

**THE QUEEN'S MEN ON TOUR**  
**PROVINCIAL PERFORMANCE IN VERNACULAR SPACES**  
**IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND**

**OLIVER JONES**

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**UNIVERSITY OF YORK**

**DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY**

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## ABSTRACT

The ongoing work lead by the *Records of Early English Drama* project into evidence for drama in England before the closing of the London theatres in 1642 has by now shown that visits to provincial towns, and performances in the spaces made available there, represented common practice for Elizabethan acting companies. The pivotal study made by Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men and their Plays* (1998), demonstrated the potential for tracking the career and plays of one particular company, while the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project in Canada showed the merits of exploring the Queen's Men's repertory in performance. However, until now such research has been conducted without fully considering the buildings in which such plays were once performed. The specific material, social and political conditions a venue and its occupants imposed on a visiting company had direct consequences for their performances, and it is only by situating performance within extant spaces that we can begin to realise the full potential of McMillin and MacLean's research. However, until now the methodologies to do so had not been developed. This thesis shows that by combining archaeological and theatre historical research we can better understand the nature of provincial performance, and offers strategies for the exploration of early modern texts in performance in provincial venues.

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**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of York or any other institution. Portions of chapters one, four and five have appeared in an early form in *The Guild and Guild Buildings of Shakespeare's Stratford* as 'The Queen's Men in Stratford and *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*' (Jones 2012).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oliver Jones', is centered on the page.

Oliver Jones, 28 November 2012

## 1 – INTRODUCTION

In 1587, after four years travelling the length and breadth of the kingdom, the royal troupe of Elizabethan players, the Queen's Men, presented themselves to the high bailiff and aldermen of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon at their headquarters in the town's medieval Guildhall, in order to seek license to perform their plays in the town. Formed in 1583, this elite company contained the most talented and most celebrated actors of the age. Hand-picked by Elizabeth's Master of Revels, Edmund Tilney, they presented plays both at court for the monarch's 'solace' and across the realm, maintaining a royal presence-by-proxy throughout a politically and socially turbulent kingdom (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 8; Chambers 1923, i, 267).

The Queen's Men's visit to Stratford in 1587 was not extraordinary. Stratford was a routine stop for many Elizabethan acting companies on their perambulations along the touring circuits of late-sixteenth-century England, and the town's Corporation hosted and rewarded numerous performances by both local and national companies (see MacLean 1993, 1-14; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 37-83; Mulryne 2012b). In 1587 alone the Stratford Corporation received and rewarded a further four companies, spending £2 1s. 8d. in the process (Savage 1929, 30-33). Yet the Queen's Men's first visit to the town merits further attention due to an entry a few lines earlier in the chamberlain's accounts for 1586/7, where it is recorded

It. p<sup>d</sup> for mendinge of a forme that was broken by the quenes players xvj<sup>d</sup>

(Savage 1929, 31).

A record that notes payment for the fixing of a bench may seem somewhat mundane, yet it is from this entry that this thesis and its research questions stem. Not only is such a record rare, but it offers a snapshot of a single theatrical event from which we can start to think about the physical and social conditions of provincial theatrical performances in Elizabethan England, the spaces they occupied, the audiences they entertained, and the processes and strategies through which they were enacted.

The touring companies whose visits and performances are extensively recorded in the provincial account books such as those at Stratford-upon-Avon came into their own during the latter decades of Elizabeth's reign. Yet while a company's presence in a certain location can be discerned, usually by tracking the record of payments rendered by their civic or aristocratic hosts, it is rare that any further detail can be adduced. The

entry above tells us more than most, but we are left unenlightened as to the circumstances in which the damage occurred. Seeking to add a little theatrical spice to his narrative, Eric Sams uses the entry to suggest a raucous reception for a performance by the royal company (1995, 58), but in reality we do not know at what point the furniture was damaged, where or how – was the bench the victim of actors' over-exuberance mid-performance, or did a more prosaic accident occur at some other time?

This interaction of a travelling company with the property of their hosts raises a number of pressing questions about the relationships between actors and their performances and their provincial audiences and venues that have yet to be raised by modern scholarship. From initial questions on the who, what and where of performances – who were the actors, what play did they present, in what building or room did they present it? – we can also begin to develop more nuanced discussions of the possibilities and strategies for performance offered to a visiting company by spaces neither designed for nor regularly accustomed to theatrical use. By considering the nature of provincial audiences we might seek not only to understand their reception of these plays, but also think about how a visiting company might target their performances accordingly.

The tireless work conducted by the *Records of Early English Drama* (REED) project, which seeks to find, transcribe and publish all evidence for drama in England before the closing of the London theatres in 1642, by now has surely shown that visits to provincial towns and performances in the spaces made available there represented common practice for Elizabethan acting companies. The growing success of the London theatres through the latter years of the sixteenth century and beyond may account for the lack of attention theatre history has paid touring theatre. But while the explosion in the London theatre industry from the 1590s may have eclipsed touring theatre and its practices, the knowledge that informed and drove the metropolitan playhouses' rise stemmed from touring traditions. In particular, players' use of, and response to the demands and opportunities represented by the playing spaces they had encountered on the road in previous decades, must have had a profound influence when they came to settle in permanent bases in the capital. Yet in spite of this premise being more widely acknowledged by scholars in recent years, much discussion of early modern theatre continues to view it primarily as a metropolitan phenomenon, to the

exasperation of many (for example see Palmer 2005; Knutson 2010; Thomson 2010).<sup>1</sup> The supposition that performances designed for London audiences and London spaces were then adapted for a provincial audience and locale still underlies many critical examinations of play texts (for example Peele 2011). Inevitably, this has involved thinking about staging in relation to purpose-built theatre spaces in London, north and south of the river, about which we know less perhaps than we imagine, and for which hard evidence remains 'elusive' (Gurr 1997, 35). Some headway has been made in identifying those spaces used for provincial performances (Wasson 1984; Somerset 1994b; McMillin and MacLean 1998; Keenan 2002), but nevertheless, study of the plays themselves in the spaces for which they were written and in which they were performed is as yet an undeveloped science.

This thesis represents a modest contribution to a new beginning. Andrew Gurr has already argued that play texts 'must be related to the distinctive repertoire of the company that performed them and the kinds of playhouse the company was using' (Gurr 2004a, 72). However, as archaeological excavation has made earlier speculation over the construction and dimensions of the London venues less secure (see Foakes 2004), it seems appropriate to turn the spotlight on those buildings which we know to have hosted early modern performance, and which are still extant. As such, this thesis seeks to situate aspects of one play within the context of one pre-theatre performance space – the Stratford-upon-Avon Guildhall, in order to investigate both the play itself and the building in which it was performed. It is my belief that performance, although ephemeral, was constrained both by the material conditions in which it was situated and by the local social and political contexts of that material space. Therefore, greater understanding of text and performance can only be achieved through studying both the spaces and places, like Stratford, that informed and framed them.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Holland has expressed his frustration that London-centric theatre historians have not 'theorized the position within the central strategies of theatre history of almost any form of event that is non-metropolitan and/or non-professional... [abandoning] the work to those working on the *REED* project itself, as if they have taken over our more general responsibility for investigating such materials' (Holland 2004, 53-4).

### **1.1 – TOWARDS A ‘THEATRE ARCHAEOLOGY’**

The challenge of any project that aspires to develop an inter- or multidisciplinary approach is how to nurture a marriage of several distinct sets of methodologies, research tools and theoretical paradigms. It is often too easy to borrow or appropriate aspects of one discipline in order to illustrate, justify or otherwise fill in the gaps in a second without fully understanding the wider disciplinary contexts (see Halsall 2010b, 41; Halsall 2010c). The ramification of this caveat is that work of this kind must pursue separate strands of research and couch them in the contexts of their individual disciplines before bringing the whole together.

For this project, the wish to combine archaeological methodologies with those of theatre practice arose from two personal encounters with problems of space, one through the context of academic study and the second as a practical negotiation while directing and producing student productions throughout my undergraduate and early postgraduate career. The former derives from my interest in the social and religious manifestations and manipulations of space through and around built environments. This is an area of research that has only relatively recently established itself as a distinct genre within the field of archaeology. Drawing on the influential theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Anthony Giddens (1984), Michel de Certeau (1984), Henri Lefebvre (1991), and a range of subsequent scholars (such as Casey 1997), archaeologists such as C. P. Graves (1989), Roberta Gilchrist (1997) and Kate Giles (2000) have sought to acknowledge and emphasise the active agency of individuals and their production of a wider cultural context, while applying the methodologies of interpretation from traditional excavation-based archaeology to standing buildings. That buildings should be seen not as empty shells or as the product of a single architect’s design but as the physical manifestation of a complex social identity is a belief that has remained at the forefront of my subsequent research.

The second encounter came from directing a number of student productions, and in particular from transferring performances in one venue in York to Edinburgh for a run at the Fringe Festival in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The challenges presented by the differing size of stage and auditorium, acoustic variation, and an extremely short rehearsal and transfer period, as well as negotiating the logistics of transporting cast, costume and properties, prompted me to think, albeit in a generalised way and couched in terms of my experience of modern student theatre, of the challenges that touring theatre companies face.

The idea of this project began to develop while researching my MA thesis on space and place in medieval Mystery plays (Jones 2007). Having been invited to produce the conservation report on the complex of Guild buildings at Stratford-upon-Avon for King Edward's School, Kate Giles had found references to an armoury in one of rooms adjoining the main Guildhall (Clark *et al.* 2006, 21-22). The connection of the hall and grammar school to Shakespeare had long been known – his father, John, was an alderman and high bailiff of the civic corporation and it is likely William attended the school housed in the premises. The possibility that the young William saw his first play while perched on his father's knee had been raised before (see Mulryne 2007, 17). Did the armoury offer visiting players, or even the schoolboy William and his peers, a handy resource for armour and weaponry for use in their performances?

With speculation soon giving way to something more academically sound, I envisioned a project that sought to explore the use of the Stratford Guild buildings by Elizabethan players, and how their performances changed according to the space made available to them and the audience for whom they played. This would involve an archaeological and historical appraisal of the Stratford Guildhall and its occupants, and selecting a suitable company of players, about whom the historical record was reasonably vocal, and of whose plays at least some survived in print. The project's research questions were driven initially by an archaeological engagement with spatial theories, but it soon became clear that questions about performance itself would play a significant role. Unlike the research frameworks developed by archaeologists and theatre historians, however, methodologies concerning performance of Shakespearean and pre-Shakespearean drama, either for research purposes or within commercial pursuits of 'Original Practice' playing, were somewhat less developed, and practices often remained rather opaque. With few examples of similar research models to follow, the project became as much a question of developing a new hybrid methodology, which we might call 'theatre archaeology'. Such a process is by nature reiterative, and when combined with the practical restraints, both financial and logistical, imposed by the scope of a three year PhD, the result is more likely to raise questions than hope to answer them all fully. What I endeavour to show, however, is that by adopting a new approach, and questioning certain pervading assumptions about early modern theatrical practice, we can begin to find firmer ground from which to proceed.

## **1.2 – METHODOLOGIES: ARCHAEOLOGY OF STANDING BUILDINGS, THEATRE HISTORY AND THEATRE PRACTICE**

In developing the methodologies of theatre archaeology, I have drawn on three main areas of academic study, and it is useful here to outline their main features and concerns. Performance – its use for interpretation, and as a research tool itself – is the key concern, as it is the point at which and through which several disciplines meet. At the heart of this project was a series of workshops at Stratford-upon-Avon in which extracts of a Queen’s Men play, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, were performed by a student cast, aiming to explore the conditions and practices of early modern touring theatre. Understanding how performance has been used in research, how it has been received, and how it has been achieved, was critical to inform and reflect on this process. Inevitably, what follows is a précis of what could easily constitute a significantly longer discussion; however, fuller discussion will follow in subsequent chapters.

### **1.2.1 – ARCHAEOLOGY**

Archaeologists are concerned with the ‘small things forgotten’ – those commonplace material objects that might lend us understanding of the practice of everyday life in the past (Deetz 1977). Archaeology and archaeological excavation have already been hugely influential over the last two decades in the development of current theatre historical narratives. Since the discovery and excavation of the Rose Theatre in Southwark in 1989, and of the Globe Theatre shortly after, material remains recovered by the Museum of London and English Heritage excavation teams at these two sites have informed both academic work into the reconstruction of the Globe on London’s Bankside and the dissemination of knowledge to the wider general public and heritage sector (see Blatherwick 1997; Greenfield and Gurr 2004; Bowsher and Miller 2009; Bowsher 2012). The more recent discoveries and excavation of the Theatre and Curtain sites continue to reveal new information (see Hilts 2012; 2008). Surviving wall foundations of both the Globe and Rose have offered empirical evidence for the dimensions, orientation and configurations of the theatre buildings. However, in the case of the Globe full excavation of the whole site was not possible (fig. 1); there is still room for speculation over many measurements and ‘definitive conclusions are hard to come by’ (Blatherwick 1997, 79; Bowsher and Miller 2009, 126-28). The discovery of



surprises such as the changing orientation and tapering of the Rose stage further demonstrated the usefulness of excavation (Bowsher and Miller 2009, 46-48, 58-61, 117-19), and artefact remains helped describe the wider commercial and leisure industries associated with the playhouses and play-going. Nevertheless, while excavation has provided a wealth of information about the London theatres, the length of time it takes to process and publish the archaeological evidence often reduces its immediate impact. The completion and publication of Bowsher and Miller's full report on the Rose and Globe excavations took some twenty years, and there is generally no guarantee or indeed requirement that archaeological grey literature such as interim site reports will ever be written up for publishing. The high level of public and academic interest in the Theatre and Curtain sites may encourage the excavation teams to publish their results, but it will be some time before the full impact of their findings can be felt.

Moreover, excavation has further limitations: it cannot tell us anything about that which once stood above ground. Researchers wishing to pursue more detailed questions on the stage spaces of the London playhouses and their relationship with the performance of plays there must turn to texts and the fragmentary pictorial remains; but at best these offer whispered and generalised hints about theatre spaces. While the excavations of the Globe and Rose offered evidence for the materials employed in those buildings, they provided none for their structural designs, and the Shakespeare's Globe project architects and craftsmen were forced to use conjectural methods to design the reconstructed theatre (Greenfield 1997a; 1997b, 101).

Nevertheless, theatre practice was not restricted to London, and outside London buildings in which performances regularly occurred have had a better survival rate. In growing numbers, archaeologists have taken the methodologies and theories of excavation and applied them to surviving structures, and the study of vernacular buildings in conjunction with the accompanying documentary record has already done much to elucidate a wide range of historical contexts. From medieval religious guild halls (for example Giles 2000) to the houses of early American settlements (for example Glassie 1975) and English vernacular buildings (for example Johnson 2010), scholars have sought to combine the archaeological and historical records to tell the story of individuals and institutions, and to offer the material remains of the past as a substantive expression of past identity and society.

The scope of such work tends towards the *longue durée*, but can be combined with an approach that assumes tighter chronological boundaries to produce a study that offers both breadth and focus. One way to explore a more detailed chronological snapshot is seldom pursued in such scholarship, unless it is within the context of heritage tourism and re-enactment, which is to repopulate these buildings and spaces, to reintroduce past activities and through their practice in the present seek a deeper understanding of the past.<sup>2</sup> A similar strategy is well established in the field of experimental archaeology, whereby scholars attempt to make objects or create structures in the original manner, and through experimentation discover what that original creation process might have been (see Coles 2010; Saraydar 2008). However, these processes are more readily used by scholars of prehistoric societies than those of the more recent past. The reasons for this are understandable. The vast volume of data available to the early modern scholar compared with the prehistorian offers the opportunity to say far more which is securely based on a body of original evidence. Written accounts, manuals, a plethora of extant objects and a surviving, if dwindling, tradition of craftsmanship all make questions about the manufacture of historic objects and buildings less pressing than those concerning their use and interpretation, for which an experimental approach might not immediately appear appropriate. It is difficult to investigate ongoing practices through the one-off creation of an event. Very few questions about, for example, the relationships between early modern education, or judicial process, or civic governance, and the buildings that housed these practices can be better answered by attempts to reoccupy these spaces than by a thorough investigation of the archival records and archaeological survey.

On the other hand, performances by visiting companies of players in provincial buildings lend themselves to study through practice as well as historical research. The archaeological and historical investigation of the host building, town and society over a longer stretch of time informs the rich political, social and religious contexts of the

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<sup>2</sup> Live interpretation at heritage sites across the country has long been provided by companies such as Past Pleasures ([www.pastpleasures.co.uk](http://www.pastpleasures.co.uk)), while scholars such as Annie Gray are amongst a growing number of academics to use their historical and archaeological research to underpin their own participation in the industry (Gray n. d.; 2008; 2010). The debate surrounding the relationship between heritage and performance has begun to be explored more urgently by scholars working in the context of museums and cultural heritage management. Projects such as *Performance, Learning and Heritage* at the University of Manchester ([www.plh.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.plh.manchester.ac.uk)) and its published outputs offer cogent discussions of heritage as a performance event, and as performance being a way through which the past can be mediated and explored (Jackson and Kidd 2011; Alivizatou 2011; Smith 2011).

venue as well as its physical specifics, while historical and literary study tells us about a company's career, its plays and economic fortunes. Drawing on these, and using the original buildings in which players performed, we can start to explore an area about which very little is asked, let alone understood – the performance of the plays themselves.

### **1.2.2 – THEATRE HISTORY**

The study of the history of early drama and theatre has a much longer and more complicated history. A full treatment of essential criticism can – and indeed has – filled an entire book (see Aebischer 2010). While the seeds of historical inquiry can be seen in the work of early scholars such as Edward Malone, the true birth of the discipline stems from the work of E. K. Chambers and subsequently G. E. Bentley, whose seminal works *The Elizabethan Stage* (Chambers 1923) and *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Bentley 1941-68) sought to draw together all available knowledge on the conditions of early modern staging.

For a long time the focus of literary criticism remained squarely on the individual author and his genius, on textual analysis and the thematic preoccupations expressed within plays. However, a shift from the 1970s onwards saw the arrival of research that changed the way drama was conceived and approached, and which sought to address drama 'as a theatrical and collaborative activity, demanding a focus both on its discursive complexities and on the institutional conditions in which it was produced' (Kastan and Sallibrass 1991, 1; cited in Aebischer 2010, 23). Subsequently, over the last two decades there have been concerted efforts to abstain from using play and playwright as organising principles, and scholars have sought to fracture broad narratives and respond instead to the 'materiality' of theatre (see Cox and Kastan 1997 and the essays therein; Aebischer 2010, 32-3). For a representative example of the changing focus of approaches to the history of early modern drama over the last forty years we should look to Professor Andrew Gurr. Gurr took up the historical inheritance and perspective of Chambers and Bentley but shifted the focus 'back to the plays and their highly mobile social and political contexts' (Gurr 1996, v). The tracking of Gurr's work, from the first edition of his *Shakespearean Stage* (1970) [1992] to *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (1987), *Shakespearean Playing Companies* (1996) and latterly *Shakespeare's Opposites* (2009), offers a useful overview of the shifting interests of

theatre historians, moving towards a more holistic appraisal of drama as a product not only of the author of a play and the stage on which it was presented, but of the company which produced it and the wider repertory in which it once existed (see Aebischer 2010, 30-1).

The study of early modern companies like the Queen's Men and of provincial drama more generally owes much to these later trends. Once a largely disregarded field, the study of touring companies has now been firmly established, in the main springing from the endeavours of the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project, based at the University of Toronto. The REED project, which aims to document any and all records pertaining to drama in Britain *ab initio* until the closure of the London theatres at the beginning of the Civil War in 1642, has demonstrated the ubiquitous presence of acting companies throughout early modern England. The project's archival findings have allowed scholars such as Sally-Beth MacLean (1988a; 1988b; 1993; 2001; 2003; McMillin and MacLean 1998) to track individual companies on their routes around the kingdom and regularly identify buildings that hosted performances (see Keenan 2002; Wasson 1984 and below). A growing body of work has focused on individual companies, offering a discussion of their repertory, of their plays and dramaturgical style alongside the historical and cultural contexts (McMillin and MacLean 1998; Ostovich *et al.* 2009a; MacLean and Manley in prep), while others have done so as a conduit to the life and career of the early modern *cause célèbre*, William Shakespeare (for example Schoone-Jongen 2008; see Gurr 1996).

In parallel with the investigation of theatre-historical issues scholars have also turned in some measure to the literary remnants of these companies. Previously the domain of the Malone Society, whose *Reprints* series has published 174 volumes of early modern texts in facsimile or transcription form,<sup>3</sup> plays linked to Elizabethan companies – rather than a prestigious named playwright – have begun to be selected by editors and published in critical editions, notably Tiffany Stern's edition of *King Leir* in the *Globe Quarto* series (Anon 2002), and Charles Forker's edition of *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* in the Manchester University Press *Revels Plays* editions (Peele 2011). Although neither of these editions was commissioned directly as a direct response to theatre historical research on the Queen's Men, whose plays they are, they nevertheless reflect a growing insistence in recent years that scholars should look

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<sup>3</sup> As of 16 October 2011. Two further volumes are listed as forthcoming (Malone Society, n. d.).

beyond Shakespeare's works to their contemporary and earlier contexts. In some cases, at least, this insistence may be seen in parallel to the growth of an academic-commercial relationship that has developed at the American Shakespeare Center and their 're-creation' of the Blackfriars theatre in Staunton, Virginia (ASC, n. d.) and at Shakespeare's Globe in London. Here commercial productions in reconstructed Elizabethan playhouses run alongside school and higher education programmes, and, at the Globe, rehearsed readings of lesser known plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries are regularly held as part of the *Read not Dead* series.

The wish to explore the historical and literary contexts of early modern theatre and their ramifications for performance has existed for some time (see for example Hattaway 1983; Sturgess 1987; Leggatt 1992; White 1998; McMillin and MacLean 1998; see also Rycroft 2009; SHC n. d.; Mulryne 2012a). It is only in recent years, however, that this discussion has extended to the discussion of companies and their repertoires. As the editors of *Locating the Queen's Men* suggest

Not too long ago, a book about a company of actors would have been of interest primarily to theatre historians, and would have been expected to concern itself more or less exclusively with theatre-historical issues – company business, venues, touring patterns, the identification of the troupe's members... [S]uch areas of enquiry were of little consequence to those studying early modern plays... Over the last 15 years, however... a new dialogue between the material conditions of playing and the interpretation of scripts has emerged (Ostovich *et al.* 2009b, 1).

