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'It pleased the Lord to discover his displeasure': the 1652 performance of *Mucedorus* in Witney

Alexandra F. Johnston

Introduction.

The performance of *Mucedorus* in Witney during the Interregnum was noticed by E.K. Chambers long ago.¹ Although he provided the reference to John Rowe's pamphlet with its cumbersome title '*Tragi-Comoedia. Being a Brief Relation of the strange, and Wonderful hand of God discovered at Witney, in the Comedy Acted there February the third, where there were some Slaine, many Hurt, with severall other Remarkable Passages. Together with what was Preached in three Sermons on that occasion from Rom. I.18. Both which May serve as some Check to the Growing Atheisme of the Present Age*',² few drama scholars have picked it up.³ Chambers remarks the performance with a dismissive sentence, 'After the suppression of the theatres in 1642, *Mucedorus* was acted by strolling players in various parts of Oxfordshire', a phraseology that is picked up in the introductions of modern editions of the play.⁴ Some years ago, as I was gathering material for the Oxfordshire collection in the Records of Early English Drama series, I read the pamphlet and was struck both by what it can tell us about local dramatic activity and by its coherence and fairness as a piece of polemic writing. Rowe may have considered plays ungodly but he does not condemn the players and, in his careful journalistic approach to the event, he has tried to be as factual as possible. This concern for fact has provided us with an unexpected and detailed account of a parish performance that persisted into the Commonwealth period. I have provided below an edition of that section of the pamphlet which Rowe entitled 'A breife narrative of the play acted at *Whitny* the third of February 1652. Together with its sad and Tragical End.'

John Rowe has found his way into the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was born in Crediton, Devon on 1626. Admitted as battler to New Hall Inn,

Oxford in 1642, he was displaced by the arrival of the Royal Mint with the Court in 1643 and continued his education at the Puritan stronghold, Emmanuel College, Cambridge, from which he graduated with his BA in 1646. Two years later Oxford recognised his degree and on 12 December, 1648, he received his MA from his original university. The next year he was made a fellow of Corpus Christi by the parliamentary visitors. He was a patristic scholar, well read in philosophy and jurisprudence as well as the schoolmen, and was remarkable for keeping a diary in Greek all his life. His first preferment was a lectureship in Witney while he retained his fellowship in Corpus. After his time in Oxfordshire he returned briefly to Devon where he was lecturer in Tiverton. In 1654 he became preacher in Westminster Abbey and pastor of an independent congregation that met in the Abbey. His high standing in the eyes of the Commonwealth government is reflected in his appointment in 1660 as one of the approvers of ministers. At the Restoration he lost all his offices, although he remained pastor of his independent congregation taking it first to Bartholomew Close and afterwards to Holborn. He died in 1677.⁵

He was, then, still in his twenties when the events of February 3, 1652 took place – a young and zealous fellow of Corpus Christi, 'tall and dignified with a pleasing manner',⁶ dividing his time between Oxford and the small market town of Witney thirteen miles away. Internal evidence from the 'Narrative' makes it clear that he was not present at the performance of the play. In the discussion of the 'blasphemous' passages, he writes, after he has cited a speech by Bremo,

At the end of which verses it followeth, *He strikes*: and probable enough it is that he used some action at that time; but the words were so gastly, and had such a face of impiety in them that he durst not say *Gods*, but (as one that excused him would have us believe) he sai'd *Gobs*.

This is the description of someone who has been told about a performance but not seen it himself. Rowe was probably among the 'many Godly People, Townesmen and Schollars of *Oxford*' who 'kept a Solemne Day of *Fast* at Carfax'. It is possible that he and the other godly citizens returned to town before or just after the disaster that happened at some time between nine-thirty and ten o'clock that night. Whether he witnessed the immediate aftermath of the disaster or not, he undertook to report both the performance and its sequel responsibly. The events are clear enough from his account even if the interpretation of those events is

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wildly coloured by his ideological stance. He carefully framed his narrative with lines from the play itself which are quoted with scholarly accuracy arguing he had the text beside him as he wrote. He interviewed the players, the surgeon and those who attended the performance and related what they told him with a clarity that gives us a unique 'window' on performance practice in the countryside in the seventeenth century.

