patrons at Dunkenhalgh contrasting with Gawthorpe's seven patronized troupes.

⁴³ For a recent study of the changes in licensing of players in the later Elizabethan period, see Peter Roberts, 'Elizabethan Players and Minstrels and the Legislation of 1572 against Retainers and Vagabonds', *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, ed. by Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 29-55, especially 54-55.

⁴⁴ For Edward, 5th Lord Dudley (Derby's cousin) and Edward, 13th Baron Stafford (another cousin), see the *Complete Peerage*.

⁴⁵ The Walmesleys also welcomed independent acting troupes. Richard Bradshaw and his company visited seven times between 1624/5 and 1635. William Perry, a member of the Red Bull company for some of this period, came with his provincial troupe five times between 1625 and 1630/1. For further details on this troupe see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 392n., 418-19, 441, 447-48 and on Bradshaw and Perry see Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage: Dramatic*

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Companies and Players, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941), pp. 387-88, 529-31.

⁴⁶ Sir Edward Warren, John Warren's father, who was prominent in both Cheshire and Lancashire in the late sixteenth century, had died in 1609 and is not to be confused with this later patron.

⁴⁷ The rewards range from 10s to 20s between 1624 and 1638.

⁴⁸ The Asshetons of Downham Hall were a junior branch of this prominent Lancashire family: this is the only evidence for entertainment at his home, although glimpses afforded from his now lost journal suggest that Nicholas Assheton enjoyed a variety of social activities abroad (see *Lancashire*, pp. 145-47).

⁴⁹ Thomas Walmesley had an appetite for pipers – there are numerous annual payments to otherwise unspecified musicians of this type.

⁵⁰ Clitheroe is known to have had a piper from other town records in the period: see *Lancashire*, p. 14.

⁵¹ For the Carlisle payment, see *Cumberland/Westmorland/Gloucestershire*, p. 87.

⁵² On the family's history during these years see further, *Lancashire*, p. xxxv. David George also discusses the Shuttleworth family and its records in more detail in his study of the hall at Gawthorpe as a performance space, 'Jacobean Actors and the Great Hall at Gawthorpe, Lancashire', *Theatre Notebook* 37 (1983), 109-21.

⁵³ At Christmas 1584 Atherton's bearward ventured as far as York (see *York*, vol. 1, p. 409) where he was well rewarded. Atherton had several manors in Yorkshire. For a partial list of JPs in 1586, including Atherton, Shuttleworth and one Trafford, see *Proceedings of the Lancashire Justices of the Peace at the Sheriff's Table during the Assizes Week 1578-1694*, ed. by B.W. Quintrell, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 121 (Bristol: Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1981), p. 68.

⁵⁴ Edward Parker, Lord Morley, had Elizabeth, daughter of Lord Monteagle, as his first wife. She died in 1585 (*Complete Peerage*).

⁵⁵ Essex's players have been found at Chester in 1591 (*Chester*, p. 166) and at York in 1596 (*York*, vol. 1, p. 471).

⁵⁶ See *Lancashire*, p. 169. The players are paid a relatively meagre 12d, so it is unlikely that they were a patronized troupe.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Maurice Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House: Architecture and Politics 1490-1550* (London: George Philip, 1987), p. 112, and *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Lancashire*, ed. by William Farrer and J. Brownbill, vol. 5 (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1911), p. 18.

⁵⁸ For a transcript and brief discussion of the will, see *Lancashire*, pp. 156-58, and endnote, p. 350. The only known performer on record from Hoghton Tower is the Baron de Hoghton's bearward who visited York with his three bears in 1611/12 (see *York*, vol. 1, p. 539).

⁵⁹ See, for example, the most recent biographies by Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1998) and Anthony Holden, *William Shakespeare* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1999).

⁶⁰ All three Derby homes have been torn down or substantially altered since the sixteenth century. Little of the family's current principal residence at Knowsley predates the early eighteenth century (*The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Lancaster*, ed. by William Farrer and J. Brownbill, vol. 3 (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1907), p. 166). Lathom House was destroyed during the Civil War and New Park, the lodge in its grounds, seems to have been pulled down during the eighteenth century (*VCH: Lancaster*, vol. 3, pp. 251, 254n).

⁶¹ See *Lancashire*, p. lxxxix.

⁶² Further details of interpretation are provided in my essay, 'A Family Tradition: Dramatic Patronage by the Earls of Derby', forthcoming in an essay collection edited by Richard Dutton et al (for Manchester University Press).

⁶³ A letter of 30 June 1599 from George Fanner to H. Galdelli and G. Tusinga as quoted by E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 127.

⁶⁴ See *Lancashire*, p. 183.

⁶⁵ See Coward, *The Stanley Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ See *Bristol*, pp. xxxvii-xl, 160-64, 242-43, and *York*, vol. 1, pp. 530-31.

⁶⁷ For details of all Prescott documents, see *Lancashire*, pp. 77-85 and endnotes pp. xlv-xlv, 331-33.

⁶⁸ Monteagle's players last appeared at Coventry in 1615-16 (*Coventry*, ed. R.W. Ingram, REED (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 397 and at Dunkenhalgh in the same year (*Lancashire*, p. 186). Derby's troupe is last on record at Kendal in 1635-36 (*Cumberland/Westmorland/Gloucestershire*, p. 212). Outside the north west they were last seen at Leominster in Herefordshire in 1619-20 (*Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, ed. David N. Klausner, REED (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 149).

⁶⁹ The Wigan and Lancaster entries have been noted by Walter L. Woodfill, *Musicians in English Society from Elizabeth to Charles I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 294-95, and will be published in John Coldewey's edition of the Nottinghamshire dramatic records in the REED series. They can be found in the Nottingham Chamberlains' Accounts, Nottinghamshire Record Office: CA 1626, fol. 10 (Lancaster, 1586-87) and CA 1627, p. 15 (Wigan, 1587-88). It is possible that research in eastern Midland counties such as Lincolnshire, for example, may turn up a few more entries, but so far published surveys in the south east and East Anglia have yielded none.

⁷⁰ *Lancashire*, pp. 27-28.

⁷¹ Although medieval accounts are lost for both locations, there are chamberlains'

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accounts surviving for Carlisle from 1602-42 and for Kendal 1582-41.

⁷² This essay draws on research in connection with a longer analytical study of regional theatre before 1642. My collaboration with Alexandra F. Johnston in this venture has been generously funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and I gratefully acknowledge their support.