As this dialogue continues we might hope to see the development of theatre-historical and literary narratives into a more consolidated methodology, and one that ultimately seeks to develop its discussion and exploration of performance. As yet, such a methodology has not been clearly articulated. We will turn to the Canadian *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project shortly, but given its statement that performance of Queen's Men plays is 'the centrepiece of our research' (PQMb)<sup>4</sup> it is worth noting that in spite of this intention the division between literary and theatre-historical approaches continued in the accompanying *Locating the Queen's Men* volume.

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<sup>4</sup> To avoid confusion, I shall distinguish between the project itself – *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* (SQM) – and the website that documents the process and provides project resources – *Performing the Queen's Men* (PQM).

Discussion of the implications of either the material conditions of playing or the interpretations of scripts for performance itself is only taken up in the contributions by Tiffany Stern (2009) and Peter Cockett (2009). Unfortunately for our purposes, Stern's essay concerns the Curtain and the plays of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and not those of the Queen's. Cockett's essay, in which he discusses the productions of three plays as part of the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project, does the most to connect historical and literary research with performance. However, even when the *Locating* volume is read in conjunction with the project's *Performing the Queen's Men* website (PQMa), which documents aspects of the production process, the historical underpinning of the performance of the three plays is left inexplicit.

In spite of a range of publications that, in a variety of ways, have furthered the discussion of material conditions and interpretations of scripts (for example Bly 2000; Munro 2005; Palfrey and Stern 2007; Gurr 2009), fewer have made the study of performance more integral – although there are a few key exceptions (notably White 1998). Fortunately, there is an alternative strand of scholarship that can offer useful insight, as well as a history of recent professional and academic performance whose inheritance needs acknowledgment.

### **1.2.3 – PERFORMANCE AND THEATRE PRACTICE**

The majority of work considering the performance of early modern plays, usually those of Shakespeare, occupies a parallel but distinct strand of academic discourse. This is in part fulfilled by editors for the three leading modern series of single play editions of Shakespeare's works. The New Cambridge, Oxford and Arden Shakespeares all set out to display an 'alertness' to texts' performance potentialities, although Michael Corder has demonstrated how admirable scholarly aims are not always successful in their execution (Corder 2006). However, the best examples of sensitivity to performance, such as Barbara Hodgdon's edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* for Arden (Shakespeare 2010), stem from a deeper and longer discussion of Shakespeare and (often modern) performance, a conversation emerging from the work of scholars such as John Russell Brown (*Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*, 1966) and J. L. Styan (*The Shakespeare Revolution*, 1977), and continued by Hodgdon, Peggy Phelan, W. B. Worthen, Peter Holland and others (see Hodgdon and Worthen 2008; Hodgdon 2008). Much of this

work of course responds to specific later performances and their progenitors, which can only have limited parallels with their early modern predecessors.

However, a number of those actively involved in the production of these modern performances have written extensively about the practical challenges faced by actors when tackling the early modern repertory. They may have done so with modern performance and interpretations in mind, but the handbooks and guides written by practitioners that include John Barton (1984), Peter Hall (2003) and Cicely Berry (1993; 2001) not only represent the fruit of many years' work with professional actors and Shakespearean texts, but offer practical methods, grounded in a detailed responsiveness to what are taken to be the demands of those texts, by which actors may begin to face the challenges of the early modern repertory.

While modern approaches to early drama may have useful applications in a project such as this – and these will be discussed in later chapters – recent years have seen another form of performance practice which impacts greatly on any project that hopes to explore the historical conditions of early modern playing. Recognising that early modern practices and circumstances of playing were radically different to those one might encounter in the present day, a number of productions have sought to recover and reproduce the 'original practices' of sixteenth century theatre. The most recent of these was the AHRC-funded *Staging the Henrician Court*, a project run between Oxford Brookes University, the University of Edinburgh and Historic Royal Palaces ([stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk](http://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk); hereafter SHC). The project, which ran from 2008 to 2010 and staged both John Heywood's *Play of the Weather* and John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* in the Great Hall of Hampton Court Palace, has an earlier focus, on Tudor court drama, but the principles of investigating performance within an extant performance space are shared by this project, and would benefit from comparison. However, the *Henrician Court* project is only in the early stages of publishing its outcomes, and while published materials often engage with literary aspects of the plays and discuss the contexts of Tudor courtly space, only Eleanor Rycroft has offered any discussion of the performances themselves (Rycroft 2009; see King 2012; Rawlinson 2012). However, Rycroft is quick to warn her readers that *The Play of the Weather* could not have originally been performed in the Great Hall itself as the text predates the hall's completion (2009, 14). Within the restraints of a short journal article, Rycroft's discussion of the performance focuses primarily on questions of audience and lighting and does not expand in any great detail on the relationship with the building

space, nor the methods and practices explored by the company of professional actors when rehearsing or presenting the text. Hopefully these questions may be further expanded in future publications (see for example Rycroft forthcoming).

Considering the playing conditions and practices of the later sixteenth century, the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project in Canada and a number of productions at Shakespeare's Globe have also sought to replicate some of the conditions of early modern playing, and their outcomes have been more widely published. An examination of their processes provides a useful springboard to this project.

### **1.3 – ORIGINAL PRACTICES, SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE AND *SHAKESPEARE AND THE QUEEN'S MEN***

The term 'original practices' is a relatively recent one, coined by Mark Rylance during the first years of performance at the newly opened Shakespeare's Globe (*The Times*, 14 August 1998; cited in Lopez 2008, 305 and n.7). It has since been taken up by a number of theatre practitioners, although often with a range of differing emphases to those of Rylance, most prominently Ralph Alan Cohen and the American Shakespeare Center at their reconstruction of the Blackfriars Theatre at Staunton, Virginia. The term has yet to take on a fixed set of meanings and implications for performance, and has been used to cover all manner of approaches to the performance of Shakespearean texts.

In the US, at least eight companies or institutions claim to follow original practices.<sup>5</sup> Scholarly rigour and healthy scepticism are not necessarily paramount in all cases. For Shakespeare & Co in Lennox, Massachusetts, 'original practice' offers 'a theatre of unprecedented excellence rooted in the classical ideals of inquiry, balance, and

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<sup>5</sup> They are: the American Shakespeare Center (formerly Shenandoah Shakespeare Express) at Blackfriars Theatre, Staunton, Virginia ([www.americanshakespearecenter.com](http://www.americanshakespearecenter.com)); Mary Baldwin College MLitt/MFA programme in Shakespeare and Performance, Staunton, VA ([www.mbc.edu/shakespeare](http://www.mbc.edu/shakespeare)); the Maryland Shakespeare Festival ([www.mdshakes.org](http://www.mdshakes.org)); Shakespeare & Company, Lennox, Massachusetts ([www.shakespeare.org](http://www.shakespeare.org)); the New American Shakespeare Tavern, Atlanta, Georgia ([www.shakespearetavern.com](http://www.shakespearetavern.com)); Grassroots Shakespeare Company, Utah and London ([www.grassrootsshakespeare.com](http://www.grassrootsshakespeare.com)); the Original Practice Shakespeare Festival, Oregon ([www.opsfest.org](http://www.opsfest.org)); and the Pigeon Creek Shakespeare Company, Grand Haven, Michigan ([www.pcshakespeare.com](http://www.pcshakespeare.com)). All pages consulted 29/05/2012. A further company, Waging Theatre, is referred to at the Maryland Shakespeare Festival site, but the URL is broken and a web search reveals no further information; Jeremy Lopez also discusses the San Diego-based Excellent Motion Theatre, whose website no longer exists and appears to be defunct (see Lopez 2008, 308-9).



harmony; a company that performs as the Elizabethans did – in love with poetry, physical prowess, and the mysteries of the universe’ (S&C, n. d.). The Maryland Shakespeare Festival and the American Shakespeare Centre are rather more grounded, setting out a considered set of principles for what they view as original practices, to which they adhere some, but not all, of the time. Broadly, these are 1) universal lighting and a visible audience; 2) an all-male company of limited numbers, perhaps 12-15, requiring the doubling of parts; 3) fast pacing, with continuous staging of scenes; 4) ‘period’ costume; 5) live period music; 6) a non-proscenium arch theatre space; and 7) no fixed sets or scenery.

### 1.3.1 – SHAKESPEARE’S GLOBE

In the UK, ‘original practices’ has been most widely invoked when discussing the Globe, although the term has been dropped under the current artistic director, Dominic Dromgoole (Dessen 2011; see Cornford 2010). Under Mark Rylance’s stewardship, ‘original playing practices’ were co-mingled with other Globe practices: ‘[a] daily class in movement, speech and verse-speaking during the rehearsal period for the actors, live music which becomes a powerful tool in the absence of lighting and sets, and beautiful, hand-crafted Elizabethan clothing’ (*The Times*, 14 August 1998; cited in Lopez 2008, n.7). This of course blurs the distinction between modern and original practices – the programme of actor-training in rehearsal is not dissimilar to modern practices at the RSC, for example. But more problematic was the way in which the belief held by the architects (both figurative and literal) of the Globe project, that theatre spaces ‘built in the seventeenth-century way... afford playing conditions appropriate to the presentation of Shakespeare’s work and that of his contemporaries’ (Mulryne and Shewring 1997b, 17), was extended to wider playing practices. There seems to have been a belief at the outset of the Globe experiment that the ‘recreated’ conditions would *in themselves* ensure original practice:

‘Original practices’ was an enormous release because the world we were concerned with was the Globe Theatre and we did not need to worry about style, the style was the relationship between audience and actor in that building (Rylance 2008, 108).

Rylance demonstrates a certain naivety about how the building shaped such a relationship, or at least, does not articulate the correlation sufficiently. Moreover, much

of his rhetoric is targeted at modern practitioners, particularly directors (who 'have to dismount their circus ponies and learn to ride wild horses' [2008, 108]), and does not, in reality, engage with the ramifications of 'original practices' for our understanding of either performances or the building space. In the volume designed to reflect on the first ten years of Shakespeare's Globe practices, *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (Carson and Karim-Cooper 2008), few contributors successfully articulate the challenges and possibilities for performance in relation to the architectural space. Despite Martin White's insistence on the speculative nature of reconstruction-based research, and his particular caveat against the physical presence of the new Globe underpinning a false sense of correctness and early modern reality, his warnings do not seem to have figured highly in the concerns of the practitioners contributing to the volume (White 2008; compare Rylance *et al.* 2008).

While practices at the Globe do rely on an integral relationship between actor, architecture and stage space, this relationship is more generally couched in terms of an actor–audience relationship, whether to do with delivery of specific lines or a sustained interaction throughout a performance (Carroll 2008; Carson 2008). As an example of the rhetoric surrounding the Globe's role in negotiating this relationship, we might cite how Carson proposes a 'David and Goliath struggle' between the practices of the Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company, placing the Globe's more participatory audience and dynamic actor–audience interaction against the 'passivity of the mainstage' at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon (Carson 2008, 115-18). However, she does acknowledge that it is the Globe's *architecture* that provokes this more engaged performance. The shared light, the shared space, includes the audience within a performance, allowing a familiarity between actors and audience that extends both ways (Escolme 1997, 19; see Woods 2011). The audience historically sat or stood in different, architecturally-defined areas of the auditorium according to class and the constraints of their pocket, with the cheap groundling tickets gaining admittance to the playhouse yard, while the more expensive tickets provided the wealthier playgoers a seat in the middle and upper galleries. This allowed actors to target discrete sections of the audience for added effect, a tactic which modern actors pursue today (Carroll 2008, 40-42). Nevertheless, such an observation perhaps falls short of the more nuanced discussion of space and performance that one might hope to have been developed through work on the Globe stage.

The realisation that theatre architecture moulds actor-audience relations is important. However, when trying to assess the relationship between the physical stage and performance at the Globe, we run into difficulties. As the excavation of the original Globe site did not extend to the yard or stage, the modern stage was designed on the basis of two pieces of evidence, neither of which refers directly to the sixteenth-century Globe itself. The first, known as the de Witt drawing, is in fact a copy by Arendt van Buchell of a sketch by his friend Johannes de Witt of the interior of the Swan playhouse, executed in 1596, and now housed in the collections of the University of Utrecht (see Mulryne and Shewring 1997a, 29 and 189). The second is a contract of January 1600 between Peter Street, 'Cittizen and Carpenter of London', and the theatre impresario Philip Henslowe for the construction of an outdoor playhouse called the Fortune based on the Globe dimensions (see Mulryne and Shewring 1997a, 180-82; Henslowe 1961, 307-310). The resulting reconstructed Globe stage has provoked sustained and heated discussion ever since, with scholars debating the size of the stage, the size and position of the columns supporting the roof, and the number of doors and existence of a discovery space (see FitzPatrick 2011). The modern Globe, then, cannot tell us with any certainty about the relationship with the modern stage space and modern performance. While it may in turn inform discussion of early modern performance, we should also look for potential situations where the disjuncture between early modern and modern could be lessened.

### **1.3.2 – SHAKESPEARE AND THE QUEEN'S MEN**

The project that has done most to reconcile performance with academic study, and original practices with original playing spaces, was undertaken by Helen Ostovich and her colleagues at McMaster University and the University of Toronto. In *The Queen's Men and their Plays*, Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean had once lamented that a festival of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries, the Queen's Men, had yet to be held (1998, xvi); the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project did just that. At the centre of the project was a professional production of three Queen's Men plays, rehearsed and performed 'in conditions that approximated those of the original company' (PQMb) in Hamilton and Toronto, Canada, in autumn 2006. The project's investigators believed that the production of plays 'gives a particular insight into theatrical process and dramatic text' (PQMb), and drew on the best available literary and historical research to inform the rehearsal and performance processes. Unfortunately, only a proportion of

the discussions and reflections on the process have so far been published, which at times makes it less than clear how the research team and acting company approached texts and performance. Nevertheless, while this project's approach was somewhat different to that of the Canadian project, many of the methodological decisions were taken after reflection over the SQM process, in particular their approach to original practices.

The term 'original practice' was used carefully by the SQM project. Like McMillin and MacLean's original research into the Queen's Men,

Our project was also guided by a desire to reach back and understand the past. We engaged in further research on the company and its working practices but instead of writing a book, we hired designers, appointed a company of actors, rehearsed the plays, and performed them within parameters set by the evidence of our research. Our insistence on a relationship between our productions and historical evidence places our work within what is often categorized as 'original practice' production but it was extremely important to our research team that we separate ourselves from the essentialism associated with other work in this area – much to the dismay of our publicity team, the words 'recreation', 'reconstruction', and 'authentic' were banned from all material related to the project (Cockett 2009, 229).

The reluctance to make bold claims to authenticity demonstrates an awareness of some of the problems faced by 'original practice' productions. However, the confines of a short piece do not allow Cockett to expand on the debates that must have been had about the structures and techniques that framed the rehearsal and performance processes, and we must await the project's further reflections to be elaborated in print. Cockett discusses how they approached the project 'in the spirit of experimentation'; director and cast were able to explore a range of hypotheses about the Elizabethan company's performance practice, and while modern pressures were sometimes felt, the 'combination of modern and early modern practice allow[ed] for an assessment of the relationship between the two' (Cockett 2009, 230). As to just what, exactly, the original hypotheses were, however, the reader is left uninformed. It would be helpful to know what their thinking was about the relationship between modern and early modern practices. It is inevitable that a modern company will draw on its members' modern training and experiences, whether implicitly or explicitly, and rigorous academic

discussion should not only distinguish between modern and early modern practices, but also be as explicit as possible identifying the residual assumptions being made about both. As neither Cockett nor the project's *Performing the Queen's Men* website explore such assumptions it becomes difficult to disentangle some of the practices the company undertook.

In terms of 'original practice' and performance spaces, the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project took a different approach to that of the Globe, although the rationale behind their staging choices has not been articulated in print. The three stage configurations selected by the project served three performance possibilities, and cumulatively could have provided the basis for a comparison of performances in the different spaces, their reception by audiences, and the different strategies required to tackle both. One hopes that as the project continues its exploration of the longer list of Queen's Men plays this sort of discussion will be developed. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the choice of stage layouts, and the implications for the project at Stratford.

### **1.3.2.1– STAGE CONFIGURATIONS**

The first stage configuration, the 'Tavern' stage, fulfilled what the team believed were the minimum demands of the plays they had chosen to perform, offering a bare stage with two exits/entrances. The actors could access both exits/entrances from back stage, and the configuration offered 'the kind of thing that might easily have been set up in the inn-yards or interior rooms of the taverns that the Queen's Men visited on tour' (PQMc). Although neither the PQM website nor director Peter Cockett are clear on what evidence the Tavern stage was based, it seems likely they drew on the evidence for the Bull in Bishopsgate Street, discovered by David Kathman and the late Herbert Berry (Kathman 2009a, 2009b; see Berry 2006). The Bull served as one of the two London bases for the Queen's Men during the first winter of its career. It offered the company an outdoor yard, accessed through a single entrance, which measured 45 feet by 35 feet at its widest points and was enclosed by galleries, and contained an erected stage around which the audience may have freely walked (Kathman 2009a, 68). However, the Bull was not the only tavern used by companies in London, merely the one for which the best evidence survives, and we cannot be sure that the staging at the Bull was replicated elsewhere. Kathman notes that another inn at which the Queen's

Men performed while in London, the Bell in Gracechurch Street, offered a yard only 20 foot wide and 125 foot long, and which had entrances at both ends. An arrangement similar to that at the Bull would have been particularly difficult to accommodate, and it seems as likely that instead plays were produced in the indoor 'hall', located at the upper front part of the inn building (Kathman 2009a, 73). Whether companies performed in the yard or the hall at the Bell, the presence of a raised stage area in the manner of that at the Bull seems unlikely.

We should also remember that all four London inn-yard playhouses – the Bull, the Bell, the Cross Keys and the Bel Savage – had survived the crackdowns that saw playing stopped at inns such as the Boar's Head without Aldgate and the Sarcen's Head, Islington, and by the late sixteenth century had become well known playing venues (Kathman 2009b, 154-57; Berry 2000, 297-9). As playing was an established commercial prospect at these venues, we might well expect there to have been some expenditure on structures such as a stage scaffold. However, while some provincial venues undoubtedly did so too – Richard Southern notes that scaffolds were regularly erected at Gloucester Boothall for visiting companies (1973, 333-40) – silence on this question in otherwise conscientious records for venues elsewhere makes a blanket assumption unwise. We cannot assume that the same facilities would have been available to companies on tour, when the inns they visited in the provinces hosted playing less regularly. The SQM team's choice to perform on a stage based on the Bull evidence seems a sensible one. But by suggesting that the stage fulfilled the plays' minimum requirements, they imply it would not be possible to use a simpler structure, when the likelihood is that a company on tour may have often faced with far plainer facilities.

The second configuration, the 'University Stage', was based on Alan Nelson's research on the stages erected in the hall at Trinity College, Cambridge (Nelson 1994). Here, the important members of the audience were seated behind the stage, while the doorways to tiring houses were positioned on either side of the stage. The majority of the audience sat to the front. This choice of stage configuration was made not because there was strong evidence for this being a common arrangement in Elizabethan England, but rather because the configuration seemed (and proved) particularly challenging to actors, and required alternative strategies for playing that had been unexplored since the sixteenth century (PQMc). The University stage setting is a harder one to justify when talking explicitly about the Queen's Men, however. The company

did not get on well with university authorities – both Cambridge and Oxford Universities refused it permission to play on occasion, the only authorities to do so across the company's twenty year career. The Queen's Men did perform twice for the university authorities at Cambridge, firstly on 24 June 1587, and again sometime around 26 June 1597, but the majority of their Cambridge performances were given to the civic authorities. At least one of the playwrights working with the company, Robert Greene, was a university man, and so must have had some experience of performances in the university colleges, but it is difficult to articulate a clear link between this and the performances of any of his professional plays.

Further problems arise when comparing the stage erected in Canada with the reconstructions suggested by Nelson. Nowhere are the dimensions of the SQM University stage given, but by considering photographs of the stage and seating we might estimate somewhere in the region of 20 to 25 feet across, a dimension which seems also to apply to the Tavern scaffold stage (PQMc). In comparison, the width of Trinity College hall was some 40 feet, almost twice the size. While not immediately clear from the reconstruction drawings, Nelson demonstrates how the Trinity College stage was a complicated structure, more elaborate even than a similar stage set up in Queens' College, which itself offered galleries and different levels of seating (Nelson 1994, 31, 42-43), features not included in the SQM stage. Similarly to Blackfriars in the seventeenth century, practices at Trinity College included having the senior dignitaries sitting on the stage itself (Nelson 1994, 41). This does not seem to have been replicated by the SQM project, despite having obvious implications for performance.

Large leaps of faith seem also to have been made about the likely similarity between performances by university students and those of travelling companies, especially companies whose presence was rarely condoned by the university authorities. If all the evidence for university stages relates to the staging of university drama, can we be sure that the same facilities were made available to visiting companies? Did visits have to coincide with performances by students, so that the stages were available? If not, would the complicated staging be re-erected, or would a company be expected to perform under more constrained circumstances? It may be possible to answer some of these questions, but, until they are, the 'University' stage appears an unsteady foundation on which to build theories concerning touring players.

The final SQM stage configuration was a 'Court' setting, erected in the West Hall of University College at the University of Toronto for the final performance of *King Leir*.

The room was laid out to represent a performance at court, with members of the University of Toronto and McMaster University faculties standing in for the royal and noble audience members (Roberts-Smith 2007, 6; PQMc). Here the 'queen' sat on display at one end of the hall flanked by two important dignitaries; opposite sat the senior nobles, while lesser nobles sat on either side, forming a central playing space in the round.

On what evidence this configuration was based both Cockett and the PQM website are silent, and indeed it goes against John Astington's description of a performance by the Lord Chamberlain's Men of *Love's Labour's Lost*, given at Whitehall in 1597 (Astington 2009, 308-9). Astington suggests that the Queen, rather than sitting behind the stage area, sat on a dais in the centre of the auditorium, facing the custom built stage occupied by the actors, while the audience sat against the side and rear walls on banks of seating. This custom of orientation evidently continued well into James I's reign, as the 1607-9 Account of Works at Whitehall describes a similar configuration of degrees, stage and royal 'state' (i.e. throne) being erected in the Jacobean Banqueting House (PRO E 351/3243, f5r). The dominance by the Queen's Men of court performance in the early years of the company's existence (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 14-17) makes a court configuration a desirable part of this kind of experiment. Without further justification for the SQM layout, particularly in the face of historical evidence which seems to contradict the project's arrangement, we should remain sceptical about the utility of adopting such a configuration.