The town of Witney had a history of dramatic performance and festival. Its parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, is one of the few in the country that celebrated Easter with a puppet play version of the resurrection. Lambarde's late sixteenth century *Dictionarium* has the following entry,

In the Dayes of ceremonial Religion they used at *Wytney* to set foorth yearly in the maner of a Shew, or Enterlude, the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour *Chryste*, partly of Purpose to draw thither some Concourse of People that might spend their Money in the Towne, but cheiflie to allure by pleasant Spectacle the comon Sort to the Likinge of Popishe Maumetrie; for the which Purpose, and the more lyvely thearby to exhibite to the Eye the hole Action of the Resurrection, the Preistes garnished out certein smalle Puppets, representinge the Parsons of *Christe*, the Watchmen, *Marie*, and others, amongst the which one bare the Parte of a wakinge Watcheman, who (espiinge *Christ* to arise) made a continual Noyce, like to the Sound that is caused by the Metinge of two Styckes, and was therof comonly called *Jack Snacker of Wytney*.⁷

Witney also held summer festivals in support of the parish. We have only traces of evidence for the event in the fragmentary churchwardens' accounts where receipts for 'whitsontide sportes' are recorded for 1610, 1620 and 1628.⁸ More details about the possible nature of the summer event comes from another Interregnum document, *The King Found at Southwell*.⁹ It was printed in London in 1646 for a Mr F. Loyd, a student of Christ Church and Captain of the Christ Church garrison, and presented to the Duke of York. The garrison left Oxford and had arranged to be met in Witney by morris dancers – a troop that included Maid Marian and two fools one of whom tumbled for the visitors – country fiddlers, a taborer, a pair of bagpipes, a harper and a group of singers. The pamphlet is, in effect, a description of the day's revelries in which the student soldiers danced,

joined with the entertainers in various capers and got very drunk. That such an array of entertainers could be summoned to be present in a town like Witney in 1646 argues the continuing tradition of folk customs in this very conservative corner of Oxfordshire. In choosing to come to Witney with their production of *Mucedorus*, then, the men of Stanton Harcourt could be reasonably assured of a receptive audience.

John Rowe's Narrative

A BRIEF
NARRATIVE OF
The Play Acted at *Whitny* the
third of February 1652. Together
with its sad and Tragical End.

It may not seem so proper, nor be so pleasing to every Reader, to set down all the Circumstances about this *Play*, forasmuch that somewhat might be said touching the rise and originall of it, the nature of the *Play* it self, and the book from whence it was taken, the motives, grounds, and ends of the Actors, concerning all which I might speak more then here shall be inserted, having taken some paines to satisfie my selfe in those particulars. But I thought it meet to insist on those things, which did most discover the hand of God in so eminent and remarkable a Providence, and lightly touch on other things, so far as they might give light to | that which is the name. This *Play* was an old *Play*, and had been Acted by some of *Santon-Harcourt* [Stanton-Harcourt] men many years since. The Title of it is, *A most pleasant Comedy of Mucedorus the Kings Sonne of Valentia, and Amadine the Kings Daughter of Aragon: with the merry conceits of Mouse, &c.* The Actors of the *Play* were Countreymen; most of them, and for any thing I can heare, all of *Stanton-Harcourt* Parish. The punctuall time of their first Learning the *Play*, cannot be certainly set downe: but this we have been told, they had been learning it ever since *Michaelmas*, and had been Acting privately every week. This we are informed upon more certain grounds, that they began to Act it in a more publike manner about *Christmas*, and Acted it three or foure times in their own Parish, they Acted it likewise in severall neighbowring Parishes, as *Moore, Stanlake, South-Leigh, Cumner*. The last place they came at was *Witny*, where it pleased the Lord to discover his displeasure, against such wicked and ungodly *Playes* by an