The SQM project was more closely concerned with questions over the shared dramaturgy of their three Queen's Men plays – *King Leir*, *Famous Victories of Henry V* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* – with the practice of early modern rehearsal and performance, based on the research of Tiffany Stern (Stern 2000; Palfrey and Stern 2007),<sup>6</sup> and with issues of casting such as doubling and gender, than with the stage spaces themselves. The plays took priority over the stages and thus shaped them. The

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<sup>6</sup> Stern outlines the main features of the early modern rehearsal process as follows: a reading of the (new) play by its author to the principal actor-sharers of the company; the distribution to actors of individual parts containing only their character's lines and their cues; private learning of lines; some one-to-one rehearsal between master actors and boy apprentices; and, if time allowed, a single rehearsal with all actors present before the first public performance (Palfrey and Stern 2007, 57-73). It should be noted that Stern's work describes the saturated market of the London theatres from c.1590, where competition was fierce and plays were on regular rotation. Whether a touring company was subjected to these pressures, and whether they followed the same practices, is another question, and one to which I shall return.



physical stage conditions the project created were not the result of disciplined dependence on information about historical sites, but were inflected by a sense of what the plays required. The wish to produce stage designs that reflected a set of 'minimum' requirements – the lowest common denominator for the performance of the three plays – appears somewhat arbitrary and imposed prior to performance, an approach which avoids the question of how companies may have fit their plays to a site, and not the other way around. While the SQM stage designs did draw on examples for which there was some historical evidence, the direct correlation between the evidence and modern design was not clearly articulated. Rather than aspire to detailed historical accuracy, it seems that the university and court settings were chosen not for their ubiquity but for their 'striking' and unusual nature, whose purpose in the theatrical experiment was to challenge the actors in their performances.

What all the configurations seemed to lack was a deeper understanding of the social spaces which the stages occupied. The oppositional relationship set up between the 'minimum' tavern stage and the 'striking' university and court stages in effect homogenises stages and performances in non-royal or non-university spaces. Moreover, there is little attempt to discuss the relationship between performance and the space it occupied, or the audience (whether modern or early modern re-imagined). For the 'Court' setting, the transposition of University of Toronto faculty members into the places of royal and noble playgoers, complete with ceremonial entrance in full academic regalia, did something to bridge the distance between a modern performance and one at court in the sixteenth century. But it is not clear how this affected the SQM company's performance strategies.

Furthermore, all of the stage configurations were set up in modern buildings. The restraints on these stages, from locations of entrances and exits to the basic dimensions of available floor space, were all specific to the buildings in which were erected. Jennifer Roberts-Smiths notes how, in preparation for the 'Court' performance of *King Leir* at University College West Hall, director Peter Cockett had to draw actors' attention to the long aisle entrance and that they had to adjust their performances accordingly (Roberts-Smith 2007, 6). This is a useful observation, albeit one that concerns a relatively simple, practical challenge, but an actor's response to such a challenge can only suit the space in which he finds himself at that time.

The *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project provided the catalyst for this thesis. It offered a significant step forward in the study of early modern repertory theatre, and

through the subsequent publication of the *Locating the Queen's Men* volume consolidated a decade of academic progress since Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean first published their groundbreaking volume. But there has been less discussion about the performances themselves, the actors' and director's approach to the texts and the wide range of implications for staging that different spaces and different audiences might demand. The project's methods remain untested and their true impact remains unknown. It is my aim that the current project begins to develop on SQM, and it uses resources unavailable in Canada, namely surviving venues, as the means by which to do so.

#### **1.4 – THE QUEEN'S MEN, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON GUILDHALL, AND *THE TROUBLESOME REIGN OF JOHN, KING OF ENGLAND***

Focusing on the Queen's Men, this thesis tackles two aspects of early modern touring theatre in turn, before considering the sum of the two parts. First, in chapter 2 I address the sources of evidence for the royal company, their career and their touring patterns, seeking to identify the venues they visited and the plays they performed. Selecting the Guildhall at Stratford-upon-Avon as the primary case study in chapter 3, I pursue extensive archaeological and historical research into the building, its occupants and the wider town. This helps build a detailed picture of the social, political and religious cultures present in early modern Stratford, suggesting the kind of spectator that a visiting company would have encountered, and the local sensitivities their performances may have touched upon. Subsequently, the thesis breaks away to focus on the second strand, which addresses the history and demands of the Queen's Men play, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*. Chapter 4 considers the play itself, its textual history and questions of interpretation and presentation. I then go on in chapter 5 to imagine a scenario in which the Queen's Men arrive at Stratford to give a performance of *The Troublesome Reign*, offering suggestions for staging, performance and their reception by an early modern Stratford audience. For the culmination of the project, in chapter 6 I discuss the rehearsal and performance of extracts of *The Troublesome Reign* in the Guildhall at Stratford with a company of student actors from the University of York, a process informed by the historical and literary research, and which in turn sheds new light on early modern performance.

## 2 – THE STATE OF PLAY

### 2.1 – SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

#### 2.1.1 – PROVINCIAL RECORDS

The broad aim of this chapter is to present the current state of knowledge and sources of evidence concerning the Queen’s Men, their plays and the places they visited. The foundations of this study are provided by the REED volumes produced by the University of Toronto. For the last three decades the REED project has worked to find, transcribe and publish all surviving evidence of theatrical performance and dramatic activity before the closing of the theatres in 1642. Some twenty-three volumes have been published, with numerous additional ones currently in progress.<sup>7</sup> There are inevitably gaps in the REED literature, not least from those areas and counties for which the records have not been collated and published, but what we do know ultimately relies on the survival and discovery of sometimes scattered records. Even for those counties whose records survive relatively intact, the possibility of missing a key event remains, and there is no guarantee that the REED project will ever provide a total and accurate depiction of drama across its chosen time frame. Critics of the series have attacked what Theresa Coletti notably termed REED’s ‘dream of wholeness’ (1991; 1990; cited in Holland 2004, 51), which inevitably prompted rebuttals from the project’s supporters (see Greenfield 1991, 1995; King 1995; King and Twycross 1995; Walker 1995). Yet even if, as Holland argues, REED’s dream of wholeness ‘is nothing more idealistic than finishing the project within the parameters it has established for itself’ (Holland 2004, 51), it is undeniable that the parameters have altered somewhat over the last twenty-five years, as methodologies in locating and selecting records of drama have developed and improved (Douglas and MacLean 2006a; Douglas and MacLean 2006b, 6, 13; Johnston 2006). This was highlighted by the recent publication of the *REED Cheshire* volume, which included a reissuing of Lawrence Clopper’s work on the records of Chester with additional records previously omitted (Baldwin *et al.* 2007; Clopper 1979). The project is also starting to embrace the digital age. Additions to David George’s *Lancashire* volume have been released as a digital download (George

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<sup>7</sup> A full list of published volumes, works in progress and their respective editors can be found at the REED website ([www.reed.utoronto.ca/collections.html](http://www.reed.utoronto.ca/collections.html)), while many volumes have been made available at the Internet Archive ([www.archive.org/search.php?query=records of early English drama AND collection:toronto](http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=records%20of%20early%20English%20drama%20AND%20collection:toronto)).

1991; Baldwin, George and Mills 2009), while the REED *Patrons and Performance* website, maintained by Sally-Beth MacLean and Alan Somerset, offers a searchable database of much published and unpublished material. The ongoing programme of updates and revisions serves to highlight the benefit of reinvestigating the resources in specific archives when investigating a more narrowly focussed project. Nevertheless, the REED volumes stand as the single most comprehensive and accessible data source for studies in medieval and early modern drama.

With respect to the Queen's Men and other sixteenth century touring theatre companies the majority of the REED records identify payments made on behalf of civic corporations and aristocratic families for performances given by licensed troupes affiliated with noble patrons. Consideration of these records offers great potential for tracking individual companies, and allows us to identify their preferred touring patterns and their economic prosperity. Sally-Beth MacLean first identified that companies followed predefined traditional touring circuits rather than haphazard wanderings (1993), while shortly afterwards Alan Somerset showed how the records could help illuminate the physical conditions and economics of touring (1994b). However, it was MacLean's detailed investigation of the Queen's Men that demonstrated how extensively the career of a touring company could be tracked (McMillin and MacLean 1998). MacLean's tabulation of payments rendered to the Queen's Men over their twenty-year career remains the fullest listing of a company's career (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 170-188).

McMillin and MacLean's treatment of the company's career is inevitably curtailed, however, as at the time of publication a number of areas significant for tracing the Queen's Men's perambulations, including Northumberland and the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire, had not yet had their records systematically investigated (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 57; 210 n. 67). Moreover, as noted above, where records do survive they are often piecemeal. The household accounts for the Stanleys, the most influential family in recusant Lancashire, cover only four years in this period. Nevertheless, they confirm the expectation that a company of the Queen's Men's standing would visit such a family. The company performed at three of the Stanleys' homes between 1588 and 1590 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 57-58; see Manley 2009). We can only speculate whether the company also visited these houses prior to or following this period, but there seems to be no obvious reason why the Queen's Men should have ceased to visit.

### 2.1.2 – THE PLAYS

The second substantial – but equally problematic – body of written evidence for early modern companies are the plays they presented during the course of their careers. All of the Queen’s Men plays that survive do so in published, printed forms. However, the publication of plays was a phenomenon that arose comparatively late, and as such the Queen’s Men are not well represented. The theatre of the 1580s ‘was an actors’ theatre, and publication had little place in it’ (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 84). Until the commercial success of Richard Jones’ venture in 1590, when he published Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* in two parts, companies and authors had rarely sought to publish their works in print. The reasons for doing so are not entirely clear. Companies may have believed that the availability of plays to read would reduce the demand for live performance (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 84); but this presumes an active reading public who would rather read a play than go see it. It might be more likely that in the 1580s there was simply not yet a demand for plays in print, or at least not one that was recognised until the success of *Tamburlaine*. Whatever the reasons, in the three years prior to the formation of the Queen’s Men, not one play from a commercial company had been published while in the following seven years there were only two (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 4, 84). From 1590, however, there was a sharp increase in the volume and regularity of publication, and as many as nineteen plays were published in the first five years of the decade. The majority of the surviving Queen’s Men plays date from around this time, ten years after the company’s formation, which suggests an attempt by the company to capitalise on an emerging and profitable market. That so few of the plays endure beyond a single edition may be an indication that the plays did not transfer well from stage to page (see Syme 2010, 491; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 84-86). If the company or the plays’ publishers realised the same they may have been reluctant to publish a wider range, and the remaining plays in the Queen’s Men repertory would have been lost. There is certainly evidence that the company performed plays that do not survive in print, as they are on record as having played four plays, now lost, at court – *Felix and Philomena*, *Five Plays in One*, *Phillyda and Corin*, and *Three Plays in One* – and there is evidence for others in the Stationers’ Register and contemporary reports (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 92-93).

Moreover, it is also difficult to say to what extent the published plays represent the staged performance. Stephen Orgel first questioned the assumption that there was a direct link between the surviving published texts and what was put on stage twenty

years ago (Orgel 2002). Any new play was required to be licensed by the Master of Revels, and it was from this 'allowed book' that any performed version of the play was drawn. Andrew Gurr points out that for the Chamberlain's/ King's Men, from whose half-century career one hundred and sixty-seven extant plays remain, only two of these licensed manuscripts survive (Gurr 2004a, 71). The transmission of performed play to printed text was a complicated process, involving revisions and unintentional changes, to the extent that 'almost no play texts survive from Shakespearean time in a form that represents with much precision what was actually staged' (Gurr 2004a, 71; see Holland and Orgel 2006). Given the Queen's Men's smaller output, especially when compared to that of the Chamberlain's/ King's, it is not surprising that no 'allowed book' of a Queen's Men play is known to have survived. The printed texts represent 'the most substantial relics of early performances' (Gurr 2004a, 72), but we must approach them with due caution.

Prior to the work of Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, more than twenty plays had at some point been assigned to the royal company, with many being assigned on the basis of speculation rather than firm evidence (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 86). When drawing up their own list, McMillin and MacLean were very aware that they were 'missing some good bets'. Their conservative approach ensured they took the title-page attribution of a published play or an explicit record of a play being performed by the company before publication as the only certain grounds for its belonging to the Queen's Men. With these strict controls, they produced a list of nine plays: *Clyomon and Clamydes*, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *King Leir*, *The Old Wives Tale*, *Selimus the Turk*, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*, and *True Tragedy of Richard III*. A second list amounts to an additional thirteen plays and includes those ascribed by other scholars to the Queen's Men. Most of these plays had been selected on the basis of an assumed relationship between the company and their publishers, particularly Thomas Creede, and/ or the connection between the company and the two playwrights Robert Wilson and Robert Greene. A further five (and possibly a sixth) have been lost, but are known from records kept of performances at Elizabeth's court, and from a report by Gabriel Harvey following a visit by the company to Oxford in 1585 or 1586 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 86-93; Gurr 1996, 210-11).

More recently, Roslyn Knutson has attempted to apply the dramaturgical 'house style' as suggested by the plays on McMillin and MacLean's first list onto contemporary plays

both listed in the second list and further afield (Knutson 2009). There are problems with this approach, not least because the imputed 'house' style – 'a medley style, a theatrical literalism, narrative over-determination, staging and versification' (Knutson 2009, 99) – better describes some Queen's Men plays than others. Knowing a play's publication date does not represent the date of its first performance, making comparisons between texts difficult. Authorship, if known, proves a two-edged sword, as while some playwrights have solid connections to the company, others worked for multiple troupes, and in such cases an author's name is no guarantee of the Queen's Men's ownership of a play. Ultimately, Knutson remains cautious. To McMillin's B list she is 'sorely tempted' to add the plays *Soliman and Perseda* (putatively by Kyd) and the anonymous *Edmund Ironside* (2009, 102-3), but refrains from over-committing.

### 2.1.3 – THE COMPANY AND ITS SHARERS

About the company's inception and its founding members, we know a little more. In the Revels Accounts from 1582/3 we find an entry recording travelling expenses of some twenty shillings incurred by the Master of the Revels as he responded to the summons of the Queen's Secretary of State, Francis Walsingham, to court: 'Edmond Tylney Esquire Master of the office being sente for to the Courte by Letter from Mr. Secretary dated the x<sup>th</sup> of Marche 1582. To choose out a companie of players for her maiestie' (Chambers 1923, ii, 104).<sup>8</sup> The Master of the Revels, a post Tilney had occupied since 1579, was charged with the organisation of the entertainments presented before the Queen at court. Tilney therefore knew the adult companies well, could judge the quality of their material and was well acquainted with the star players. As such he was well placed to cherry-pick the best actors in the country to join the Queen's company.

The new troupe initially comprised twelve master actors, drawn from the foremost companies of the day. We can say with some assurance that five men came from two of the prominent companies of the 1570-80s – Robert Wilson, John Lanham and William Johnson were previously Leicester's Men, while Richard Tarlton and John Adams had been in the troupe of Lord Sussex. A sixth, John Dutton, may have been connected with

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<sup>8</sup> In Britain, until 1752 the New Year was usually taken to start on 25 March (Cheney 2000, 13), meaning that while Walsingham's letter is dated 10 March 1582, in modern parlance this should read 10 March 1583. I will use modern dates throughout when discussing specific dates, although may use the older format when citing accounts whose precise dating is unclear.

Oxford's Men at some point, but certainly led Warwick's Men in 1575 (McMillin and Maclean 1998, 11-15; Stow 1615, 697). It is not known from where the remainder – John Bentley, Lionel Cooke, John Garland, Tobias Mills, John Singer, and John Towne – were drawn, although McMillin and MacLean speculated that Derby's Men may have provided a number (McMillin and Maclean 1998, 38, 205 n.6; see 194-97 and PQMd for further biographical information). The high regard in which these actors were held, even years after their deaths and the disbandment of the Queen's Men, is a testament to their skill and status. In his *Apology for Actors*, Thomas Heywood gives the following tribute

to do some right to our English Actors, as Knell, Bentley, Mils, Wilson, Crosse, Lanam, and others: these, since I neuer saw them, as being before my time, I cannot (as an eye-witnesse of their desert) giue them that applause, which no doubtte, they worthily merit, yet by the report of many iuditial auditors, their performance of many parts haue been so absolute, that it were a kinde of sinne to drowne their worths in Lethe... Heere I must needs remember Tarleton, in his time gracious with the Queene his soueraigne, and in the peoples generall applause (Heywood 1612, E2<sup>v</sup>).

In the Induction to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* the stage keeper reminisces that

I kept the Stage in Master Tarletons time, I thanke my staires. Ho! and that man had liv'd to have play'd in Bartholomew Fayre, you should ha' seene him ha' come in, and ha' beene coozened i' the Cloath-quarter, so finely! And Adames, the Rogue, ha' leap'd and caper'd upon him, and ha' dealt his vermine about, as though they had cost him nothing (Jonson 2007, 8).

The company's membership fluctuated over the course of its career. The company suffered a blow when its leader, Richard Tarlton, died suddenly in September 1588, and two further founding members, John Bentley and Tobias Mills, had also passed away in 1585. At various points numerous actors became sharers in the company, including John Cowper, Laurence Dutton, Francis Henslowe, Simon Jewel, William Knell, Robert Moon, and John Symons, and there may possibly have been others (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 194-97). The company's ranks would also have been swelled by actors hired for a short term to take on some of the lesser roles, and by



apprentices bonded to the master actors, although we lack much information about either.<sup>9</sup>

From the outset of their career, the Queen's Men dominated the world of Elizabethan drama, immediately becoming the favoured company at court and being granted unique privileges to rehearse and perform at venues in the capital (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 12-17, 45-46). But if the company enjoyed some success in the capital during the first decade of its career, it was not long before it faced stiff competition. After a failed season at the Rose with Sussex's Men in 1594, there is no record of the Queen's Men returning to the capital (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 41), but the company itself did not fail. For the next nine years it continued to do what it had done from the outset, successfully, and with great rewards: it toured the provinces. Far from being a reluctant response to the closure of London theatres at times of plague, touring was the Queen's Men's primary purpose. The company ranged far and wide across the country and beyond, travelling as far as Dublin and the Scottish court in Edinburgh in 1589 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 58; George 1991, 356), and performed in hundreds of towns and houses along the way. Life on the road was very much at the centre of the Queen's Men existence.

## 2.2 – ON THE ROAD

Sally-Beth MacLean has identified five key established routes which were already well-trodden in 1583 – the Earl of Leicester's Men in particular had been masters of the touring tradition, and it is likely that the majority of the actors in the Queen's Men had extensive experience of life on the road (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 18-21, 38). The circuits took in East Anglia, the southeast through Canterbury and the Cinque Ports, the southwest via Southampton and Dorset or Bristol, the Midlands with Coventry at the hub, the West Midlands along the Welsh borders, the northeast along the Great North Road or via Leicester, and the northwest reached from Coventry or Yorkshire (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 39-40).<sup>10</sup> Troupes often favoured particular routes, especially those around which their patron's name might encourage greater favour. The Earl of Oxford's

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<sup>9</sup> Tarlton had at least two apprentice actors, Phillip Woodward and Richard Haywarde (see Kathman 2009c); I shall return to the question of apprentices in chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> An extensive discussion of the growth, status, and social and political make up of early modern towns can be found in the second volume of the *Cambridge Urban History of Great Britain* (Clark 2000, ii).

Men, for example, toured mainly in the south and east until 1565, those areas being the principal spheres of influence of the de Vere family (MacLean 1993, 1, 9). The Queen's Men travelled much further than most (fig. 2), and their royal patronage helped ensure they were well received almost everywhere they went.

The key to success while touring was to maximise the number of performances – and payments – while keeping travel between destinations to a minimum. The choice of routes was primarily driven by the wish to reach the next town that offered the best opportunities for reward. A significant secondary factor was no doubt the conditions of the roads that joined towns together and the topography of the land in between (Greenfield 2002, 218). Road conditions were variable, and challenging terrains may have presented a slower and less appealing route. Peter Greenfield has suggested that Guildford and Farnham were often bypassed by companies due to the 'ruggedness' of the North Downs (Greenfield 2002, 218). While this may have been the case, Norbert Ohler (1989) has previously argued that travel increased during this period in spite of road conditions we might now assume prohibitive. Certainly, difficult terrain did not prevent companies making the effort to leave the main road from London to Southampton and detour several miles over considerable hills to visit Winchester. The prospect of significant financial reward may have outweighed the challenges of a difficult journey. Companies visiting Winchester could not only hope to perform for the city's mayor, from whom the Queen's Men received a reward of twenty shillings for each of their nine visits between 1589 and 1599, but also for the Dean and Chapter of Winchester Cathedral and the Masters and Warden of the wealthy College (Cowling 1993, 62; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 179-87). There may also have been an ideological motivation for the royal company making the detour. Winchester was a city noted for its high level of recusancy and Catholic sympathy, and for a company dedicated to promoting the policies of the monarch and emphasising her Protestantism it would have been important to stop in those places whose religious or political leanings did not align with royal expectations (see Paul 1959; Walsham 1993).

Within three months of their formation the Queen's Men left the capital, negotiating the popular route through East Anglia that encompassed Kirtling, Norwich, Aldeburgh and Ipswich. The earliest record for a performance is an entry for 3 – 4 June in the household account book of Lord North, at whose home in Kirtling, near Cambridge, the Queen's Men received twenty shillings (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 41). Around

eleven days later the company were received at the city of Norwich, where they were rewarded a sum of forty shillings by the corporation (Galloway 1984, 65-76).

### **2.2.1 – THE RED LION, NORWICH, 1583**

It is most frequently the case that throughout this period entries such as these are the only surviving evidence to indicate the presence of a travelling company. They allow modern scholars to join the geographical dots that provide a wider picture of the routes companies followed throughout the kingdom, and by noting the value of rewards compare the economic success of vying troupes. In rare instances, however, a heavier footprint is left. On the afternoon of 15 June 1583 the Queen's Men were performing at the Red Lion Inn when a local man by the name of Windson attempted to gain entry without paying the admission fee. The gate keeper, who may have been John Singer (Keenan 2002, 99), refused him, and the disturbance caused a number of the Queen's Men to join in the affray, as well as one over-enthusiastic member of the audience, Henry Brown. The three actors, Richard Tarlton, John Bentley and John Singer, made to eject Windson, with Bentley striking the recalcitrant Windson repeatedly with his sword and Henry Brown joining in. Windson fled, but in the pursuit that followed his servant, George, was killed by a blow from Brown's sword (Galloway 1984, 70-6; Keenan 2002, 99-105).

Henry Brown was arrested and imprisoned, but the actors were released on bail and summoned to appear at court the following September. They failed to do so, forfeiting the bonds raised on their behalves by Norwich businessmen, and leaving Brown to face the law alone. He, admitting his guilt, sought 'benefit of the clergy' to avoid a possible death sentence (Galloway 1984, 378-81). The actors bore no further reprisals, and the Queen's Men were welcomed back the following year (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 175) – no doubt it was deemed unwise to prosecute the Queen's servants further, especially since Brown had confessed his guilt and shouldered the blame.

The episode serves to emphasise the company's reliance on 'getting a good gate' (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 42). The players' prompt and vigorous reaction was the product of the precarious economic nature of touring, and the need to ensure all due income was received. Of the three actors who intervened, one, Singer, may have already been by the entrance, but at least one other, John Bentley, and possibly Tarlton as well, had been performing at the time of the outbreak and stopped the show to join

the affray. Defending business interests evidently outweighed any notion that ‘the show must go on’.

The Red Lion incident is noteworthy as much for its rarity as for its detailed record of events, which survives through the depositions taken from witnesses and subsequent court examinations. Others have discussed elsewhere whether this incident was an example of falling ‘respect’ for the players and, more importantly, their patrons (Keenan 2002, 99-106; see Gurr 1996, 203), but lack of comparative evidence makes for a rather anecdotal argument. It may well have been that interruptions such as those made by Windson were a normal occurrence, easily incorporated into the performance and dealt with the players in character as an *ex situ* improvisation with no further ramifications. We know from several instances that provincial play-going could be a vigorous and rowdy affair. In June 1589 the Master and merchants of St John the Baptist’s Hall, York, (now known as the Merchant Taylors’ Hall), banned all players from using the hall, its furniture or furnishings (Giles 2000, 44), while the Stratford-upon-Avon Corporation had to spend 16 *d.* repairing a ‘forme’ or bench broken by the Queen’s Men during a visit in 1587/8 (Savage 1929, 31). By July 24 1592, the York Corporation had evidently had enough of such incidents, announcing:

And whereas the doores, lockes, keyes, wyndowes, bordes, benches and other buildings of the Common Hall are greatlye impared and hurtt and diverse of the same broken, shakne, lowst and ryven up by the people reparinge to se and heare plays. It is theirfore nowe agreed by theis presente that no Players shalbe permitted to playe anye manner of playes, either in the same Common Hall or in St. Anthony’s Halle at anye tyme or tymes hereafter (York Minute Book Vol. 30, f.340, cited in Rosenfeld 2001, xvii).

If plays and play-going were as unruly as such records suggest, we might think that disputes like that which arose at the Red Lion may not have been uncommon, but presumably settled without much trouble. At Norwich, however, matters escalated too far, and it was the death of Windson’s servant, George, that caused this particular dispute to be recorded.

The Red Lion affair also leaves us a rare record of a performance in a public space. Inn performances are commonly assumed to have been a regular occurrence in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, but finding solid evidence is a more difficult task. Only some

twenty specific references to inn-playing have been uncovered (Keenan 2002, 87-90). The problem in identifying such records lies in the manner in which companies were paid. Every payment to the Queen's Men noted in McMillin and MacLean's appendix was made under the auspices of either civic authorities, aristocratic households, cathedral Dean and Chapters or the universities at Oxford and Cambridge, as well as one additional entry for a payment made by Philip Henslowe for the company's spell at the Rose Theatre on 1 to 8 April 1594. These are all institutions that by and large kept good records and accounts. On the other hand, no record survives to suggest that players were paid by inn-keepers, and companies evidently did not keep a close record of income for ticket sales, nor of the venues they played. Trying to identify the venues in which the Queen's Men performed is not always easy, and while there is sufficient evidence that survives to suggest a wide range of venue types they might have played, connecting the company to specific venues and buildings is somewhat more difficult.

## **2.3 – PLAYING SPACES**

### **2.3.1 – REGULATION**

Companies were not allowed free rein to travel the country and perform where they willed. The Elizabethan government viewed travelling subjects with sensitivity and some suspicion, particularly larger bands of men that drew crowds to inns and threatened disorder (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 13). The regulation of players and performance had grown steadily in the early half of Elizabeth's reign. In 1559 a royal proclamation forbade

all maner interludes to be played either openly or privately, except the same be notified beforehand, and licensed within any city or towne corporate by the mayor or other chief officers of the same, and within any shire by such as shall be lieutenants for the Queen's majesty in the same shire, or by two of the justices of peace inhabiting within that part of the shire where any shall be played (Hughes and Larkin 1969, 115-16).

Further tightening of restrictions were enforced through the 1572 'Acte for the Punishement of Vacabondes', which prohibited any company from operating without the patronage of a noble lord, stating that any player

not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable Personage of a greater Degree; [...] whiche [...] shall wander abroad and have not Lycense [...] shalbee taken and adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars (Chambers 1923, iv, 269-70).

Players infringed these laws at their peril, and faced prosecution or even imprisonment. In 1583 a row between a Kentish Justice of the Peace, Thomas Potter, and a group of players who claimed to travel with the licence of Sir Walter Waller but could not produce the warrant to prove it, escalated to the point where, in spite of the intervention of Sir Walter himself, the case was taken before Sir Francis Walsingham and the Privy Council (Keenan 2002, 5-6).

On arriving in a new town, the company were bound to first seek permission to play from the civic authorities. It is not clear whether permission was granted at the outset, after which the company would then perform for the guildsmen of the town corporation, or whether the company gave a performance in order to procure permission to play again and elsewhere in the town. If a company was refused permission outright they were usually paid off and instructed to leave the town, as were Worcester's Men at York on 1 July 1595 (Johnston and Rogerson 1979, i, 464). In other cases companies were prohibited from performing for the council but were permitted to play in private houses – Lord Willoughby's Men were so restricted in York on 21 November 1595 (Johnston and Rogerson 1979, i, 464-5).

Siobhan Keenan describes the licensing process as a company presenting themselves to the town authorities, being granted license to play, and subsequently performing before the mayor and council in the town hall, at which other citizens were also welcome (Keenan 2002, 15). However, the report on which Keenan bases this order of events may not be a reliable indication of wider provincial practices, and given the time gap between its publication and the events described the account might not be as accurate as has been widely accepted (Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 362). The report is that of R. Willis, who in 1639 published a description of a play held at Gloucester's Bothall when he was a child in the 1570s. Willis describes that

when Players of Enterludes come to towne, they first attend the Mayor to enforme him what noble-mans servants they are, and so to get licence for their publike playing; and if the Mayor like the Actors, or would shew respect to their Lord and Master, he appoints them to play their first play

before himself and the Aldermen and common Counsell of the City; and that is called the Mayors play, where every one that will comes in without money, the Mayor giving a reward as hee thinks fit (Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 362-3).

However, in York the sequence of licensing and first performance may have been different. A statute in the House Books of 1582 states that

And now it is agreed by these presentes that players of Interludes now come, and comyng from hencforth to this cittie shall play but twice in the common hall of this cyttie viz: once before the Lord maior and aldermen &c. and thither before the commons (Johnston and Rogerson 1979, 399).

This would seem to support the argument that the first performance may itself have constituted part of the licensing process, after which the visiting company was able to perform to a wider audience.

The licensing process was an important feature of touring practice. The command mayoral performance demonstrated the mayor and council's authority, even over players in the service of the monarch. Although the Queen's Men were turned away less than most, and usually because of plague (see Greenfield 1997, 252), the process of licensing served to insist that in town matters immediate authority lay with the civic powers. It also provided the players with mayoral endorsement, which might help support subsequent performances. Importantly for authorities concerned with disorder, the setting created 'an aura of proper decorum appropriate to performance in the town's seat of government', while containing the performance within a supervised and controlled space, and allowed the authorities to scrutinize the content of performances (Tittler 1991, 143-4).

Following the mayoral performance companies were free to remain in the town for a period and give further performances. As we have seen, these may have taken place in the same venue as the mayoral performance, or the company may have chosen to perform at private houses or inns. Some councils sought to restrict the number of days and performances a company could make. On 3 November 1580 the Gloucester Council sought to restrict the 'great sums of money' spent by its townsfolk on performances and to control the distraction travelling players evidently caused for many in the servant and apprentice classes (MacLean 2009, 51; see Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 306-7). The regulation of visiting troupes restricted the number of performances

permitted within the town boundaries. The Queen's players were allowed three performances in as many days; those players with the patronage of a baron or higher were permitted to perform twice in two days; while those with a lower-ranking patron could perform but once (Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 306-7).<sup>11</sup> While this might appear to be a useful guideline for the number of days the Queen's Men spent in a town, we should be wary of assuming the Gloucester restrictions were ubiquitous, particularly when we consider that Lord Willoughby's Men were explicitly granted permission to perform in York private houses for three or four days (Johnston and Rogerson 1979, i, 464-5).

### 2.3.2 – VENUES

Although it is impossible to state unreservedly that a company's mayoral performance would always have taken place in the town or guild hall, it would be very tempting to do so. Alan Somerset's interim survey strongly suggests that companies like the Queen's Men had a preference for indoor locations (Somerset 1994b). However, very few records for the royal company link a civil reward with an identifiable building. Only Canterbury's Court Hall, Norwich's 'New' Hall, York's Common Hall and the guild halls at Abingdon, Bristol and Leicester are explicitly mentioned (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 67-8). On the other hand, Keenan's survey of the fifteen REED collections published at the time of her study identifies one hundred and sixty performances in a named location, of which one hundred and twenty name the local civic hall (Keenan 2002, 24). John Wasson has also noted that 'virtually every borough town for which we have records identifies the guild hall as the normal playing place if any site is mentioned at all' (Wasson 1984, 6). It is therefore reasonable to acknowledge McMillin and MacLean's conservatism but to agree on the rule of thumb that civic performances were made in civic spaces. This naturally raises questions about the composition of the audiences at such performances, to which I shall return in chapter five.

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<sup>11</sup> The Gloucester records pre-empt the formation of the royal company by three years, but it is unclear whether it does so out of an expectation such a company would inevitably be formed, or rather as an automatic gradation of royal versus noble rights (see Ostovich *et al.* 2009b, 13 and n. 38). That said, an earlier company does seem to have operated under the Queen's name between 1558 and 1574 (see MacLean and Somerset, *Patrons and Performances*), which would make the council's assumption less surprising.



After performing before the mayor the company was free to play to the wider public. Occasionally the players remained at the town hall to stage further performances (see Somerset 1994a, 685). More often companies moved to inns, churchyards, and other open-air public spaces for their additional performances, as well as private houses, schoolhouses and university halls. Explicit evidence for playing in inns is not extensive, largely because only controversial performances were likely to be recorded, although there is sufficient incidental mention of inns as playing venues, particularly in regional civic ordinances, to suggest they were a staple venue of travelling players (Keenan 2002, 91-2). That the Queen's Men played at the Red Lion Inn, Norwich, has already been noted, even if the incident does little to shed light on how the inn was organised for the performance. However, we might gain a better idea of inn-yard playing by considering two former inns which had been converted for permanent use as venues for playing in London, namely the Bull at Bishopsgate Street and the Bell on Gracechurch Street (see Kathman 2009a; 2009b).

During their early days of residency in London, the Queen's Men were granted a license by the London Court of Aldermen, dated 28 November 1583, permitting the players to play on certain days at the Bull and the Bell and nowhere else until the following Shrovetide, 3 March 1584 (Kathman 2009b, 158; Berry 2000, 300; Chambers 1930, 314-15). The posthumous *Tarlton's Jestes* provides a number of anecdotal records of the eponymous clown, who had been first one of Leicester's Men and later leader of the Queen's Men, performing at these venues. Among these is the story how 'at the Bull in Bishops-gate-street, where the queenes players oftentimes played, Tarlton comming on the stage, one from the gallery threw a pippin at him' (Halliwell-Phillips 1844, 13-14). Subsequent entries remark how Tarlton took a second role as a judge 'in a play of Henry the Fifth' at the Bull in addition to his usual clown's role, and how Tarlton left the Bell after playing his part to see 'Banks and his famous trained horse Morocco' performing at the adjacent Cross Keys (Kathman 2009b, 158).

Exactly how galleried inns would have been used by players is uncertain, complicated further by the lack of specific evidence for their layout in the period. A 1574 Act of London's Common Council alluded to crowds attending plays 'In greate Innes, havinge chambers and secrete places adioyninge to their open stagies and gallyries' (Chambers 1931, 292), but Glynne Wickham suggests that the use of the term 'open' as frequently indicated open to the public as open-air, and John Orrell suggests galleries could equally be internal (Orrell 1988, 10; see Sisson 1972, 14). Jean Wilson finds parallels

with this idea in the internal galleries of contemporary tennis courts; however, her anticipation of the later conversion of tennis courts into theatres after the reopening of the playhouses in the 1650s rather puts the Restoration cart before the Elizabethan horse (Wilson 1995, 31; 187 n. 34; see Wickham 1959-81, ii.ii, 93-4). Wickham was of the belief that open-air inn-yards were unsuitable for performance of plays (1959-81, ii.i, 186). Yet despite the mutual inconvenience caused by players, playgoers and the other patrons at an inn – of noise and through-traffic – there is incontrovertible evidence that performances occurred in these spaces (Kathman 2009a; 2009b; Rowan 1992). David Kathman has suggested that the arrangement of the three inn-yards at the Bull would have eased the logistical constraints by situating plays in the rearmost yard (2009b, 161). While interruptions may have been a concern to visiting players they were evidently capable of coping with such challenges as they arose – the Red Lion incident and the anecdotes in *Tarlton's Jests* surely indicate the actors' versatility in dealing with interference. It does not stand to reason to believe, as Jean Wilson does, that the 'inconvenience' such performances caused the landlord and other inn patrons would have made such venues less popular (see Wilson 1995, 29-30), given that the success of inns as venues for theatre caused the London authorities to attempt to close down many and tightly regulate the survivors (Kathman 2009b, 154-6). Whether in London or the provinces, we could envisage that the landlord might share a proportion of the company's takings, or be happy with the additional custom the additional entertainment encouraged.

If the Queen's Men were still in search of an alternative venue, they may have looked to spaces owned by the church. Performances throughout the period occurred in churchyards, indoor ecclesiastical spaces, church houses and even on one occasion a vicarage (Keenan 2002, 45; Wasson 1986, 234, 244). Until recently churches have been largely ignored as locations for professional playing, based on the belief that plays would have been considered 'entirely inappropriate in the official institution of religious worship' in 'an age when the theatre was often viewed as a kind of anti-church' (White 1993, 16; cited in Keenan 2002, 45-6). However, given that order 88 of the 1604 Church Canons forbade 'plays, feasts, banquets, suppers, church ales, drinkings, temporal courts or leets, lay-juries, musters or any other profane usage, to be kept in the church, chapel or church-yard' (Dymond 1999, 484) it suggests all the activities listed were not, in fact, as uncommon as church authorities would have liked. Tensions between church and entertainment certainly existed. As early as 1569 the City of London had complained that its citizens had gone 'to here and see certayne

stage plays, enterludes and other disguisinges, on the Saboth days and other solempne feastes commanded by the church to be kept holy' (Chambers 1923, iv, 267).

Yet we should not assume that religion-inspired antipathy towards plays and playing was a universal phenomenon. In 1583/4 the Puritan Alderman of Stratford-upon-Avon, Nicholas Barnhurst, rewarded both players and itinerant preachers (Clark *et al.* 2006, 24; Savage 1926, 136). It is unlikely that a Puritanical preacher would have endorsed or condoned the performance of plays, and one might expect the town to follow the direction of its favoured preachers. But provincial religious sensitivities were often more complex. At Stratford the council was late to get rid of 'papist' images in the Guild Chapel and was known to be a hotbed of recusancy and declared Papists (Mulryne 2007, 12; Hughes 1997, 97). The role of plays and play-going in a period of rising religious tension is an important one, and while recent studies have focussed on Shakespeare's supposed Catholicism (see Rist 1999; Richmond 2000; White 2008; Groves 2007, 4-5), when we turn to examine Stratford in later chapters we will see that the discussion of religion and provincial playing demands a more nuanced appraisal of local religious and civic attitudes.

Religion and theatre may have been uneasy bedfellows at times, but specific legislation aimed at preventing the use of religious spaces by players had not taken effect during the period when the Queen's Men were active. Nevertheless, only two ecclesiastical spaces are named as venues for their performances, one at Gloucester Cathedral Churchyard in 1590 and twice at Sherbourne Church House in 1597 and 1598 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 68, 76). However, in the same way that we should assume that mayoral performances took place in civic halls, we might expect that the performances the Queen's Men gave to the Deans and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral and York Minster would have taken place in the Cathedral precincts or inside the buildings themselves. It is also possible that companies may have played in the private lodgings of the cathedral canons. In 1582/3 the Earl of Essex's Men were paid two shillings by the Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral 'when they woude haue played in Mr Deanes howse', while an unnamed troupe were rewarded by York Minster for performing 'at Mr Doctor Bennittes', the Canon Chancellor (Clopper 1979, 135; Johnston and Rogerson 1979, 484). There is, however, no evidence for how plays were staged in these locations.

We might surmise that open-air performance in cathedral precincts potentially offered a more lucrative space, being able to host a larger audience. At Norwich it was usual to

construct galleried seating to house civic and ecclesiastical luminaries during public sermons, for which an entrance fee was charged (Keenan 2002, 49). Sir Thomas Browne described the yard:

The mayor and aldermen, with their wives and officers, had a well-contrived place built against the wall of the Bishop's palace, covered with lead so they were not offended by rain. Upon the north side of the church, places were built gallery wise, one above another, where the dean, prebendaries and their wives, gentlemen, and the better sort, very well heard the sermon: the rest either stood or sat in the green, upon long forms provided for them, paying a penny or half-penny a-piece (cited in Quennell 1898, 43).

This would have been an attractive space for visiting players, not only for the potential for greater income at the gate but for staging. An eyewitness account of the Queen's Men's stop at Shrewsbury in July 1590 – the same tour that also stopped at Gloucester Cathedral – describes the spectacular acrobatics of one member of the company:

he shewyd woonderfull feates and knackes in fallinge his head and handes downewardes and hangid at the roape by his feete and assendid vp agayne and after that hangid by his handes and all his feete and bodye downewardes and turnid hys body backward & forward betwyxt his handes & the rope as nymbell as yf it had been an eele in sutche woonderfull maner that the licke was neuer seene of the inhabitantes there before that tyme (cited in McMillin and MacLean 1998, 63)

We might expect that such a performance would have required a larger performance space than was offered by many indoor venues, and cathedral precincts would have offered a suitable alternative.

The clergy were not alone in hosting performances in their private houses. The Queen's Men posted flyers advertising a performance at a private house in Chesterton, near Cambridge, despite being paid not to play by the University authorities (Nelson 1988, i, 342-3). More usually, though, performances are recorded at elite aristocratic houses. Payments to visiting companies are recorded in household account books much in the same way as with civic corporation accounts, and as with civic performances specific spaces are not specified. Nevertheless, it was normal to host entertainments in the 'great' hall or its nearest equivalent (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 79; see Heal 1990). It

is reasonable to assume that this was true for the list of aristocratic houses visited by the Queen's Men, which includes the Cavendish home at Chatswood and Bess of Hardwick's new Hall in Derbyshire; the Clifford home at Londesborough in the East Riding; the Stanley homes at Knowsley, Lathom and New Park, all in Lancashire; Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire and Winkburn, Nottinghamshire, both residences of the Manners family; the Berkeley seat at Caludon Castle, Warwickshire; and the home of Sir Francis Willoughby at Wollaton in Nottinghamshire (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 79-80). Very few of these houses have survived the collective forces of time, civil war and the renovations and rebuildings that were the product of their fashion-conscious owners (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 217 n. 139; see Pevsner and Wedgwood 1966, 281; Pevsner 1970, 420; 1979, 275-9; 1984, 82, 95-100; Doubleday *et al.* 1904-69, viii, 121-2) Only one of these ten grand houses remains more or less as it would have stood at the turn of the seventeenth century: Hardwick Hall, home of Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury. The house, built in anticipation of a royal progress that never materialised, was not complete at the time of the Queen's Men's first visit in September 1596, so it is likely they would have performed in the great hall of Old Hardwick Hall, now a crumbling ruin in the keeping of English Heritage. By the time the company returned at the end of September 1600 all building and decoration works had been completed, so it seems probable that performances would have been held in the High Great Chamber (see Girouard 1996, 56; McMillin and MacLean 185, 187, 217-8 n. 140). The house, now in the hands of the National Trust, has been maintained largely unchanged since it was built, although subject to the layers of heritage-based interpretation that often accompanies the opening of such houses to the general public. Nevertheless, the house and its great hall offer a future study a great resource for examining touring players.<sup>12</sup>

University colleges and schools were also regular hosts to travelling players. The links between texts of Elizabethan drama and academic curricula have been well

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<sup>12</sup> It was initially intended that Hardwick Hall be a case study in this thesis, but was held back once the full scope of the project became clear. The house is fortunate to boast a full inventory made in 1601 (Boyton and Thornton 1971) and an extensive archive, held at Chatsworth House, which was in the process of being examined for REED by the late Barbara Palmer but has not been published (see Palmer 2005; 2009). There is a strong connection between the halls of Elizabethan and Jacobean great houses and the indoor London theatres, which is discussed in the forthcoming *Moving Shakespeare Indoors* volume (Gurr and Karim-Cooper; Greenfield and McCurdy; Jones; all forthcoming; see Girouard 1983; 2009; Mowl 1993). However, there is still need for an extensive further study, to which I hope to be able to return.

established, and scholars are starting to investigate the relationship between performance and pedagogy (see Potter 2004; Enterline 2006; Green 2009; Moncrief and McPherson 2011). Classical drama was learned and performed both in the grammar schools and at the universities, where academic performances had been a regular feature since the early fifteenth century (Potter 2004, 150, 154-6; Boas 1914, 3-4, 25; Elliott Jr. 1997, 641). The hall at Trinity College, Cambridge, hosted numerous performances by its students from around 1546 until it was rebuilt between 1602 and c. 1608 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 77). The payment of thirty shillings made to the Queen's Men in 1587 does not reveal whether they performed in the hall itself. Had they done so, they might have worked within a uniform plan:

All [college halls] were substantial rectangular rooms with distinctive upper and lower ends. In general, doors to the outside were often separated from the body of the hall by a light wooden wall called "the screens", normally in three panels defining two openings. When the screens passage was covered, as was usually the case, the natural result was a gallery above, overlooking the hall... At the upper end of the hall was generally a single door through which persons of higher standing entered the hall, and a wooden platform – the dais – raised perhaps a foot above the hall floor. This upper end dais was usually reserved for the dining table of college dignitaries and guests (Nelson 1994, 5).