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eminent hand. Some few dayes before the *Play* was to be Acted, one of *Stanton* came to the *Baylife* of *Witny* telling him *that there were some Countrey men that had learn'd to make a Play, and desired his Leave to shew it*, his aime being (as the *Baylife* conceiv'd) that they might have the Liberty of the *Towne-Hall*. Leave also was desired of the other *Baylife*, but they being denied by both *Baylifs*, they pitched on the *White Hart*, a chiefe Inne of the *Towne* to Act their *Play* there. The day when it was Acted, was the third of *Fe- | bruary*, the same day when many Godly People, Townesmen and Schollars of *Oxford*, kept a Solemne Day of *Fast* at *Carfax* [The area in front of the parish church of St Martin in Oxford at the junction of High Street and Cornmarket]. About seaven a Clock at Night they caused a Drum to beat, and a Trumpet to be sounded to gather the People together. The people flocked in great multitudes, Men, Women, and Children, to the number (as is guess'd) of three Hundred, some say foure hundred, and the Chamber where the *Play* was Acted being full, others in the Yard pressed sorely to get in. The people which were in the Roome were exceeding Joviall, and merry before the *Play* began, Young men and Maides dancing together, and so merry and frolick were many of the Spectators, that the Players could hardly get Liberty that they themselves might Act, but at last a little Liberty being obtained, the *Play* it self began. In the beginning of it Enters a Person that took the name of *Comedie*, and speaks as follows.

*Why so thus doe I hope to please;
Musick revives, and Mirth is tolerable,
Comedie play thy part, and please:
Make merry them that come to joy with thee.*

With two or three verses more.

Vpon this enters *Envy*, another person, & speaks as followes.

*Nay stay Minion stay there lyes a block;
What all on mirth? I'le interrupt your tale,
And mix your Musick with a Tragick end.*

Vpon which *Comedie* replies. *Envy* makes answer [sic] againe in severall verses, and among the rest these. |

*Harken thou shalt heare noyse
Shall fill the ayre with shrilling sound,
And thunder Musicke to the Gods above.*

Three verses after it followes,

*In this brave Musick Envy takes delight
Where I may see them wallow in their bloud,*

*To spurne at Armes & Leggs quite shivered off,
And heare the cryes of many thousand slaine.*

After this *Comedie* speaks, *Envy* replies

*– Trebble death shall crosse thee with dispight
And make thee mourn where most thou joyest,
Turning thy mirth into a deadly dole;
Whirling thy pleasurs with a peale of death,
And drench thy methods in a Sea of bloud.*

Which passages if the Reader carry along with him, he will see how farre they were made good by the Divine hand, both on the Actors and the Spectators. The matter of the *Play* is scurrilous, impious, blasphemous in severall passages. One passage of it hath such a bitter Taunt against all *Godly persons* under the nature of *Puritans*, and at *Religion* it selfe, under the phrase of *observing Fasting days*, that it may not be omitted, it was almost in the beginning of the *Play*, and they were some of the Clownes words when he first began to Act, *Well Ile see my Father hang'd before Ile serve his Horse any more, well Ile carry home my bottle of Hay and for once make my Fathers Horse turne Puritan, and observe Fasting dayes, for he gets not a bitt.* How remarkable was this that some of them that were called *Puritans* in the dayes of old, had spent that | very day in *Oxford* in Fasting and Prayer; and that the Lord by so eminent an hand should testifie against such, who were not scoffers at *Godly persons*, but at *Religion* it selfe. Another passage was of so horrid an aspect, as that the Actor who was to speak it durst not vent it without a change. The verses as they are Printed are these.

*Ah Brema, Brema, what a foyle hadst thou,
that yet at no time was afraid*

To dare the greatest Gods to fight with thee

At the end of which verses it followeth, *He strikes*: and probable enough it is, that he used some action at that time; but the words were so gastly, and had such a face of impiety in them, that he durst not say *Gods*, but (as one that excused him would have us believe) he sai'd *Gobs*. And indeed so insolent were these, and other expressions in the *Play*, that some of the Spectators thought they were not fit to be used, and when they heard them, wished themselves out of the roome. We might instance in some other passages, but there hath been enough already. The modest, and ingenuous reader would blush to read some passages. Thus had they continued their sport for an hour, and halfe, as some of the Spectators say, but as is more probable, about two houres, for they were

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ordinarily three houres in acting it (as the Players say) and there were aboute two parts in three of the play were passed over in this Action. At which time it pleased God to put a stop to their mirth, and by an immediate hand of his owne, in causing the chamber to sink, and fall | under them, to put an end to this ungodly Play before it was thought, or intended by them.

The Actors who were now in action were *Bremo a wild man*, (courting, and solliciting his Lady, and among other things, begging a *Kisse* in this verse.