This layout had its roots in the medieval hall spaces found across the country, and was echoed in other educational spaces. For example, the hall at Winchester College stands almost identical to Nelson's description, though it lacks a rear entry to the dais end and the gallery has since been removed. There has been some confusion over what travelling players visited the school and when. The Queen's players alluded to by Keenan performed at the college in 1568/9 and 1570/1, well before the formation of the Queen's Men proper (see Cowling 1993, 62; Keenan 2002, 107-8). However, as Jane Cowling was unable to access a large proportion of records kept at the college while undertaking her survey there may well be substantial evidence as yet unexamined (Cowling 1993, 5). The Queen's Men certainly visited the Free School, Bristol in 1589/90, with a performance that included a rope-walking act. They may have performed inside the sixteenth-century school buildings, no longer extant, or else in the yard outside (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 76, 215 n. 123; Price 1979, 17).

Finally, the companies could be summoned to perform at court. The Queen's Men dominated court drama for the first three years of their career. Performances by the royal company accounted for 79% of all those given by adult companies between 1583 and 1586, when between 1578 and 1583 three companies gave 63% of performances, and two companies accounted for 75% of performances between 1572 and 1578 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 16). Most performances during Elizabeth's reign were held in the old Banqueting House at Whitehall, a large hall in the shape of a 'long square' measuring three hundred and thirty-two feet in circumference (Gurr 1992, 164). Standing forty feet high and containing some two hundred and ninety-two glass windows that would have done something to combat the 'murk of winter', the building was eventually pulled down and rebuilt by James I in 1607 (Gurr 1992, 164). As the Jacobean Banqueting House in turn burnt down and was replaced by the surviving building designed by Inigo Jones, it is difficult to say exactly how the Elizabethan space was organised. We know that during the winter months it housed the temporary staging and tiered seating erected for the performances held over the Christmas season. The Elizabethan hall may have been similar in size and feature to its Jacobean replacement, although perhaps without some of the costly excess James lavished on his building. The Jacobean hall had 'pillars support[ing] galleries along the east, north and west sides, under which scaffolding for the 'degrees' or tiers was installed by the Revels Office when a play was to be put on. The seating was partitioned into boxes, and the stage was set at one end' (Gurr 1992, 164). While this is not direct evidence for its Elizabethan predecessor, the Jacobean hall would have been based on the earlier setup and we might make a relatively safe comparison.

Court performances were not confined to Whitehall, and frequently players were required to attend the monarch at one of their other London palaces. Both Elizabeth and later James hosted performances at the royal palaces at Hampton Court, Richmond and Greenwich (Astington 2009, 308-11). The evidence for court performances collated from the Revels Accounts by McMillin and MacLean reveal that the Queen's Men in fact only appeared at Whitehall six times, while the bulk of their court appearances were at Greenwich – seventeen times – while they made three trips to Richmond and a single visit to Hampton Court (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 175-88). Of these venues only Hampton Court remains, although the hall in which plays were staged has not received as much attention from scholars as the later Whitehall theatres

(see Astington 1999, 63-4).<sup>13</sup> The site of Greenwich palace is now occupied by the Royal Naval Hospital and Maritime Museum, housed in later seventeenth-century buildings designed by Inigo Jones and John Webb, which reveal no further details of the nature of the sixteenth century royal palace.

The Queen's Men were rewarded lavishly for their court performances, receiving £20 for performing three plays in their first season, £40 for four plays the following year, and another £70 over the next two (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 175-7). While on tour, the company could expect rewards to be generous, if not in the same league as those of the Queen. However, their financial success demanded careful management and organisation.

#### 2.4 – FINANCES

A company's patronage did much to help smooth the wheels on the road to success, but it was not always sufficient to keep a company afloat. The Queen's Men were afforded wages and liveries as grooms of the queen's chamber (Stowe 1615, 697), but the company members were expected to shoulder the brunt of the running costs themselves. The risks of failure were high. If a company failed to cover its expenses it collapsed. In his letter to Edward Alleyn dated 28 September 1593, the theatre impresario Philip Henslowe recorded that the Earl of Pembroke's Men had not made sufficient money on the road and had been forced to sell their costumes and theatrical gear to cover their debts:

As for my lorde a penbrockes wch you desire to knowe wheare they be they are all at home and hauffe ben t[his] v or six weackes for they cane not saue ther carges [w]<sup>th</sup> trauell as I heare & weare fayne to pane the[r] parell for ther carge (Henslowe 1961, 280).

Luckily, the Queen's company held a certain advantage. The Gloucester ordinance that regulated the number of days companies were permitted to stay and perform in the city, and which allowed the royal company the greatest number of opportunities, gives

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<sup>13</sup> The *Staging the Henrician Court* project investigated the performance of Tudor drama at Hampton Court through a performance of John Heywood's *The Play of the Weather* in 2009, but focus of the project seems to have been fixed markedly on the play rather than the building in which it was performed (SHC).



an indication of the preferred treatment the Queen's Men could expect around the country. This preference can also be seen in the size of rewards assigned by councils. In their first year the Queen's Men received 30s. at Gloucester, compared to the Earl of Oxford's Men, who were paid 16s. 8d., and Lord Stafford's Men, who received 10s. (Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 308). This sum was frequently matched elsewhere – McMillin and MacLean's appendix gives an average payment of 33s. 6d. during their first year (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 175). Affiliation with Elizabeth also accounts for the relative infrequency with which the Queen's Men were paid not to play – a ploy used by civic and university authorities to maintain public order or demonstrate religious antitheatricity, amongst others – as they were turned away only seven times, at a rate of 1.7%, where the national average was to be refused 5% of the time (Greenfield 1997, 252). Of these, three of the seven incidents can be linked to Cambridge University, 'an institution which was... hostile to popular theatre generally and to the Queen's Men specifically' (Ostovich *et al.* 2009b, 27). Cambridge aside, the company was almost guaranteed to be allowed to play.

The day-to-day running of the Queen's Men was an expensive business. The company had twelve founder members but it was normal to increase the base number with boy apprentices and hired men, and McMillin and MacLean expect that the inflated troupe would number between sixteen to twenty (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 60-1). However, for the majority of the first ten years of the company's career it appears the company split into two branches, as payments to the company are logged in the account books of distant towns either on the same date or with too short a time difference to allow the company to travel from one side of the country to another (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 211 n. 80). How this affected the numbers of the company is uncertain. McMillin and MacLean suggest the company divided evenly and without hiring additional actors, imagining two companies with six principal actors and a few hired men or boys, numbering eight to ten (1998, 61). However, the casting demands of the surviving Queen's Men plays suggest that when the troupe split to follow different circuits they would have had to make up numbers with additional hired hands. While splitting might offer a way to increase profits, McMillin and MacLean's suggestion that they would double income 'without entailing a similar increase in road expenses' is perhaps over-optimistic.

William Ingram has estimated that touring costs would run to between thirty-two and forty shillings a day for a group of sixteen and twenty actors (Ingram 1993, 57-62).

Even though the Queen's Men received more generous rewards than competing companies, normally running around 20 to 40 shillings in the first decade of their career, it is clear that additional income was needed in order to be profitable. We know that companies sometimes took supplementary donations over and above the initial reward offered by the civic authorities – the 1582/3 entry for the Leicester Chamberlains' Accounts notes the town's official contribution with the phrase 'more than was gathered' (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 206 n.16) – and we know that the Queen's Men took money at the gate to the Red Lion, Norwich on 15 July 1583. Companies were resourceful in arranging further performances. Even when banned from playing in Cambridge by the main University authorities, the Queen's Men arranged to perform for the mayor in 1584 and 1592, and at Trinity College in 1592. They also disregarded prohibitions by posting flyers advertising a performance at a private house in nearby Chesterton (Nelson 1988, i, 311, 313, 338, 319, 337, 342-3).

The smaller rewards recorded in the household accounts of the Cliffords, Earls of Cumberland, of the Cavendishes and of Bess of Hardwick, might at first seem less welcome than the more substantial donations offered in towns. The Cliffords and Cavendishes received companies of players thirty-seven times during the 1590s at their houses at Skipton Castle and Londesborough, Chatsworth and Hardwick Hall respectively, paying an average ten shillings, while the twenty-five equivalent visits made to York and Doncaster during the same period were on average rewarded with thirty shillings (Palmer 2009, 35). However, the small payments made by private houses were supplemented with substantial allowances for 'keep', including board and lodging for both the players and any horses they brought with them and quantities of candles and coal to light and warm their accommodation (Palmer 2009, 28-9).

Yet generous hospitality was not always confined to private houses. Civic account books record payments 'for drinckinge to welcome' the Queen's Men at Dover in 1586/7 'and for their breakfaste at their departure', while at Fordwich in 1591/2 16 *d.* was spent on horsemeat and beer to feed the players (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 176, 182). Similar records of expenditure on refreshments, most commonly wine, make regular if infrequent appearance. Whether these incidents are representative of unusual generosity on the behalf of the host corporation or unusual conscientiousness by the recording clerk is difficult to say. It should be noted that where the expenditure on hospitality was substantial, as at Dover in 1586/7, it came in addition to a large

reward – 10s. 6d. was spent on refreshments and breakfast for the company on top of a 40s. reward.

By visiting both towns and aristocratic houses companies maximised the likelihood of playing and guaranteed a higher income. Any additional hospitality they received was undoubtedly a useful bonus. Aristocratic houses might not have rewarded the Queen's Men quite as highly as the larger towns and cities, and there may have been fewer opportunities to play elsewhere afterwards compared to visits to towns. But on the long road between Leicester and Kendal, where the Queen's Men played in the summer of 1593, pausing midway to visit the Cavendish family at Chatsworth House would have seemed an obvious decision (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 183). Nevertheless, the company did not visit places due only to financial imperative. The foundation of the company was ideologically motivated, and the Queen's Men were expected to play a prominent role in maintaining the royal presence throughout a turbulent kingdom.

## **2.5 – GOVERNMENT AND REALPOLITIK: THE QUEEN'S MEN AS A POLITICAL ENTITY**

The formation of the Queen's Men came during a period of complicated power shifts in the government of Elizabethan England. The political backdrop to the English Renaissance was 'dominated by international conflict, dynastic questions, religious tension and economic confusion' (Jones 2002, 13). By 1583, after twenty-five years on the throne, Elizabeth was unmarried, without an apparent heir, and swiftly approaching fifty. The greatest political question of the time was the matter of succession to the throne, for bound up in that problem were issues of war, peace, religion and economics (Jones 2002, 14). Influential nobles grew increasingly concerned and started to court potential successors. Believing that 'her Majesty could not live above a year or two', the Earl of Essex opened lines of communication with King James VI of Scotland in the late 1580s (Hammer 1999, 92), while the presence of James' mother and Elizabeth's cousin, the exiled Mary Queen of Scots, had caused problems since her arrival in England in 1568. The Duke of Norfolk was executed in 1572 after his persistent attempts to marry Mary, and her Catholicism was a standard around which recusant English Catholics continued to rally until February 1587, when Mary was eventually executed for encouraging a Catholic coup d'état. In 1583, therefore, Elizabeth's position was established but her legacy was not, and maintaining

control of her country and her subjects required subtle and substantial skill. It is out of this environment that the Queen's Men were born.

The motivations behind the company's inception have been widely debated. While in the 1580s London's city authorities called for restrictions on 'an immoral and disruptive theatre', the Privy Council responded by speaking 'of a queen whose 'solace' increased with her attendance at plays, especially at plays performed by actors well rehearsed through regular performances in and near the city' (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 8-9). The 'solace' argument had previously been taken 'rather at face value' by earlier theatre historians (see Chambers 1923, i, 267 and Greg 1923), but has more recently been questioned, although McMillin and MacLean emphasise that Elizabeth's 'personal interest in drama was keen and well-educated – the privy council were not inventing the queen's-solace argument out of thin air' (1998, 9.) In reality, many other factors probably influenced the creation of a royal company.

At the time Tilney was instructed to seek a company of players the London authorities had recently won a small victory in the ongoing struggle with the Privy Council over the regulation of theatres. Following the deaths of eight spectators at a bear-baiting at Paris Gardens in January 1583, the Lord Mayor successfully sought to end Sunday performances in the city and on Bankside. The creation of the Queen's Men, therefore, could be seen as the Privy Council reasserting its authority and creating additional protection for actors (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 10), making 'a deliberate and to some extent a successful attempt to overawe the city by the use of the royal name' (Chambers 1923, i, 291). McMillin and MacLean nevertheless question this motive, noting that banning Sunday playing was a minor problem compared to the quotidian concern of ensuring regular and repeated visits to plays by the public six days a week. Furthermore, the Privy Council lost nothing by conceding one day in favour of guaranteeing regular performance in preparation for court entertainment (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 10-11).

Leeds Barroll and Scott McMillin have argued that the creation of the royal troupe was a 'means to emasculate' competing companies who vied for preference at court and whose rivalry, or rather that of their noble patrons, 'was becoming an embarrassment' (Gurr 1996, 196; see Barroll 1975, McMillin 1988, esp. 8-13). If this was indeed the case then the ploy certainly worked. Leicester, Sussex and Oxford's Men all lost key members of their troupes. The new company was given more than twice the number of opportunities to perform at court than any other company for the previous decade,

accounting for almost 80% of performances by adult companies between 1583 and 1586 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 11-12, 14-16).

However, this argument seems to beg an awkward question: at whose behest was the royal troupe created? That Tilney's instruction came from 'Mr. Secretary' – Sir Francis Walsingham – rather than the Lord Chamberlain, under whose jurisdiction the Master of Revels usually came, prompts two observations. Firstly, Walsingham's position as one of two principal secretaries of the Privy Council, effectively acting as the Council's executive officer, means that the demand made of Tilney was technically 'a formal enactment authorized by the full Privy Council' (Gurr 1996, 197). The majority of those companies most affected by the Queen's Men's arrival – Sussex, Leicester and Warwick's Men – were patronised by Elizabeth's inner circle of advisors. Thomas Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex, was Lord Chamberlain; both Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and his elder brother Ambrose, Earl of Warwick, were also members of the Privy Council. Walsingham had shown no previous interest in theatre, and sponsored no troupe of his own. It seems unlikely that the creation of a royal troupe was primarily his idea. A collaborative decision by the Privy Council seems a more reasonable bet – yet surely they would not have made such a decision if the reason was to restrict their own companies. A more sophisticated answer is needed.

The second observation on Walsingham's involvement stems from his role in the Elizabethan government gathering covert information. Walsingham sat in the centre of a network of informants and professional spies, forming a sophisticated intelligence system that often used licensed travellers and performers to extend and provide cover for clandestine operations (see Read 1925, Plowden 1991, Archer 1993). While we cannot with any certainty link named actors in the Queen's Men with named court messengers, a man sharing the name Robert Wilson is said to have dwelt at court in 1585 and carried letters to the Low Countries the following year, while the messenger records also name John Dutton and John Garland (Bradbrook 1962, 162-77; Chambers 1923, ii, 314). These are, however, common names. Firm evidence that some actors were entrusted with letters can be seen from the case of the unfortunate Will, 'my Lord of Leicester's jesting player', who misdelivered a letter from Utrecht, and from a 1603 record showing intelligence delivered by four unnamed players (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 28).

Whether members of the Queen's Men did relay information back and forth to Walsingham is largely immaterial. More important was the *possibility* that they might be doing so:

Thus a travelling company of Queen's Men would not only carry the name and influence of the monarch through the country but would also give the impression of a watchful monarch, one whose 'men' ranged over the land... [They] helped to spread a new court culture – not only by acting stories the court wanted the country to hear, but also by letting some in the country wonder what stories the actors were telling the court (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 28).

Walsingham would have surely appreciated the utility of a royal company to maintain an absent presence in remote parts of the kingdom rarely, if ever, visited by the Queen herself. He would also be aware of previous secretaries of state's successful use of theatre for propaganda, notably Thomas Cromwell and William Cecil (see White 1993, 42-66).

The royal company's creation may have provided an extension to Walsingham's information network; it did provide high quality performance for the monarch's 'solace'. It also offered the opportunity to streamline court entertainments, and slightly strengthened the Privy Council's bid for control over the regulation of theatre within London. The company's creation may, as Andrew Gurr suggests, have been the result of a bid by Tilney's cousin, Charles Howard, made in anticipation of Sussex's imminent death, to gain the Lord Chamberlainship, a post previously held by Howard's father (Gurr 1996, 198-9). Yet such statements are made from piecing together the fragments of a moment in time. To ascertain whether the Queen's Men successfully fulfilled their political role, how it affected their performances, their plays, and their audiences, we must look for further clues in their texts, in their venues, and in their audiences.

### **3 – STRATFORD-UPON-AVON**

#### **3.1 – INTRODUCTION**

Playing the towns and cities of England was bread and butter for companies such as the Queen's Men. A respectably sized town not only offered a company the chance of a reasonable reward from the local corporation or council, but supported an entertainment-seeking population and suitable venues to host their performances. The councils of larger, wealthier and more populous cities naturally paid more substantial rewards – Bristol, York, Norwich, Newcastle and Worcester regularly paid the Queen's Men £2 or more. There was evidently sufficient demand from the general public for several days of entertainment – the Queen's Men were granted permission to play for up to four days in Norwich in August 1600 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 187). However, the majority of records for rewards come from smaller provincial towns of all sizes, up and down the country. Official rewards to the royal company ranged from as little as four shillings to as many as thirty or forty, but often the more modest sum of ten or twenty shillings was offered by most towns (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 175-88).

As discussed in the previous chapter, while it is difficult to pinpoint many spaces in which a visiting company might have performed, the one venue we can confidently assume hosted performances is the town hall, or guild hall, in which the local civic governing body resided. These medieval, timber-framed halls, though varied in size and configuration, offered visiting players a familiar venue type that would comfortably host their performances. For the greatest part of Elizabeth's reign the majority of companies, if they spent any proportion of their year on the road, would probably have been more familiar with these playing spaces than any of the purpose-built theatres in London.

When these spaces have been investigated by scholars interested in their construction, function and development they have frequently been shown to be more complicated entities than one might assume (see Schofield 1994; Schofield and Vince 1994; Clark *et al.* 2006). Having a more sophisticated understanding of the buildings themselves can help shed further light on the activities carried out within them, be they religious, governmental, legal or educational (see Mulryne 2012a and the essays therein). It is appropriate, then, to apply a similar approach to the buildings when considering them as hosts to theatre and visiting companies of players.

Although performance leaves few direct traces, it is nevertheless enlivened and constrained by the material conditions in which it is situated. By investigating and understanding the spaces that informed and framed them, we can gain a greater insight into text and performance. In this chapter, therefore, I have selected the guild hall of a 'fairly average' early modern town, Stratford-upon-Avon – prosperous, but not exceptionally so, and containing a community that was well aware of its historical origins and shared a sense of civic pride. In doing so I hope to elaborate on the specific contexts of one venue for provincial performance, and begin to link those contexts with fundamental questions about the practices of early modern companies, and the Queen's Men in particular. Through this chapter I will explore an example of one kind of space regularly used by the Queen's Men, examining both the form and function of the building, its occupants and the activities it hosted.

### **3.2 – STRATFORD AND THE SHADOW OF SHAKESPEARE**

The selection of Stratford and its Guildhall to represent England's early modern towns is an obvious choice, although not necessarily for the first reason that leaps to mind. Unsurprisingly, the modern town's *de facto raison d'être* is the celebration of Shakespeare and all things Shakespearean. Shakespeare outshines Stratford. Although I do not intend to do so, it would be easy to assume that any work on Stratford and early modern drama must necessarily place Shakespeare at the centre. After all, the Shakespeare connection to the Guildhall is a hard one to ignore – he is likely to have attended the grammar school housed within the complex, and his father, John Shakespeare, held the offices of alderman and high bailiff and carried out town business in the hall itself. The tantalising image of a young Will, perched on his father's knee, watching the performances of travelling players (see Mulryne 2007, 17) invites (not unimportant) questions over the poet's earliest influences – who did he watch, where did he watch them, what did they perform?

However, stronger links between William Shakespeare and the Guildhall, or indeed between him and any of the companies that visited Stratford-upon-Avon, are difficult to assert. The years between the conception of his youngest children, the twins Hamnet and Judith, in 1584 and Robert Greene's 1592 attack on the 'upstart crow', generally



taken to indicate Shakespeare's presence in London, are an infuriating blank.<sup>14</sup> Much has been made of Shakespeare's 'missing years,' with scholars variously linking the poet, and thus his whereabouts, to Leicester's, Strange's, Pembroke's, Sussex's, Queen's, Oxford's, Worcester's and the Lord Admiral's Men (Schoone-Jongen 2008, 1-2; see Halliwell-Phillips 1898, i, 122; Lee 1917, 54; Chambers 1923, ii, 130; Gurr 1992, 248; Sams 1995, 59; Gurr 1996, 271; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 165; Sobran 1997, 221; Southworth 2000, 29, 50; Duncan-Jones 2001, 36). Based partly on links between a number of Queen's Men's plays and Shakespearean works (see Sams 1995 and below) and partly on the timely death of William Knell, whose demise at a stop shortly before reaching Stratford in 1587 left the royal troupe a man short (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 160; Eccles 1961), the suggestion that Shakespeare may have been a Queen's Man would be beguiling, if it were supported by firmer evidence. Sams's wilder theory, that William was *already* travelling with the company when they first visited Stratford in 1587, promotes a routine performance stop into a riotous homecoming that saw furniture being broken by an appreciative home audience (Sams 1995, 58).<sup>15</sup> However, the evidence for such an event is slight, and there are equally strong arguments for the other companies, as Terrence Schoone-Jongen notes:

while Shakespeare's familiarity with some Queen's plays make it *possible* he acted in that company, it does not, under any circumstances, *prove* he was a Queen's player. It is perhaps justifiable and plausible to speculate about Shakespeare's membership in the Queen's, but this speculation is not conclusive, nor is it any stronger, preferable, or more forceful than other, also circumstantial arguments [for other companies] (2008, 101).