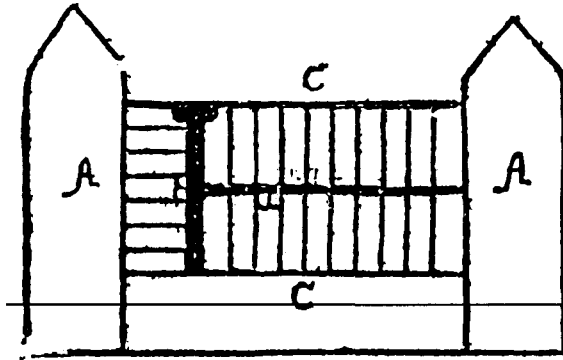
*Come kisse me (Sweet) for all my
favours past)*

And *Amadine* the Kings daughter (as named in the Play) but in truth a young man attired in a womans Habit. The words which were then speaking were these, the words of *Bremo* to his Lady

*Thou shalt be fed with Quailles, and Partridges,
With Black-birds, Larkes, Thrushes,
and Nightingales.*

Various reports there have been concerning the words spoken at that time, as that it should be sayed, *the Devill was now come to act his part*: some People might say so, observing the *wild mans* carriage, and some other passages that went before, where there was mention made of the Divell in a Bares dublet, the *wild man* then acting the Bares part: and indeed we have it upon good information that there were such words spoken; only they were the *spectators* words and not the *Actors*: but this we are assured of, the words then spoken by the *Actor* were those above mentioned, as *he himselfe* acknowledged, and we find them printed so in the Book.

The *Place* wherein the *Play* was acted, was not a *Stage* erected on purpose, but a *Chamber* belong | ing to the *Inne*, a larg [sic] Chamber, and which sometime had been a Malting roome, having a part of it covered with earth to that purpose. It had two Beames to support it, of which one So: the shorter was a great, *sound* & substantiall one; & lay between the two side walls; the other had one end shooting into the middle of the shorter beame, and the other end of it fastned in the wall, of which you may see a description.



The 2 end Walls. A. The 2 Beames B. The sid-Walls C. The short Beame, which broke neare the middle, was betwixt 13 and 14 Inches square, one end lying even, or a little within the Wall upon a shoulder of Stone, the other end almost a foot in the Wall, the short Beame breaking, the other fell with it. |

The fall was not very quick, but somewhat slow, & gentle, in so much that some that were present thought it was part of the play, (but it proved the saddest part) & expected when they should be taken up againe, yet was it not so slowe as that they were able to recover themselves, for the actors then in the action fell down, and a great number of people with them into the under roome, which was a *Shuffle-board-roome*, and the *table* it selfe broken in peeces by the fall of the Timber. The Chamber did not fall down quite, but lay somewhat pendulous, and hanging, broad at the top, and narrow at the bottome, that end of the long beame, which lay in the short falling down, the other end not falling, & the ends of the short Beame where it brake hanging down, the bottome where the people lay was of a very narrow compasse, the people falling as it were into a Pit: & such were the apprehensions of some of the Spectators, seeing the chamber sink in that manner as if the *earth was opening, and swallowing them up*. After the Crack of the beame which was exceeding great, and the fall of the Chamber (in the manner as is before described) all was quiet, and still and a kind of silence for a pretty space of time, the people being astonied, and bereft of their senses. One that was present was so much affrighted (as was said) that she thought her selfe verily to be in Hell, which we do the rather insert because whoevershall [sic] put the circumstances together may well say it was a little resemblance of that black, and dismall place, there being so many taken in the middest of their sinfull practises, and thrust into a pit together where they were left in darknesse, the *Lights* being

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put out by the fall, where the dust that was raised made a kind of Mist, and Smoake, where there were the most lamentable skreekes, and out-cryes that may be imagined; where they were shut up as in a prison, and could not get themselves out, (the doore of the under roome being blocked up, and their leg's [sic] being so pinioned, & wedged together by faggots, and other things, that fell down together with them from the upper roome, that they could not stirre to help themselves.) Another (as is said) supposing his limbs to be all plucked asunder cryed out, *that they should cut off his head*: this is certaine, the fright was exceeding great, and many were dead for a time that afterward came to themselves. When the people were come to themselves, there was a fearfull, and most lamentable cry, some crying one thing, some another, some crying *aid for the Lords sake*, others crying *Lord have mercy on us*, *Christ have mercy on us*, others cryed oh my Husband! a second, oh my Wife! a third, Oh my child! and another said No body loves *me* so well as to see where my child is. Others cryed out for Ladders, and Hatchets to make their passage out, for the chamber falling, the doore of the under roome was so Blocked up that they could not get out there, so that they were fain to break the barres of the window, and most of the people got out that way though it were a good space of time before | they could get forth. The other Players that were not in action were in the Attiring-roome which was joyning to the chamber that fell, and they helped to save some of the people which were neer that part. Those of the people that fell not down, but were preserved by that meanes got out at the window of the upper roome. There were five slaine outright, wherof three were Boys, two of which being about seaven, or eight yeares old or thereabout; the other neer twelve: the other two were Girles, the elder of which being fourteen, or fiveteen, and the younger twelve or thirteen yeares old. A woman also had her legg sorely broken that the surgeons were forced to cut it off, and she dyed within three or foure dayes after it was cut off. Many were hurt, and sorely bruised, to the number of about threescore, that we have certaine information of, besides those that conceale their griefes, and some of the Contry of which there were diverse present, it being a market day when this Play was acted.

The Surgeon that dressed the wounded people, told me that the next day after this was done he was counting with himselfe how many he had dressed, and as neere as he could reckon he had dressed aboute fortie five, and twelve after that as he had supposed, and two or three after he had cut off the womans legg. Which therefore I thought good to insert that the reader may know upon what grounds he may take this relation.

Some others were dressed by others in the town | the just number of which

I have not learn't. But it is generally conceaved that there were divers did receive hurt which would not suffer it to be knowen. Among those that were hurt there were about a dozen broken armes, and leggs, and some two or three dislocations, as we were likewise informed by the Surgeon. Some of the people came out with bloody faces, neither could it be otherwise they having trod one upon another in a most sad, and lamentable manner. Certain it is there was much hurt done that way; the children that were killed, being stifled as was supposed. The man in womans apparrell lay panting for breath and had it not been for *Bremo* his fellow Actor, he had been stifled; but *Bremo* having recovered himselfe a little, bare up the others head with his arme, whereby he got some breath, and so was preserved; but both the one, and the other were hurt; *Bremo* being so sorely bruised, as that he was fain to keep his bed for two dayes after, and the Lady had her beauty mar'd, her face being swoln by the hurt taken in the fall. Some had their mouths so stuf'd with dust that they could hardly speak, the people that came from the house made a pittifull moane, some going in the streets, and complaining, here is a Play, a sad Play indeed, others crying out to them that met them, (as they are wont that have received some deadly wound) oh I am kil'd! Some cryed out that their Armes were broken, others that their Leggs were broken, some cursed the Players that ever they came to *Witny*, and the players them | selves wished that they had never came thither. They that had received no hurt were exceedingly affrighted, insomuch that one of them that were present, as I am credibly informed, did say, that he would not, for as much as *Witny* was worth, be in the like affright again, though he were sure he should have no hurt. Others said that they would never goe to a play more, and that it was a judgment. Others have been so prophane, as we hear, to make a laughing-stock of it, and some so desperate, as to say, they would go againe, if it were to morrow next: and too many apt to say it was but chance, a misfortune, the beame was weak, there were so many load of people there, and the like. But how sleight so ever the matter was made afterwards, sure enough it is, it was sad enough then. It was one of the saddest, and blackest nights that ever came on *Witny*. Sad it was to see Parents carry home their Children dead in their armes, sad it was to see so many bruised, hurt, and maimed, and some, as it were, halfe dead that were not able to help themselves, but were fain to be carryed away by their friends, some on their backs, some on chaires, sad it was to hear the piteous cryes of those that were not there bemoaning their distressed friends. This was the sad end of this ungodly play. And what was spoken in jest in the beginning of it, by the just hand of God, was made good in earnest. The Comedy being turned into a Tragedy, it had a sad

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Catastrophe, ending with the deaths of some, and hurts of many, And as it was said before |