The evidence for the connection between Shakespeare and the Queen's Men, based on similarities and influences of earlier and broadly contemporaneous texts on Shakespeare's works, and on the process of matching dates and Shakespeare's known whereabouts with those of contemporary companies, has been discussed at length both

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<sup>14</sup> Legal documents name Shakespeare in a lawsuit involving his parents in 1588, but such a suit did not require him to be present. The church baptism registers give the date of his eldest daughter, Susannah's, christening as 26 May 1583, while his twins, Hamnet and Judith, were christened on 2 February 1585, meaning that William Shakespeare could have left Stratford any time after early May 1584 (Wilson 1995, 7).

<sup>15</sup> The Corporation Accounts for Christmas 1586/7 note a payment of 20 shillings given to the 'Queenes players' as well as an additional 16 shillings spent fixing a bench broken by the company (Savage 1929, 31-2).

by McMillin and MacLean, and by Schoone-Jongen. Wishing to refrain from speculation, but rather work with the solid evidence available, I wish to put Shakespeare to one side, and therefore place the Queen's Men not within the context of Shakespeare's Stratford, but of Stratford's Stratford.

### 3.3 – HISTORIOGRAPHY

The market town of Stratford-upon-Avon lies in the heart of Warwickshire countryside, close to the city of Warwick and within striking distance of the main urban centres of the Midlands and Cotswolds – Oxford, Gloucester, Worcester, Coventry and Leicester. Nearby lay the country seats of two of the most influential nobles in Elizabeth I's court: Ambrose Dudley at Warwick Castle and his brother Robert, the Earl of Leicester, based at Kenilworth. Surrounded by potentially lucrative stopping places, Stratford was perfectly situated to become an essential break on any route that took in the West Midlands, and in the thirty years between 1568 and 1597 rewards given at more than thirty visits by professional theatre companies are recorded in the town's *Minutes and Account Books of the Corporation* (Savage 1921-1929; Fox 1990; see Mulryne 2007; 2012b).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Local eccentricities in recording have led to some confusion in the accurate dating of visits by companies to Stratford. The financial year in Stratford ran from Michaelmas to the following Michaelmas (29 September) until 1584/5; the financial year end for 1585/6 is not noted, but by 1586/7 the year end had been moved to Christmas, although the exact date ranges from 20 to 24 December (see Savage 1926, 1929, Fox 1990). The annual account was usually entered into the account books by the Chamberlains in mid- to late-January, although earlier entries are also variously made in February (1574/5) and March (1575/6). As I noted in the previous chapter, the traditional year end in Elizabethan England was in March, so a record dated February 1594, for example, would be February 1595 by modern conventions. Added together, these various quirks of dating make for substantial confusion, and it is unsurprising that errors have crept in to modern works. For the Queen's Men, McMillin and MacLean record visits in 1586/7, 1590/1, 1591/2, 1592/3, whereas Mulryne (2007) records 1587, 1593 and 1594. Some of these discrepancies may have come from a misreading of the original documents, but issues still remain. A thorough re-examination of the records held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust shows that payments were made to the company and recorded for the financial years of 1587/8, 1593/4 and 1594/5, giving modern dates of 1587, 1592 and 1593. Where McMillin and MacLean derived the payment from 1590/1, however, remains unclear. The reference may be included in Halliwell-Phillips' Scrapbook (MacLean, *pers. comm.*); in any case it has not been found by the current REED editor (Somerset, *pers. comm.*). Mulryne has since amended his list (2012b), and includes a recent discovery by Robert Bearman of a rough set of accounts in the hand of Richard Quiney (BRU 5/1/19). Quiney notes 'Julii 16 and 17 paid the Queens plaiers 10

It is important that we understand such visits within the wider context of Stratford's foundation and development, and attempt to grasp some of the complex relationships and tensions that existed within the town and onto which performances by companies may be superimposed (Clark *et al.* 2006, 5). Early modern Stratford, with a population of around 1500 to 2000, was 'a fairly average Midlands town', and may stand representative of many similar settlements visited by companies in the latter half of the sixteenth century (Mulryne 2007, 1; see Styles 1945). As such, the town stands as a good example, in its formation and development, to represent around six hundred other small towns across England. Despite going through an 'acute phase of administrative uncertainty' over the course of the sixteenth century, when the Bishop of Worcester, the town's traditional suzerain, was dispossessed of his estates and powers, and the governing Guild was dissolved, Stratford was unusually unaffected by the severe decline experienced by many other towns at a time of national economic and social stress following growing population and rising prices (Dyer A 1997, 80; Dyer C 1997, 43 and *passim.*). It is these contexts I will outline below.

Stratford has received considerable attention from past scholars, from early antiquarian accounts of the borough's development (Wheler 1806; 1825; Fisher 1838) to the later Victoria County Histories (Styles 1945) and more recently work by Robert Bearman (1988; 1997b) and Mairi MacDonald (2007). Interest in Stratford as Shakespeare's hometown has remained a driving force for historical exploration since Halliwell-Phillipps' account of the town in the late sixteenth century (Halliwell-Phillipps 1864a; 1864b; Brinkworth 1972; Jones 1996). Robert Bearman's edited volume *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon 1196-1996* is particularly important, containing discussion of the town's history, topography, and socio-economic and religious make-up (Bearman 1997a; Slater 1997; Dyer C 1997; Carpenter 1997; Dyer A 1997; Hughes 1997). I will return to its key themes below. Growing interest in Tudor and Elizabethan pedagogy (for example Potter 2004; Green 2009; Moncrief and McPherson 2011) has prompted a more focused appraisal of the role of the Grammar School (Green 2012; see Barkan 2001), while debates surrounding the religious persuasions of Shakespeare and his father John (for example Wilson 2004;

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s', supplemented in a lighter ink by 'Therle of Darbies' and 'mi Ld Ogles'. This helps illuminate the entry in the main accounts which records a payment of 19s. 4d. disbursed amongst four companies of players, which Bearman suggests indicates four performances rather than four troupes (Mulryne 2012b). If this was the case, the Queen's Men received 10s. for two performances.

Raffel 1998) have led to a more balanced and thorough investigation of the Stratfordian Reformation experience (Bearman 2003, 2005, 2007).

Turning to the buildings themselves, the work on the Guild complex by Wilfred Puddephat and Keith Parker (Parker 1987) remains an invaluable resource, while the recent Conservation Management Plan drawn up by Jonathan Clark *et al.* (2006) on the Guildhall and Pedagogue's House for the King Edward's School provides the first comprehensive survey and investigation into the Guild buildings complex. Kate Giles, Anthony Masinton and Geoff Arnott (2012; see Arnott 2007) have since demonstrated how digital reconstructions of contemporary buildings can hugely enhance our understanding of medieval and early modern spaces. More recently, the volume *The Guild and Guild Buildings of Shakespeare's Stratford*, edited by Ronnie Mulryne (2012a), has brought together the latest research on the Guild buildings and their use. For the context of this study, however, the next sections will summarise some of their findings which especially illuminate this thesis's focus of interest.

### **3.3.1 – THE TOWN: POLITICAL MASTERS AND RELIGIOUS TENSIONS.**

While there is evidence for Roman occupation at Tiddington, just 1.5km from the modern town centre (Palmer 1997, 13), Stratford's origins as a centre for commerce and government date to the late twelfth century, when the Bishop of Worcester created a borough within his manor estates. A royal charter issued by King Richard and dated 25 June 1196 allowed the Bishop to hold a weekly market at his Stratford manor; the subsequent charter issued by the Bishop confirming borough status can be confidently dated to the same summer (Bearman 1997, 1, 6). The Bishop's venture was a great success and within fifty years the town grew by some thousand burghers, while surname evidence demonstrates that the population increase brought with it an explosion of trades and crafts being practised (Bearman 1997, 10-11).

The medieval town was nominally governed by representatives of the Bishop of Worcester, the reeve and two catchpolls, while the borough court passed by-laws and heard pleas of debt. Both the Bishop's representatives, and the court jury and officials were drawn from the local population (Dyer C 1997, 45). However, the borough grew increasingly independent, and the burghers formed their own organisations, the most significant being the Guild of the Holy Cross. By the late thirteenth century the Guild had built itself a chapel, hall and almshouses, and was holding regular business

meetings (Dyer C 1997, 45-6). A complicating factor in the governance of the town arose in the form of the Stratford-upon-Avon College, which grew out of a chantry of five priests established in the 1330s at the parish church. The College had been granted a peculiar jurisdiction of the local episcopal court, permitting its warden, and later its dean, to sit in judgement two years out of three in the Bishop's stead (Bearman 2007, 71). Tensions between town and priests ran deep, with the Guild and College vying for higher status and arguing over the financial consequences. In 1430, the Bishop of Worcester was forced to intervene in a long-running argument over whether the Guild should pay tithes and oblations to the College. The previous year, after a failed attempt to mediate between the parties, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Proctor was forced to flee from a mob of armed townsfolk and was almost burnt alive in the house in which he had sought refuge. Worcester ruled in favour of the College, restricting the purview of the Guild priests and enforcing an annual payment of four shillings from the Guild to the College, although this can have done little to ease relations between the parties (Bearman 2007, 71-2; n.11).

In spite of these tensions, the temporal influence of the Guild grew, particularly following its re-establishment in 1403, when it amalgamated with the religious guilds of Our Lady and John the Baptist. While the Guild maintained its original function of supporting a community of priests to pray for the souls of its members, the endowments and bequests it received allowed it to begin rebuilding the Guild buildings from the early fifteenth century (Bearman 2007, 71; Clark *et al.* 2006, 9). By this time it had become a significant landholder and collector of rents and was beginning to take over the oversight of education in the parish (Dyer C 1997, 49-53; Clark *et al.* 2006, 7). Indeed, by the late fifteenth century the Guild had displaced the town's traditional suzerain, the Bishop of Worcester, as the town's leading landlord. In comparison with the episcopal revenues of between £10 and £12, the Guild was now collecting over £47 in rent (Dyer C 1997, 49-50). The Guild weathered the economic downturn of the late fifteenth century well compared to the Bishop, and suffered only a 15% rise in decays of rents compared to the Bishop's 50% (Dyer C 1997, 51). The Bishop's direct influence over the town weakened significantly over the course of the early sixteenth century. Secular affairs were increasingly overseen by the Guild, 'albeit acting through the seigneurial borough court', and while the College represented the Bishop's spiritual authority it acquired a certain independence, made more pronounced from 1498 when a succession of three incumbents were absentee Italians on royal embassies to Rome (Bearman 2007, 70, 72). While squabbles over Henry VIII's religious policy caused the

need for direct intervention in the running of diocesan matters by Cardinal Wolsey and later Thomas Cromwell on behalf of central government in the 1520s and early 1530s, it is unlikely Stratford would have been directly affected (Bearman 2007, 70; Down 1995, 14-15).

However, in the years between 1547 and 1553 there were a number of seismic shifts that had drastic repercussions for the town. The first of these was Edward VI's 1547 Chantries Act, the culmination of his father's policy of confiscation of religious wealth which, in effect, replaced an earlier 1545 Act which expired on Henry's death in January 1547 (Bearman 2007, 82-3; Haigh 1993, 163-4). Under this, both the Stratford-upon-Avon College and the Guild of the Holy Cross were dissolved, and those lands and properties that had not been hastily leased by the astute college warden and guildsmen were confiscated by the Crown (Bearman 2007, 74, 82-3). The second, in July 1549, was the relinquishing of authority over Stratford by the Bishop of Worcester and the transfer of the valuable Stratford Manor to John Dudley, Earl of Warwick (Dyer A 1997, 81-2).

The loss of the primary governing force embodied in the Guild certainly had the most immediate consequences to the town. Not only would its members have been concerned that they no longer were permitted the traditional burial ceremonies, but equally there was an anxiety over the town's possible loss of prestige. In particular, there was a feeling that the lack of social cohesion provided by the Guild would directly contribute to the decline in the town's fortunes (Bearman 2007, 83-4). The Chantries Act made some provision for supporting the civic activities previously undertaken by guilds. Arrangements were made for the schoolmaster, William Dallam, to continue receiving his annual salary of £10, although what became of the other four priests associated with the Guild is unclear (Bearman 2007, 84; see Green 2012). Moreover, as no records survive for the Guild between 1503/4 and 1554 (Clark *et al.* 2006, 19) we are left rather in the dark as to the practice of administration and implementation of legislation. In many similar towns, where strong guilds had been dissolved and an administrative vacuum created, the townsfolk swiftly petitioned the crown for charters of incorporation or endowment. Lichfield gained its royal charter within a year of its Guild being dissolved and Maidstone succeeded also the following year, while Stafford secured a re-endowment of its school in 1550 (Dyer A 1997, 82). However, it was not until February 1553 that the people of Stratford petitioned the Privy Council for the

making of booke to be signed by his Majestie, for thincorporating of the towne by the name of the Baylif and Burgesys; that they may purchase certen landes belonging to the late Monastery [i.e. the Colledge] and Guilde there, of the yerely value of about ij<sup>c</sup> markes, for the erecting there of a gramer schole with xx<sup>li</sup> yerely stipende, for the relief of iiii<sup>d</sup> weekely to every of the xxiiij poore men being in the almeshowse there, with v marks by the yere towards the maintenaunce of a bridge of stone there; the which all were before mainteyned by the sayde Guylde, being nowe desolved (Dasent 1892, 226).

The request was granted the following day, and formally issued the following June. The delay between dissolution and incorporation is unusual given other towns' comparative haste and the Stratford elite's history of rigorous involvement with local government. Alan Dyer has noted that in the cases of Lichfield, Maidstone and Stafford petitions were supported and hastened by powerful local patrons, thus suggesting that Stratford's relations with its own lord were still uncertain (Dyer A 1997, 82).

The manner in which John Dudley's acquisition of the Stratford manor was made is unclear; certainly the exchange of lands between the earl and the bishop greatly favoured the former. It seems a sensible deal to have made on the earl's part, as it consolidated his land holdings near to his recently-granted castle at Warwick. Yet only six months later, Dudley made a further exchange with the Crown, where substantial Warwickshire properties, including Stratford, were swapped for others worth almost £500 in Oxfordshire. Shortly after the town petitioned the Privy Council, however, a further exchange between Crown and earl saw property in Kent being returned to the Crown in exchange for extensive Warwickshire properties that included Stratford (Bearman 2007, 85). This flurry of land requisition and bartering does something to explain why the town's burghers may have taken so long to petition the Privy Council. It also marks Dudley as a highly astute and aggressive politician, as each land exchange furthered the earl's ongoing political fencing with the Seymour family, out of which the elder brother, Edward, Duke of Somerset, was Lord Protector and the younger Thomas, Baron Sudeley, was Lord High Admiral. The machinations of these land dealings and political wrangling have been discussed elsewhere (Loades 1996; Adams 1995); suffice it to say that by early 1550 Dudley had successfully removed Edward Seymour as Lord Protector and was *de facto* regent of England. In Stratford, Dudley sought a high level of control, denying the new Corporation the court leet [i.e. the manorial court], as granted

elsewhere, while retaining the right to tolls on the market. He also reserved both the right of removal of any high bailiff deemed undesirable and the last say on the appointments of vicar and schoolmaster. 'By such means did one of the main architects of religious and social changes of these years seek to both retain his patronage and to influence the way in which his new Corporation would develop' (Bearman 2007, 87).

However, Dudley would shortly make an ill-judged move to put his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey, on the throne, following the death of Edward in July 1553. His execution and forfeiture of all lands to the Crown meant that Queen Mary became Stratford's direct temporal lord. The town would remain in royal hands until Elizabeth reinstated the Dudley family, restoring Ambrose Dudley to the earldom of Warwick and granting him the lordship of the Stratford manor in 1562. During the interim the alderman and burgesses of the new Corporation emphasised their duty to 'maynteyne & defende the liberties and rights' of the town, and appear to have assumed that the court leet had been granted to them. Where previously these courts had been held in the name of the temporal lord, the Corporation attempted to renegotiate their own influence, going as far as to refashion the '*Curia lete*' of April 1554 as the '*Visus franci plegii cum curia ballivi, aldermanorum et burgensium de Stratford*'<sup>17</sup> in October 1557. This further ambition of independence was, however, firmly quashed with Ambrose Dudley's reinstatement (Bearman 2007, 93).

As important as Stratford's socio-political developments in the early sixteenth century are the religious tensions that existed throughout the Reformation and beyond. Once again, Shakespeare has been the driving focus of research: some scholars have enthusiastically supported claims for his Catholicism while others have vehemently denied it, and only a few have taken a more measured outlook (Bearman 2005, 411; see n.1 for Bearman's précis of literature on the poet's religious persuasion). However, several works have dealt with Stratford more broadly (Bearman 2007; Hughes 1997; Gill 2012a); all present the town in the complex tones which we might have come to expect. The initial fallout from Henry's split from Rome was felt but lightly; the subsequent declining fortunes of the Bishop of Worcester and the effect of the 1547 Chantries Act have been discussed above. Ann Hughes notes that 'ambitious Edwardian reforms had been short-lived' (1997, 99), while Robert Bearman suggests a 'general lack of enthusiasm for reform' on the part of the 'generally conservative' aldermen

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<sup>17</sup> View of the Frankpledge as well as the court of the Bailiff, Aldermen and burghers of Stratford



(2007, 88). The religious persuasions of the Corporation members – amongst which there *were* some less resistant to change – ‘were of less importance than the creation of a body politic composed of men of sufficient substance, who clearly showed a willingness to be involved in one another’s affairs despite what might be seen as differences in their views’ (Bearman 2007, 90). Under Mary’s rule Catholic traditions that had been suppressed under Edward, such as the pageant of St George, were revived. Yet in 1554 the Corporation employed a strict Protestant schoolmaster, William Smart, after he was forced to quit his Fellowship at Christ’s College, Cambridge, due to his reformist religious sensibilities. The charter confirming Smart’s £20 annual salary ends: ‘over and above the covenantes above recyted, the said hy bely, aldermen & capytall burgesez... shall warrant & defend... agaynst all people’, taking a tone that suggests resistance against outside pressure (Bearman 2007, 94-5).

From 1561, a series of Protestantising advances were made, starting that January with the appointment of John Bretchgirdle – not a radical but nonetheless a preacher and an encourager of visiting preachers. This was subsequently followed by the Corporation’s move to employ as assistant minister William Prickett, who would later become vicar of Banbury, a town of significant and zealous Protestant reform (Bearman 2007, 96-7). The Corporation began to spend sizeable sums on refurbishing and renovating the Guild chapel, although it is unclear to what extent this demonstrates a desire to represent the chapel in the Protestant form. In January 1564 2 *d.* was paid for the ‘defasyng the ymages in ye chapel’, and 2s. was spent the following year on removing ‘ye rood loft’ (Savage 1921, 7). Seats and forms were frequently commissioned or repaired, and walls were whitewashed at regular intervals from 1586/7, at an initial cost of 16*d.*, and rising to 20*d.* (Clark *et al.* 2006, 31). Ann Hughes has reiterated Patrick Collinson’s argument that the iconoclasm of image destruction comes rather late after the order from central government in 1560 (Hughes 1997, 97; Collinson 1994, 219-52), and deemed the whitewashing of the walls a rather ‘half-hearted’ attempt to cover the pictures. Before leaping on this as evidence for Stratford being a hotbed of recusancy, however, we must note that the research of Eamon Duffy and Christopher Haigh demonstrates that a delay of two to three years was not unusual in an active parish church: the Guild chapel at this time was not a place of worship but a redundant building and, moreover, there is no evidence to suggest its wall paintings and other traditional Catholic furnishings had not been covered over or removed during Edward VI’s reign (Bearman 2007, 97; see Haigh 1993, 244-7; Duffy 2005, 568-76). That said, we cannot be entirely sure what was the ‘defasyng’ entailed. William

Puddephat suggests in notes to a series of lectures he prepared in the 1950s that a partition hiding the paintings was erected in the 1560s (SCLA DR624/13 (iii), 624/16, 624/17, 624/22, 624/33, 624/27-31) More recently, Kate Giles has suggested that the chapel's redundancy following the dissolution of the religious Guild had caused the building to be shut up and left unaltered until it came back into use in the 1560s. This being the case, the late 'cleansing' of Catholic imagery was the product of 'a lack of use and a concern by the [civic] Corporation not to incur unnecessary expenditure' (Giles *et al.* 2012, 2.3; Bearman 2007, 98). It seems, then, that in a time of flux and uncertainty, the Corporation may have been reticent to strip its chapel of decorative schemes in which its members had invested time, money and religious belief. If so, by hiding the paintings, rather than destroying them completely, the aldermen could conform to official dogma, yet hedge their bets should the country once more swing to Catholicism. If, however, the images' late survival was the product of the chapel's redundancy, such an explanation may be mitigated by a rather more prosaic measure of financial thrift.

There was a Catholic presence in Stratford during the mid-sixteenth century, but it is hard to assess its extent. After the failure of the 1569/70 Catholic 'Northern Rising' both the schoolmaster and vicar were suspected of holding Catholic sympathies and replaced by genuine Protestants, while the master under whom William Shakespeare most probably studied later left and had become a Jesuit priest by 1578 (Hughes 1997, 100). Hughes states that lay Catholic sympathisers can be found throughout the period – it certainly appears many of Shakespeare's relatives had leanings towards the old faith – yet after the 1577 campaign instigated by the newly elected bishop of Worcester to take a census of all those refusing to attend church, Bishop Whitgift managed to report only three people in the whole of Warwickshire, all from Warwick, to the Privy Council (Hughes 1997, 100; Bearman 2005, 416). The popular accusation levelled at John Shakespeare, that he was a recusant Catholic and refused to attend church, can be tempered by an investigation into his ill fortune in business and troubled finances, which reveal alternative reasons for poor attendance, 'namely, fear of arrest for debt and the consequent social humiliation' (Bearman 2005, 417).

Such an argument does not *deny* Catholic leanings, but it does make the level of residual Catholicism increasingly difficult to quantify. Bishop Whitgift made further investigations to that of 1577, but only the campaign of 1592 gives a sufficiently detailed description of Stratford's recusants to allow assessment. That of 1580/1 gave no names, and subsequent lists of 1596/7, 1605/6 and 1606/7 merely reiterate the

long-standing Catholic families (Bearman 2007, 105-6). Out of a population of between 1500 and 2000, the 1592 list names forty-two Stratfordians, of whom only ten were noted for their 'obstinate recusancy' – and of those four had fled the town (Bearman 2007, 106). Persistent offenders seem to be restricted to some seven Stratford families. It is notable, then, that out of these families were drawn four High Bailiffs, one Chief Alderman, a burgess and an alderman, with many men serving several terms, despite having close family members (usually wives or sons) undertaking explicitly Catholic activity. When Thomas Barber refused to become High Bailiff for the fourth time in 1611 due to his wife's conduct he was initially dismissed as an alderman, but reinstated two months later on the proviso that he agreed to serve in future or pay the appropriate fine. Nevertheless,

Tempting though it might be to interpret this, and the earlier evidence of tolerance, as sympathy for Catholicism itself, it can, in fact, be readily explained as a wish on the part of the governing élite not to make religion a divisive issue. It was not a matter of Catholics protecting Catholics but of the majority of, by then, supporters of mainstream Protestantism, not wishing to split the community on issues of personal faith. If Catholics could reconcile their beliefs with loyalty both to the Crown and to the interests of the local community, then they would not be generally penalised for holding them (Bearman 2007, 107).