*And make thee mourn where most thou
joy'st*

So by the just hand of God came it to passe. For in the midst of their mirth, and jollity did this fall out, in the midst of these amorous passages between *Bremo*, and his Lady was this stroke given; yea immediately before they expected the greatest pleasure, and contentment. For the Actors said the best of the play was still behind, and a little after the hearts, and fancyes of the Spectators were to be filled with love-complements between *Mucedorus*, and his *Amadine*. So true was that

Turning thy mirth into a deadly Dole

The Lord from heaven, having given a check to such wanton sports, teaching men what they must look for, and that he will not bear with such grosse open profanenesse in such an age of light as this is. That he will so farre take notice of Atheisme, and the profanenesse of men in this world, as shall keep the world in order, though he hath reserved the great, and full recompence for another day, and place.

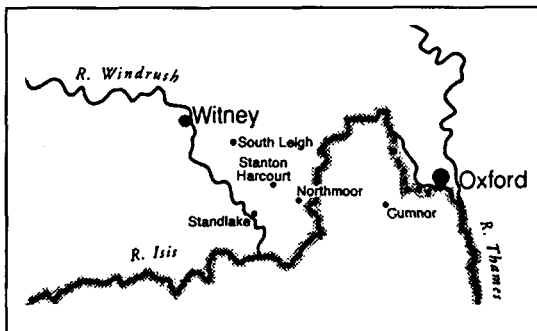
Commentary

It is clear from the description of the actors that these were not, as Chambers suggested, 'strolling players' but players who had a local base in the parish of Stanton Harcourt, a village about four miles south east of Witney. Rowe's interviews have filled in for us a picture of parish dramatic activity that is startlingly like the parish dramatic activity of over a century before where groups of entertainers from parishes in the Thames Valley would visit neighbouring parishes in order to raise money for the upkeep of their church.¹⁰ The ancient tradition where the priest was responsible for the upkeep and appointments of all parts of the church east of the rood screen while the parish was responsible for the upkeep of the rest of the building and the property continued to place a heavy financial burden on the laity. The parishioners of Stanton Harcourt are simply continuing an ancient and honourable custom. The major difference between the playmaking recorded here and the historic situation seems to be the nature of the entertainment. The earlier evidence indicates that parish folk plays, Biblical plays or morris dancers were shared with neighbouring parishes. Here we have a more

ambitious project – the production of an 'old play', *Mucedorus*, first registered in the Stationers' Register in 1590 with its first text dating from 1605.¹¹ It is a slight play but one that was sufficiently popular to be revived by the King's Men in 1610 to be played 'before the King's majesty at Whitehall on Shrove-Sunday next'.¹² Exactly how a copy of the play came to be in the hands of the parishioners of Stanton Harcourt remains a subject of speculation. Plays were purchased by country gentlemen when they went up to London. For example, Sir Thomas Temple of Stowe in Buckinghamshire visited London in 1600-01. His steward, Raphe Handes, recorded the following expenses for that trip,

Item your standing at Paules Sermon	iiij d
...	
Item your place at Paules Sermon againe	iiij d
Item paid in part for your standing at the Tylt	xij d
Item for the Conquest of west India	xx d
Item deliuered ys at the plaie at Paules	xv d ¹³

The Conquest of the West Indies by John Day, William Haughton, and Wentworth Smith (now lost) was registered by the Admiral's Men that year.¹⁴ It seems likely that someone from the parish purchased *Mucedorus* in the first decade of the century. When the idea was broached to perform a play it must have seemed attractive to the players since the title page carries the assurance 'ten persons may easily play it'.¹⁵



Work on the play, Rowe tells us, began in early October with weekly rehearsals. By Christmas the show was ready to go up and was performed first in Stanton Harcourt itself and then in the neighbouring parishes of Standlake and North

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Moor (each less than two miles away), South Leigh slightly over two miles to the north west and then Cumnor over three miles to the south east. By the end of January, they felt ready for the larger venue of Witney just beyond South Leigh.