It was in this political and religious context, then, that travelling players were received throughout the period 1568-98. As we have seen, the scene was a complex one and full of nuance. Frictions that could have had the potential to flare up into open dissent were rather soothed by a Corporation sensitive to religious loyalties and mindful of its self-imposed mission of encouraging social cohesion and civic pride. What is clear is that the Stratford's identity, its government and its very essence stemmed from the Guild and subsequent Corporation. What I will attempt to do in the following section of this chapter is to tie the socio-political idea of the Corporation to its physical expression of corporate self, both the symbol and the locus of the Corporation's work: the Guild buildings.

### 3.4 – THE GUILDHALL AND ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS

Stratford's Guildhall, Guild chapel, schoolhouse (known as the Pedagogue's House) and almshouses constitute the most significant building complex in the medieval and early modern town (figs 3-6). These buildings have been thoroughly examined and described by Parker (1987), Clark *et al.* (2006), Giles *et al.* (2012) and Giles and Clark (2012), and thus facilitate my necessary abridgement of the complex's description. Hence, I concentrate on those features directly relevant to travelling players, which in Stratford's case, following the arguments of Gurr (1996, 39), Keenan (2002, 24) and Mulryne (2007, 1-2), means in effect the Guildhall, and the upper hall in particular, for reasons I shall outline below. As such, while certain aspects of construction, orientation and furnishing of a number of the other buildings may be relevant, and hence presented below, I have abstained from reproducing fully what has been amply covered elsewhere. While I cite frequently from the Proctor and Chamberlain accounts housed at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, these can be more easily accessed through published editions of the Guild registers by Mairi MacDonald (2007) and of the Corporation accounts by Savage (1921, 1924, 1926, 1929), Levi Fox (1990) and Robert Bearman (2011), which may be further consulted through the National Archives online *Access to Archives* scheme ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a)) and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's online archive catalogue ([www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/collections/catalogues.html](http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/collections/catalogues.html)).

#### 3.4.1 – THE GUILDHALL BUILDING TODAY<sup>18</sup>

Constructed in the early fifteenth century, Stratford-upon-Avon's Guildhall is a two storey, timber-framed building typical of the vernacular medieval style. The full length of the building is visible at its west elevation, formed of five bays plus an additional sixth, smaller, bay at the northern end (fig. 3). Characterised by close studding, where the bays are divided into narrow panels by vertical timbers, which themselves frame infill panels of approximately the same width, the hall's construction uses a common, if expensive, technique (Clark *et al.* 2006, 52-3). The sole plate rests upon a stone plinth

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<sup>18</sup> The survey and conservation report produced by Clark *et al.* (2006) is the most thorough examination of the guild complex, and it is to this that I have referred throughout. However, a summary of the work by Giles and Clark will be made more widely available with the publication of the *Guild and Guild Buildings of Shakespeare's Stratford* (Mulryne 2012a) in December 2012.

which runs the length of the elevation, from which the studs rise to the wall plate, which itself is supported by the principal posts of the building. Though no windows or doorways were originally present at ground level, each bay presently has two windows, with one window in the smaller northerly bay, and a window and doorway in the first full bay at the northern end (Clark *et al.* 2006, 53). At first floor level joists project out from the lower wall plate forming a jetty, from which the upper wall plate runs to eaves level. Each upper bay contains a central window, including the small north bay. Each window contains four lights, save the third window from the south, which has only three, although no evidence survives to suggest why this was necessary (Clark *et al.* 2006, 53).

The eastern elevation is largely hidden behind the later south range and nineteenth century staircase, leaving only two complete bays visible at the northern end, as well as the small north bay and part of a forth to the south (fig. 7). At ground level the small bay is a relatively modern brick structure, while the rest are timber framed and incorporate large windows. They are interrupted by a substantial doorway, about half a bay wide, which allows access out onto Church Street and appears to be an original feature (Clark *et al.* 2006, 53-4). At the upper level the bays again incorporate close studding and small windows at the centre of each bay. The windows all seem to date from the nineteenth century, although they may follow the original fenestration positions (Clark *et al.* 2006, 54-6).

The internal walls have been altered considerably, particularly in the nineteenth century. It appears that all openings along the west wall are later insertions, and the north wall has been entirely reconstructed, although an 1892 drawing shows a door in roughly the same location as present (Clark *et al.* 2006, 57-8). The majority of the east elevation has also been altered; the doorway to the stairs was inserted in the nineteenth century (Clark *et al.* 2006, 59).

Some benefits have nevertheless arisen from these renovations – clues to the original decorative scheme were revealed on five sections of plastered infill of the close-studded south wall (fig. 8). These traces, which contain clear religious iconography, suggest a scheme that must pre-date the dissolution of the Guild (Clark *et al.* 2006, 57). Surviving lathe and plaster infill on the east wall show further decorative features, suggesting a reddish background with stylised roses in a white or pink shade (Clark *et al.* 2006, 58).

The close studding arrangement visible on the external walls and internal south wall is also apparent at first floor level. As below, many timbers have been replaced by nineteenth century restorers, particularly in the west and north walls (fig. 9). A blocked arch at the west end of the south wall is most likely associated with the door to a 'prevey' for which a catch was made in 1442/3 (SCLA BRT 1/3/52) (fig. 10), and it seems there may have been a window to the right of the doorway that was filled in after the construction of the almshouses (Clark *et al.* 2006, 61-2). The south 'door and window' construction is mirrored in the north wall, where the still extant door leads to the museum room (Clark *et al.* 2006, 62-3). The east wall's close studding is interrupted in the southernmost bay for the inclusion of an original doorway into the south range. The doorway in the adjacent bay was inserted with the 1890s staircase, although it seems an earlier opening may have existed, and while the window to the left of this doorway is a later insertion, the two further windows in this elevation may indicate the location and size of originals (Clark *et al.* 2006, 63).

Lastly, the roof structure at first floor level gives clues to the hall's internal configuration. Despite evidence for substantial repair to the principal posts, grooves can be identified in two pairs of principal posts at the south end, which 'suggests partitions originally divided these bays into two smaller rooms' (Clark *et al.* 2006, 64). This is confirmed by the presence of further grooves in the southernmost trusses (fig. 11).

Two further rooms leading off from the upper hall are important at this juncture. The first, now known as the museum room, connects through a doorway at the north wall of the hall. The structure of the room is very irregular, and post-dates the construction of the hall itself; however, the door itself is original. Clark *et al.* therefore convincingly suggest that this room replaced an earlier structure, namely one of the two stairs giving access to the hall (Clark *et al.* 2006, 67-8).

The second is a rather more complicated structure: the south range (fig. 12). No documentary evidence tells us when the south range was built, although there are references to rooms in the range by 1427/8 (see below). Following the dissolution of the Guild, the ground floor of the south range became the Council Chamber, and was also referred to as the Court House (Clark *et al.* 2006, 68). Cartographic evidence from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shows the range running eastwards past its current end, and may have joined or abutted the south end of the Pedagogue's House (see Clark *et al.* 2006, 19) (fig. 13). By the time the *Illustrated London News*

published its image of the complex in 1847, however, the range had been reduced to its modern dimensions (Clark *et al.* 2006, 68). As with the Guildhall itself, the south range was heavily restored in the nineteenth century, but a contemporary photograph shows a clear scar running along the north elevation. This may have been associated with an abutting single storey structure, but may also indicate the presence of a gallery that ran along this elevation and survived until the seventeenth century (Clark *et al.* 2006, 22-3, 70-1). As the archaeological evidence for the internal structure has been discussed by Clark *et al.* and has little direct impact on the spaces' use for travelling players, I will spare further discussion of the extant buildings for now, and turn instead to the documentary evidence for the development of the Guildhall.

### **3.4.2 – THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE**

In 1269 the petition submitted by Robert de Stratford and fifteen other members of the fraternity of the Holy Cross, requesting licence to erect a chapel and hospital, was granted by Bishop Gifford (Clark *et al.* 2006, 6). Incomplete records until 1388 prevent us from knowing at what point substantial building programmes had been completed, but the existence of the earliest Guildhall is confirmed by the accounts of 1388/9 which note repairs being undertaken (SCLA BRT 1/3/4).

From the early fifteenth century regular repairs and renovations are recorded. The Proctor accounts for 1402/3 show that a carpenter was paid 16 *d.* to make windows for the hall, and 'hukes and twystes' were obtained for the hall and chamber doors and windows at a cost of 3s. 2*d.* Further payments were made for a 'recudbord' for the windows, for stopping the holes in the Chaplains' chamber, and for general repairs including those to the kitchen door (SCLA BRT 1/3/14). Further repairs were made the following year, by which time the hall's 'new chamber' had been occupied for one term by one John 'Scolemayster' (SCLA BRT 1/3/16), demarcating the start of the Guild's long association with education in Stratford. Significant expenditure on tiles, stone, timber and labour over the years 1406-10 (SCLA BRT 1/3/20, BRT 1/3/25) make it clear the Guildhall was 'undergoing considerable remodelling of its "lower" end', with the reconstruction of the kitchen and the erection of a new porch and gallery (Clark *et al.* 2006, 8).

None of the earliest Guild buildings survive to the present day, and while Wilfred Puddephat's conjectural layout (Parker 1987, 15) seems plausible enough his plans

cannot be confirmed without thorough excavation of ground which for the most part is currently covered by extant buildings.

The hall that stands today is the product of the programme of replacement begun in 1417/18. Here the carpenter Richard Swyfte was paid in part '*pro nova edificatione Gildæ*'<sup>19</sup> the sum of 8 marcs 3s. 4d., and was awarded a further 20s. to 'find' all the cost of the carpenters erecting the new hall (SCLA BRT 1/3/31). At the same time Swyfte was paid 26s. 8d. for timber for the Almshouses, while a second carpenter, Richard Hewe, was paid in part 6s. 8d. for 'making the same Almshouses' (SCLA BRT 1/3/31). Detailed documents concerning the hall's construction are lacking due to a gap in the accounts until 1421/2, when the hall and almshouses were evidently built – documentary references were confirmed by dendrochronological sampling of the hall timbers, which showed both the hall and the south range to have been erected in c. 1420 (Clark *et al.* 2006, 9). Though we do not know what alterations ('*reformatione*') John Grove was contracted to perform on the 'new hall as far as the chamber of [chaplain] John Mortemer' in 1424/5 (SCLA BRT 1/3/35), the implication that there was by this time a recently-built, 'new' Guildhall is clear (Clark *et al.* 2006, 9). Clark *et al.* note that '[i]t is also possible that the use of the name 'new' hall was in order to differentiate from the 'old' hall [-] i.e. the old hall still existed at this time' (2006, 9). Such a hypothesis might fit, but is not necessarily proven by Pudepphat's conjectural plan of the earlier complex (see Parker 1987, 15). However, there is no further evidence to suggest the old hall still stood once the new was built.

Further alterations to the Guildhall included the erection of two stone chimneys in 1427/8, one in 'le Cowntyngghows' in the 'Guild Hall' and the second above the chamber of Master John Harrys – both of which were actually located in the south range (Clark *et al.* 2006, 68), and the construction and furnishing of a new 'Parlour' on the ground floor (SCLA BRT 1/3/38; Clark *et al.* 2006, 9-10). In the same account, the first mention of 'le stayr' implies the pre-existence of a staircase which was extended at this time (Clark *et al.* 2006, 10).

Thereafter, '[t]here is little evidence to suggest the Guildhall was again significantly altered until the institution was dissolved in 1547' (Clark *et al.* 2006, 10). Nevertheless, further, minor outlays can provide some idea of the building's internal arrangement and layout. The accounts of 1440/1 show that the Guildhall's two storeys were being

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<sup>19</sup> For the new building of the Guild.



described as the 'upper' and 'lower' – '*pro mundatione Aulæ desuper et Aulæ inferioris necnon coquinie*' and '*pro clarificatione Aulæ supra et coquinæ post convivium*' (SCLA BRT 1/3/49). Two years later a 'cache' for the door of the 'prevey', or garderobe chamber, was made (SCLA BRT 1/3/52). The chamber was accessible from the main body of the hall, and though we cannot be certain whether it was located on the first or ground floor, it may well be associated with the small blocked doorway at first floor level in the upper hall's south wall (Clark *et al.* 2006, 10, 60-1). In 1442/3 5 *d.* was spent on 'cirpis' – wicks for rush-lights – that were 'bought before the Feast for the upper hall and the house of the Accountant' (SCLA BRT 1/3/51), making it clear that it was the upper hall, as opposed to the lower, that was being used. The house of the Accountant mentioned seems likely to be the aforementioned Counting House (Clark *et al.* 2006, 11). A presence of a buttery, for which a key was purchased in 1455/6 (SCLA BRT 1/3/64), and associated pantry and kitchen, is unsurprising in a medieval hall. While no documentary evidence categorically fixes the level on which the buttery was located, the use of the upper hall for feasting (above; SCLA BRT 1/3/51) makes the first floor the best candidate. This hypothesis is further supported by the archaeological evidence, which has confirmed the sometime existence of partitions in the upper hall dividing the southern end into two rooms (Clark *et al.* 2006, 11, 64). The kitchen occupied a two bay structure along the south elevation of the south range, but may have been substantially dismantled by 1567/8 (Clark *et al.* 2006, 29). Originally twice its current size, with an additional bay to the west, the large fireplace survives intact at the north wall, although the floor level has been substantially raised (Clark *et al.* 2006, 11).

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Guildhall's first-floor layout largely reflected its medieval arrangement (fig. 13), as concisely described by Clark *et al.*:

The function of the eastern end of the south range is perhaps the least clear aspect of the plan, but might have contained a further chamber or chambers complementing that to the west. Access to these first floor rooms would probably have been obtained from a gallery running along the northern face of the range. The gallery would have been reached by stairs at the junction between the south range and the Guildhall, where the current 1890s stairs are located. The stairs would have also provided access to the 'low' end of the upper hall. A further set of stairs would have been located at the north end of the Guildhall to provide access to the 'high'

end of the upper hall, subsequently removed when the Guildhall was extended to meet the tower of the Guild Chapel. The stairs functioned to provide direct access from the Guild Chapel to the upper hall, removing the need to enter from the service end of the hall and thus maintaining the typical hierarchy of a medieval hall (Clark *et al.* 2006, 18).

The functions of the various rooms within the Guildhall and south range changed in the sixteenth century, as the religious Guild gave way to the civic Corporation (fig. 14). The focus of activity shifted too, away from the Guildhall itself and towards the Council Chamber, housed in the former 'Cowntyngnows' on the ground floor of the south range (Clark *et al.* 2006, 20-1). Here the high bailiff, aldermen and burgesses gathered, to 'commen & consoult to gether of thynges nessessary & redress thos thynges that shall fortyn to be enormyd and out of ordor' (Savage 1921, 64). The room, originally a further bay in length, could easily house the fourteen aldermen, and would soon have been established as the formal civic jurisdictional heart of the town. Frequently referred to as the 'Court House', it is clear that privacy and security in the chamber were paramount. The 1557 Orders of the Corporation demanded that

Fromhensfurthe non of ye aldermen nor Capytall Burgesez do dysclos nor declare of ye Councell chamber eny woordes or dedes spoken or done in the Councell chamber unto eny other personse but only unto thos persones yt be of the Councell under ye payne of euery person so ofendynge to forfeit for the first defalt xli - & for the thryd defalt to be expulsed and after yt neuer not to be exceptyd nor to be taken to be of the Councell (Savage 1921, 64)

and over the period there was steady expenditure on 'staples, hinges, locks, keys and other door furniture' (Clark *et al.* 2006, 21).

The first floor room above the council chamber was, by 1612/13, host to the Armoury, but whether the 'harness' or 'armour chamber' of the late sixteenth century was also located here is uncertain. Regular mentions from 1580/1 of the 'chamber where the Armour hangeth' and 'harness chamber' (Savage 1926, 84) suggest a permanent location; on the other hand, there seems to be an expectation that the upper chamber could and would be rented out (Clark *et al.* 2006, 21; Savage 1926, 164). Clark *et al.* have suggested that the room was used as the tiring room for travelling players, a function 'not... incompatible with the use of this room as an armoury' (Clark *et al.* 2006,

21). While the chamber certainly seems an appropriate space to use as a tiring room, for the Corporation to have set aside the room solely for this very occasional purpose seems unlikely. The thirty recorded visits by touring companies in as many years does not suggest that the town was exactly inundated by hosts of players, even if we allow for some companies having slipped the accountants' net. To leave the room otherwise empty seems a startling lack of business acumen, if nothing else, from the town's leading businessmen. Short of evidence to the contrary, then, tentatively placing the earlier armoury in the same space as in 1612/13 seems a reasonable leap of faith.

The Guildhall itself continued to function as the venue for feasts and meetings. In addition, following the appointment of John Brownsword as schoolmaster in 1565/6, the school moved from its former location in the Pedagogue's House into the Guildhall (Clark *et al.* 2006, 28). At the same time the internal partition between the service rooms at first floor level was removed (Mulryne 2007, 15), suggesting that the school was located in this south chamber. Frequent payments for reflooring and repairs to the walls were made throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'particularly in advance of court meetings, feasts and other events' (Clark *et al.* 2006, 23). A 1574/5 payment of 3 *d.* for 'paving wtin the yeld haule where the masters sitt' (Savage 1923, 98) seems to suggest it was the lower hall where the aldermen sat for their feasts – further evidence, it has been argued, that the school occupied the upper hall (Clark *et al.* 2006, 23).

The Guildhall's long and complex association with such a range of civic, jurisdictional, educational and religious activities necessarily complicates our understanding of the space. The hall's imbued associations with the daily practices of Corporation life were underlain by three hundred years of religious affiliations which, though now hidden, still held significant influence. Yet new influences were also growing, particularly that of the new educational system which not only brought boys within the hall itself, but also brought with it a new syllabus of Terrence and Plautus, of recitation and oration (Green 2012; Potter 2004). The aldermen themselves were sophisticated, pious men; they were businessmen and officers of the court, charged with jurisdictional oversight and enforcement. Yet they were willing to bend the rules to ensure the smooth running of the town and to help friends fallen on harder times. These affiliations, these practices, this body incorporate defined, and were defined by, the building in which they practised their everyday lives, the Guildhall. It was into this multifaceted palimpsest, this Guildhall, that the Queen's Men arrived to present their plays.

How they might have done so will occupy much of subsequent chapters, but it is more productive to do so with a particular play and its demands in mind. With this purpose, I will now turn to one of the Queen's Men's plays, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*.

## 4 – THE TROUBLESOME PLAY OF KING JOHN

### 4.1 – THE QUEEN’S MEN’S *TROUBLESOME REIGN* AND SHAKESPEARE’S *KING JOHN*: SOME PROBLEMS FOR COMPOSITION AND AUTHORSHIP

The Queen’s Men’s play *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, has been the source of greater contention than any other play in the company’s repertoire. It has been considered the ‘earliest vital representation of historical characters on the English stage’ (Schelling 1908, i, 258), but has also suffered comparison with the play on the same subject by William Shakespeare. Traditionally *The Troublesome Reign* has been treated as the main source for Shakespeare’s work, and it is as such that it is included in Geoffrey Bullough’s *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1962, iv) and Everitt and Armstrong’s *Six Early Plays Related to the Shakespeare Canon* (1965). However, following the arguments of his colleague and former supervisor Peter Alexander, when E. A. J. Honigmann published his 1954 edition of Shakespeare’s *King John* for the New Arden Series he argued for Shakespeare’s work being the earlier work, and hence the source for *The Troublesome Reign* (Alexander 1939; Shakespeare 1954). The position has since been followed by a number of scholars, including *King John*’s editor for the most recent Cambridge edition, L. A. Beaurline (Shakespeare 1990). Study of the Queen’s Men’s play in its own right has been relatively sparse, although more extensive than for some of the company’s plays. There were only three dedicated editions published in the early twentieth century (Farmer 1911; Furnivall and Munro 1913; Furness 1919), while a small number of doctoral theses focusing on the play text were completed over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Domonic 1969; Gary 1971; Sider 1979). More recently, Charles Forker has produced a modern critical edition for the Revels Plays series (Peele 2011), and Karen Oberer has produced an edition of the 1591 Quarto as part of the ongoing *Queen’s Men Editions* project, itself part of the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* and running parallel to the Canadian *Shakespeare and the Queen’s Men* project (Anon 2012).<sup>20</sup>

Save a few notable exceptions (for example Lyons 2009; Oberer 2009; Longstaffe 2012), recent work on *The Troublesome Reign* has largely been incorporated as part of wider discussion focused on the more famous work by Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John* (see Shakespeare 1989; 1990; Boyd 1995; Groves 2004). The complex

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<sup>20</sup> For a more complete survey of editions and works on the *Troublesome Reign*, see Charles Forker’s comprehensive report in his edition of the play (Peele 2011, xv-xxiv).

relationship between the two has prompted the nickname 'The Troublesome Play of King John', and much has been said on the 'intricate and disputed', 'obscure and elusive' connection between both works. While Braunmuller complained that 'determining the relation between [the two plays] bears little on what I personally find most interesting and rewarding about Shakespeare's *King John*' (Shakespeare 1989, 1), we need to examine this relationship and the assumptions made by scholars before we can begin to examine *The Troublesome Reign* in a way which informs our understanding of the play not merely as the poorer cousin of Shakespeare's work, but as a work in its own right, with a discrete set of parameters and demands for performance.

It is first necessary to state what solid evidence we have about the two plays. *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, was first published, without entry in the Stationers' Register, by Samson Clarke in 1591. The text was published in two quarto volumes, although it was written as one whole (Bullough 1962, iv, 4). The title pages to both parts declare it was '(sundry times) publikely acted by the Queenes Majesties Players, in the honorable Citie of London' (Sider 1979, 4, 110). Three imperfect copies survive respectively in the Capell Collection at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, and in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. A second quarto, published in 1611, retains the play's attribution to the Queen's Men, but further adds the words 'Written by W. Sh.' It is on this second quarto that almost all editions before 1900 are based (Sider 1979, xv). A third quarto, published in 1622 – a year before the publication of the First Folio – more firmly attributes the play as being 'Written by W. Shakespeare'. *The Troublesome Reign* draws heavily on the historical chronicles of Raphael Holinshed (1587), with further reference to the *Chronica Majora* by Matthew Paris (1872-83) and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583). The life and reign of John are omitted from Holinshed's first edition of his chronicles, but inserted into his second edition of 1587: thus we can safely suggest an anterior date of 1587 for the composition of *The Troublesome Reign*.