By the time the players arrived in Witney to ask permission of the Bailiffs to perform in the town, at least seven performances had taken place within less than six weeks in a very small district. The prospective audience must have been aware of production. This may explain the astonishing number of people Rowe records as attending the performance – between three and four hundred. The fact that it was a market day may also have contributed to the large audience of men, women and children who crowded together at seven o'clock on a dark February evening summoned by drums and trumpets to begin the evening with dancing. The weight of the crowd and the vigour of the dance may well have contributed to the disaster. The shorter beam spanning the width of the room was not fastened into the walls but rested 'upon a shoulder of stone'. Once it broke in the middle, there was no residual strength from a beam securely fastened in to the side walls, removing all vestige of horizontal support from the floor and allowing the fatal tipping that shot so many of the people into the lower room. It could be said that the disaster was caused not by the hand of God but by the size and robustness of the audience.

Rowe's description of the terrified confusion that followed the disaster is a compelling one. He has captured the panic of the moment as well as the long term pain of those who lost their children and other relatives. The picture of the actor playing Bremono protecting the boy playing Amadine is particularly striking. But one of the most interesting passages is the one where he records the attitude of those involved in the disaster to the idea of attending another play. Some said they would never go to a play again while others said 'they would go again, if it were tomorrow next.' Clearly the only thing unusual about this performance was the unstable condition of the playing space. Ten years after the closing of the professional theatres in London, playmaking in the countryside seems to have been a sufficiently common occurrence that the victims of the Witney disaster could speak with confidence about future opportunities to see plays. The Puritan divines, such as Rowe, may have preached against the playmaking as an ungodly and blasphemous activity but it is clear that it continued. Like so much of the 'received tradition' about the history of the English theatre, this piece of Puritan polemic must be re-thought in light of the contextual evidence provided by the extensive research of the REED project. Rowe's pamphlet is as much evidence of a vigorous continuing practice of playmaking as it is of Puritan disapproval of the theatre. A man of stern convictions but also one of compassion and attention to detail, John Rowe has provided us with

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an account of a living tradition that did not die when the professional houses were closed but continued its long established customary life deep in the English countryside.

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NOTES

¹ E.K.Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 36.

² It was printed in Oxford by L. Lichfield, for Henry Cripps, Anno Dom. 1653. The Bodleian shelfmark for their copy of the pamphlet is Gough Oxf 45(5). It can be found on WING Film 509 item R2067.

³ An American scholar, Thornton S. Graves, working at the same time as Chambers, published the text of the Narrative with no commentary in his 'Notes on Puritanism and the Stage' in *Studies in Philology* 18 (1921), pp. 141-69. The only modern edition I could trace was a facsimile edition in the Garland *The English Stage: Attack and Defense 1577-1730* series edited by Arthur Freeman, *Tragi-Comoedia*, (New York, 1973) with a brief preface.

⁴ See, for example, *Drama of the English Renaissance I: The Tudor Period*, ed. by R.A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York, 1976), p. 463.

⁵ *The Dictionary of National Biography*, The Compact Edition (Oxford, 1975), p. 1818.

⁶ *DNB* p. 1818.

⁷ Cited in Pamela Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre in England*, Early Drama, Art and Music Reference Series, 5 (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 294-95.

⁸ Oxfordshire Record Office; Ms DD Par Witney c.9, ff.34, 43, and 49v.

⁹ Its full title is *The King Found at Southwell, and the Oxford Gigg playd, and Sung at Witney Wakes: With the Masque shewed before divers Courtiers, and Cavaliers, that went thither from Oxford, and severall Ketches and Songs at the said Wakes*. The pamphlet is BL E.336,14.

¹⁰ See Alexandra F. Johnston, 'Summer Festivals in the Thames Valley Counties', in *Custom, Culture and Community in the later Middle Ages*, ed. by T. Pettit and L. Søndergaard (Odense, 1994), pp. 37-56 and Alexandra F. Johnston and Sally-Beth MacLean, 'Reformation and resistance in the Thames/Severn parishes: the dramatic witness' in *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600*, ed. by Katherine L. French, Gary Gibbs and Beat Kümin (Manchester, 1997), 178-200.

¹¹ Alfred Harbage and Samuel Schoenbaum, *Annals of English Drama 975-1700* (Philadelphia, 1940), pp. 54-55.

¹² Fraser and Rabkin, p. 463.

¹³ Huntington Library, San Marino California; STTF Box 5.

¹⁴ *Annals*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁵ Fraser and Rabkin, p. 464.