The play that is more securely recognised as Shakespeare's *King John* was first published in the 1623 First Folio. The play is shrouded in uncertainty. It was never published in quarto form and never entered into the Stationers' Register. Yet when on 8 November 1623 two of the syndicate who were preparing to publish the First Folio, Edward Blount and Issac Jaggard, paid to submit sixteen Shakespeare plays 'as are not formerly entered to other men', neither *King John* nor *The Taming of the Shrew* – both included for the first time in the Folio – were among the plays submitted. Rightly or

wrongly, publishers seem to have treated these two plays as being identical to *The Troublesome Reign* and a play attributed to Pembroke's Men, *The Taming of a Shrew*. Braunmuller has demonstrated why we should consider the two cases separately (Shakespeare 1989, 19-20), and hence I will follow McMillin and MacLean's inclination 'to leave the *Shrew* problem to students of Pembroke's Men' (1998, 162). Evidently the publishers of the Folio either believed *King John* was a version of the earlier-published *The Troublesome Reign* quartos or else they were encouraging this belief in order to circumvent the submission procedure to the Stationers' Register. While this second option seems plausible at first glance, it is in fact a less likely option, given that *The Troublesome Reign* itself was never entered into the Register. Like *The Troublesome Reign*, Shakespeare's *King John* draws on Holinshed, Foxe and Paris, again supplying 1587 as the earliest year the play could have been written. Analysis of each author's choice of chronicle materials and the extent to which he modifies the original text has largely formed the bedrock of most academic argument over which work has priority (Shakespeare 1954, xi-xxxiii; 1989, 15-19; 1990, 195-205; Sider 1979, xxii-xxvii; see Peele 2011, 6-9, 28-50). Finally, a play named *King John* is one of twelve listed as works by Shakespeare in Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598), from which the majority of modern editions of Shakespeare's *King John* take 1598 as the posterior date for the play's composition (Shakespeare 1954, xliii; 1990, 3).

Let us now consider the alternatives proffered as to the authorial and chronological relations between the two plays. While for some time *The Troublesome Reign* was thought to be either an early draft by Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1990, 194) or a 'bad quarto' of Shakespeare's *King John* (see Tillyard 1944; Honigmann 1982; Boyd 1995), it has more recently been popular to attribute *The Troublesome Reign's* assignation to Shakespeare in its second and third quartos as the work of unscrupulous publishers wishing to falsely profit from the name of the more famous playwright (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 162). However, as McMillin and MacLean note, the publishers of the Folio – Valentine Simmes, Augustine Mathewes, Issac Jaggard and Edward Blount –

had dealt with Shakespeare's texts before... and they were closer to the facts of the case than we are. They may have known something about the authorship of *The Troublesome Reign* that we do not know. In some sense, Shakespeare may have been involved in that authorship (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 162).

It is worth briefly retracing our steps to the account of Francis Meres, on whose word scholars date Shakespeare's *King John* to before 1598. As Meres relies heavily on secondary English writers and standard Latin quotation books, and furthermore omits significant works of the Shakespearean canon, namely the *Henry VI* plays, scholars have questioned the reliability of his observations (Shakespeare 1989, 2 n.3). We can only confirm Meres's residency in London for two years, 1597 and 1598. His omission of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays may therefore have been due to their not being 'played in London between his [Meres's] arrival and the compilation of his list' (Chambers 1930, i, 208; ii, 193). Chambers' argument, if valid, would allow us to suppose *King John* was performed at some point in the two years Meres lived in London. However, Honigmann suggests Meres 'betrays imperfect sympathies with popular dramatists', and thinks the evidence 'suggests that Meres was not up-to-date in theatre affairs in 1598' (Honigmann 1982, 76). That said, while Meres's knowledge of theatre affairs may have been second-hand and unreliable, 'at least as negative evidence' (Allen 1933), Braunmuller has noted that Meres was sufficiently *au fait* to mention 'the Author of Skialethia', Edward Guilpin, whose work was entered in the Stationers' Register a week after his own (Shakespeare 1989, 2 n.3). In a brief flight of fancy, let us consider the following: if we acknowledge Meres as an imperfect source but still worthy of some consideration, and if the publishers of *The Troublesome Reign's* second and third quartos and those of the First Folio were not merely unscrupulous entrepreneurs out to capitalise on Shakespeare's name but had a better idea than we about authorship attributions, how do we then know *which* *King John* play was recorded by Meres? Was it *King John* as printed in the Folio, or might it have been some version of *The Troublesome Reign*, or something else, an intermediary text?

I am not, of course, arguing that Meres *is* referring to *The Troublesome Reign*. If he were, the play would not have necessarily been performed by the Queen's Men, as we have no record of their presence in London after their failed season in 1594.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there may be sufficient evidence to show that *King John* existed as a separate entity by 1598. Anthony Munday's *Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, first acted around 1598 and printed three years later, contains a dumb show showing John, Austria, Constance and Arthur, in which Hubert is addressed as 'thou fatal keeper of poor babes'. This, arguably, is more likely to refer to Shakespeare's young Arthur

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<sup>21</sup> Henslowe recorded that the company 'broke' on 8 May 1593 (Henslowe 1961, 7); McMillin and MacLean (1998 49, 209 n.49) assert the W.W. Greg's alteration to 1594 is correct.



rather than the much older character of *The Troublesome Reign* and the chronicles (Shakespeare 1990, 3). Topical allusions suffer from ‘an embarrassment of riches’, but stylistic internal evidence has persuasively shown *King John* as being closely related to *Richard II* (1595) and *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-8) (Shakespeare 1989, 3). Nevertheless, without knowing the exact relationship between *The Troublesome Reign* and *King John* we should be wary of drawing conclusions prematurely.

Let us return to the authorial and chronological possibilities of the two texts. The problem arises in the first place because of the close and continuing proximity of the two texts to each other, both structurally and in the way in which information was extracted and reworked from the chronicles. That each author had direct access to the chronicles is certain, as each includes details from Holinshed’s *Chronicles* and Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* that are not present in the other play. The structure of both plays is remarkably similar – in fact, almost identical. Yet elsewhere Shakespeare substantially reworks his sources and in his history plays he notably ‘boldly telescopes and invents’ (Shakespeare 1990, 197). Thus Beaurline, arguing for *King John*’s priority, incredulously questions:

Must we presume that [Shakespeare] found in [*The Troublesome Reign*] a ready-made, carefully articulated plan that fitted his own habits of plotting? This is odd, indeed, since no other playwright of the time – not Marlowe, Peele, Greene, Kyd, or Lyly – has the combinative and structural powers of the early Shakespeare; yet the preternaturally gifted author of [*The Troublesome Raigne*] has supposedly done his basic work for him (Shakespeare 1990, 197).

Nevertheless, neither of the main proponents for *King John*’s precedence, Honigmann and Beaurline, can provide irrefutable evidence for their preference, nor can they explain why more of Shakespeare’s language is not carried over. Ultimately only 20-25 lines echo the other play (see Shakespeare 1936, xxvi-xxvii; Gary 1971, 155-7), and with most of these are as pedestrian as:

Hubert, what news with you? (*John* 4.2.68)

How now, what news with thee (*TR* 8.207) (Shakespeare 1990, 195):

The two plays share only two lines that are more or less identical. One once-popular theory (summarised in Boyd 1995) suggests that *The Troublesome Reign* is a ‘bad quarto’ of *King John*, whereby the former was hastily recorded by an audience-member

during or shortly after a performance of the latter. The discrepancies of character and internal structure of scenes between the two are too frequent, however, for this to be the case. Moreover, one would expect significant chunks of Shakespeare's writing to survive and be reproduced – Kenneth Muir observed that it was 'incredible that hack writers who were so well acquainted with Shakespeare's play as to follow it scene by scene could reproduce none of the actual dialogue' (1960, 50). Moreover, poor and incoherent overall structure is a diagnostic features of 'bad' renditions of plays, and while *The Troublesome Reign* lacks some of Shakespeare's skill with language, it remains 'coherent and recognizable in its own terms', displaying a dramaturgy and style favoured more widely by the Queen's Men (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 163).

The arguments for the dates and priority of the two plays can be summarised thus (see Shakespeare 1989, 9-11; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 163; Sams 1995):

- a) *The Troublesome Reign* was written by an unknown playwright or playwrights and performed in some form before Shakespeare's *King John* was written and performed. It provided the main source for Shakespeare's work.
- b) *The Troublesome Reign* was adapted from Shakespeare's *King John*. This would shed little light on dating *The Troublesome Reign*, but reduce *King John*'s posterior limit to 1591, the year of *The Troublesome Reign*'s publication.
- c) A lost play or plot was written and perhaps performed before either *The Troublesome Reign* or *King John* were written. *The Troublesome Reign* and *King John* were then written by authors aware of this hypothetical text.
- d) *The Troublesome Reign* was written by Shakespeare, who some time later substantially rewrote the play as *King John*, presumably for a different company.

The argument that both plays came from some kind of proto-*John* is a difficult one to pursue – Braunmuller declares that 'appealing to hypothetical plays, scenarios, or plots is playing tennis without a net' (Shakespeare 1989, 11). In such a scenario, the third playwright must *also* have had a tenacious handle on structure, or else both Shakespeare and the author of *The Troublesome Reign* wrote near-identically structured plays independently and at the same time. In the absence of any evidence for such an event it seems prudent to discount this argument completely.

The fourth argument, that of Eric Sams, for seeing Shakespeare's hand in the writing of *The Troublesome Reign* is based around his supposition that Shakespeare was a 'master

of structure before he was a master of language' (1995, 146). Sams supports his argument by insisting that Francis Meres's list of plays is not sufficient evidence to give *King John* any earlier date than its First Folio publication date of 1623. Moreover, as Greene writes complaining that Shakespeare imitates both Peele and Marlowe, and *The Troublesome Reign* also copies both poets, Sams is further convinced of Shakespeare's authorship (1995, 147). Yet Sams' 'master of structure' must explain some significant structural instabilities within individual scenes of *The Troublesome Reign*. To take just one example: the play's first scene, in which Robert and Philip Falconbridge seek King John's ruling over Philip's legitimacy and claim to his late father's estate, presents the trial in full view of Margaret Lady Falconbridge, mother to the disputing brothers. Despite this, and despite the Philip's trance-induced revelation that he is the bastard son of Richard Lionheart and nephew to the king, and despite the public acceptance of the same, there is a lengthy coda of some hundred and ten lines in which Philip cross-examines his mother and has to threaten violence to gain knowledge he has already professed earlier in the scene. Such an imbalance does not occur in Shakespeare's work. Margaret does not enter until after the dispute is settled, and the Bastard, having accepted employment from Queen Eleanor, which she offered solely on the basis of his similar appearance to Richard Lionheart, has not in any way settled his paternity. Shakespeare's argument between mother and son therefore has an essential role in the shaping of narrative and character.

Both Sams' and the 'bad quarto' arguments assume that the two plays resemble each other in style:

[T]hey do not. They resemble one another in plot. The style of Shakespeare's play depends on a writer who has a knack for writing dramatic blank verse, while the style of *The Troublesome Reign* depends on actors who command the resources of a visual theatre. These are not mutually exclusive characteristics, but they do have a different emphasis and the difference in emphasis can be seen and heard in the theatre (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 163).

Until now I have omitted discussion of two essential pieces of scholarship that comprise the most recent interventions to discuss the authorship of *The Troublesome Reign*: Brian Vickers's article, '*The Troublesome Raigne, George Peele, and the Date of King John*' (2004), and Charles Forker's recent Revels Plays edition, the first time the play has been subjected to modern, critical study (Peele 2011). Their work is notable

not least for their firm assigning of *The Troublesome Reign* to the playwright and university wit, George Peele. The connection is made on the basis of Vickers's analysis of the Chadwyck-Healey databases, which used plagiarism-detection software to identify authorial self-repetitions, and which is whole-heartedly accepted by Forker. Forker avoids reproducing the 'massive totality of Vickers's evidence' in the introduction to his Revels edition and provides only illustrative examples of the similarities between *The Troublesome Reign* and Peele's 'known and putative works' (Peele 2011, 9, see 6-31, 335-356). However, while Vickers's evidence is undoubtedly voluminous, the strength of his methodologies and his interpretations of the data during similar exercises, in which he considers multiple hands in the composition of Shakespearean works, have frequently been questioned (Rasmussen 2004, 336; Brown 2006, 170; Burrows 2012; see Vickers 2002). Neither Forker's edition nor Vickers's attribution to Peele have yet been widely reviewed, but Peter Kirwan has raised concerns over the clarity of Vickers's statistical analysis (Kirwan 2011).

The play's connection to the Queen's Men may offer some support for Peele's involvement with its composition, but the link admittedly offers only incidental evidence: Peele also wrote *The Old Wives' Tale* for the company, which was published four years after *The Troublesome Reign* in 1595. Dora Jean Ashe also argued some years ago that Peele's *Edward I* was originally a Queen's play (1955, 169), but Roslyn Knutson prefers to think of the play as being 'influenced by the Queen's Men's house style yet a step or two removed from its replication' (2009, 105). It is worth noting that past criticism of *The Troublesome Reign* has often commented on the debt owed by the author to other playwrights. Honigmann described the author as having 'a memory-box filled with scraps of other men's plays', echoing lines from Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 3*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors*, as well as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II*, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, *The Arraignement of Paris* and *The Battle of Alcazar* by Peele, and *Selimus*, possibly by Greene (Shakespeare 1990, 195; Honigmann 1982, 79-83). In the past authorship, based largely on such internal stylistic variations, has variously been attributed to Drayton, Greene, Kyd, Lodge, Marlowe, Munday, Peele, Rowley and Shakespeare (Sider 1979, xlvii). The stylistic variety displayed in the play must either demonstrate the author's ability in imitating the range of writing styles, or suggest that such distinctive styles had not become fixed by the time the play was written, and that authors were rather more stylistically flexible than they are given credit.

The question of authorship has implications for repertory and invites comparison with other plays in the author's repertoire. However, where, in the face of inconclusive squabbles, uncertainties remain over a play's true author, we might be better put the question aside. In these circumstances it has little bearing on what we might say about staging and performance, and the benefit of taking an interdisciplinary approach is that we can look at the play from other angles. Rather than seeing the play as the result of an author working in isolation, we should see it instead as a product of the company that performed it, and of the spaces in which it was performed. Given that a question remains over the play's authorship, and as it does not have consequences for this project, it seems sensible to follow McMillin and MacLean's spirit of conservatism and continue to refer to an anonymous author.

#### **4.2 – THE PLAY**

This project was based around the exploration in performance of a number of key scenes of *The Troublesome Reign* over the course of two workshops in the Guildhall at Stratford-upon-Avon. The discussion of the preparatory research, rehearsal and final performance will provide the focus of the majority of the rest of this thesis. However, this necessarily involves focussing on a restricted number of scenes, and it is helpful to have in mind an overview of the play, particularly when later thinking about the themes it touches upon and its reception by an early modern Stratford audience. A substantial examination is given by Charles Forker (Peele 2011, 50-79), so what follows is a shorter synopsis of the play.

*Part 1 Scene 1.* The play opens soon after the ascension of King John, and Eleanor's introductory speech suggests by inference that John's coronation may just have taken place. John receives Chatillon, the French Ambassador, who delivers a message from Philip, King of France, in which the French king demands that John hand the crown and all English territories to his nephew, Arthur. John dismisses Chatillon and promises to travel to France to fortify the English possessions. Subsequently the king receives two brothers, Robert and Philip Falconbridge, 'unnaturally falling to arms' (77-8) in a feud over Philip's legitimacy. Listening to the plaintiffs, John does not dismiss the younger brother, Robert's, claim, but puts the onus on the elder, Philip, to prove his patrimony. After falling in a trance in which Philip learns he is the son of Richard the Lionheart, Philip rescinds his claim to his inheritance, submitting himself to John and Eleanor.

John and the court retire to make war preparations, leaving Philip the Bastard to interrogate his mother – who has been present throughout – on the matter of his parentage. Lady Falconbridge, on threat of death, eventually confirms that Philip's true father is indeed King Richard.

*Scene 2.* The French forces are gathered in front of the English-held town of Angers, where John and his troupe arrive to reclaim his territories. King Philip of France attempts to bring the various quarrels to a head, but John suggests asking the citizens of the town to choose. The citizens, unwilling to risk offending either party, refrain, leaving no option but for the opposing forces to join in battle.

*Scene 3.* During excursions between the two armies Philip the Bastard duels with his father's killer, Limoges, Duke of Austria. Limoges is forced to drop his trophy lion skin to escape the Bastard's attacks.

*Scene 4.* The battle is inconclusive, and the kings are forced once more to debate their respective merits and persuade the town to choose a side. When they still refuse, the Bastard suggests razing the town, and the citizens hastily suggest a union between the Dauphin Lewis and John's niece, Blanche. Through this deal King Philip is able to acquire the English lands held in France as part of Blanche's dowry, and John achieves the complete disenfranchisement of his nephew and competitor, Arthur. The parties retire into Angers' church to celebrate the wedding, leaving Constance to bemoan her son, Arthur's, losses.

*Scene 5.* The nuptial preparations are interrupted by the papal legate, Cardinal Pandulph, who excommunicates John for crimes against the Church, forcing French and English forces to annul their peace treaty and battle once more.

*Scenes 6-9.* A series of excursions in which the Bastard again confronts Limoges, and slays him; Queen Eleanor is captured by the French and subsequently rescued by John; John and the English forces capture Arthur; and, having placed Arthur in the custody of Hubert de Burgh, John returns to England.

*Scene 10.* The French lick their wounds, mourning Limoges' death and Arthur's capture. Pandulph conveys the Pope's blessing of Lewis' claim to the English throne and encourages a French invasion.

*Scene 11.* Back in England, Philip the Bastard arrives at Swinstead Abbey to seize the friars' riches. He finds nuns secreted in treasure chests and monks chanting Skeltonic

verse in English and Latin. As he leaves the Bastard encounters a prophet, whom he arrests and conveys to court.

*Scene 12.* Hubert de Burgh, acting on written command of John, binds Arthur to a chair and prepares to blind him. Arthur appeals to Hubert's better nature and successfully negotiates his release. Hubert resolves to (mis)inform John of Arthur's death.

*Scene 13.* John and the English nobles arrive in triumph from France. John resolves to be crowned and proclaimed king for a second time. This resolution worries the nobles, who think such actions will 'breed a mutiny in people's minds' (38). As preparations are made, Philip the Bastard returns with news of his exploits at Swinstead, and describes the prophecies made by the man he encountered there. The nobles and bishops enter and crown John, who grants a boon to his nobles. They demand Arthur's release, arguing that John need not fear his nephew's claim now John has been crowned a second time. John – having ordered his nephew's blinding – accepts. Suddenly five moons appear above John; Philip the Bastard brings the captive prophet to interpret, who predicts John's deposition by Ascension Day. Terrified, John rescinds his promise to release Arthur, just as Hubert arrives to inform the king of his nephew's demise. Outraged, the nobles exit, threatening revenge. Facing a furious John, Hubert reveals his lie and confirms that Arthur is alive and well, giving John hope of calming his nobles.

*Part 2 Scene 1.* Arthur stands atop the castle walls where he is still held, contemplating his fate. In a desperate bid for freedom he leaps from the walls, but falls to his death. The lords Essex, Salisbury and Pembroke arrive to find his lifeless body, and vow revenge.

*Scene 2.* A troubled John frets while he waits for news. His triumph when informed of Arthur's death is short lived as the Bastard enters to inform the king of the baron's revolt and Lewis' imminent invasion. Philip is sent to dissuade the nobles, while in desperation John submits to the Cardinal Pandulph and to Rome in a bid to save his throne.

*Scene 3.* The nobles gather at Bury St. Edmunds, giving speeches in support of rebellion and Lewis' claim. Philip is unable to deflect them from their course, and leaves them to welcome the newly-arrived Dauphin. Lewis, having received the nobles' pledges, dismisses them, requesting time for private prayer. Immediately he and the French

lords plot to renege on their oaths, promising to execute the rebels once Lewis controls the throne.

*Scene 4.* John and the Cardinal face the French forces and the rebel lords. In spite of Pandulph's command that Lewis stand down, Lewis refuses, and battle ensues.

*Scene 5.* In the midst of the battle the French lord Melun is fatally wounded. He warns the English nobles of the French treachery, moved to confession 'for the freedom' of his soul (25), and – in a wonderful revelation – because his grandfather 'was an Englishman' (28). The earls resolve to return to John.

*Scene 6.* The king, now sick from the weight of his sins, arrives near Swinstead Abbey. Philip the Bastard, in retreat from Lewis' army, arrives to tell John of the obliteration of the English forces. Arriving at the Abbey, the Abbot welcomes the king in to rest and recover. Left apart, Thomas the monk plots to murder the king. The abbot, overhearing, mistakenly thinks Thomas means to kill him, and when corrected gladly falls in with Thomas' plan.

*Scene 7.* Lewis' success is dampened with news that the English lords have reverted to John's cause, and that the fresh supply of men and munitions from France have foundered while crossing the Channel. A third messenger arrives to encourage the Dauphin, telling him of the decimation of the English forces as they traversed the Wash.

*Scene 8.* John and the Abbot retire to the orchard, where John is tricked into drinking poison by the monk Thomas. Dying, John repents of his tyranny, and blames his downfall on capitulating to Rome. With his last breaths he predicts the rise of the Tudor house and the break from Rome under Henry VIII. His voice spent, John receives the newly-arrived, repentant nobles, and encouraged by Pandulph forgives them their betrayal. Reconciled with his nobles and the church, he dies with his son, Prince Henry, by his side. Pandulph discourages the Bastard's incitement to seek battle with Lewis, leaving to meet the Dauphin and encourage a truce.

*Scene 9.* The nobles bear the body of John to be laid in state. Lewis relinquishes his claim to the throne, citing lack of support from the rebel lords, and Henry is crowned king.

From an initial glance the main themes of the play seem to uphold the Queen's Men's role as the promoters of the monarchy and Protestantism. However, the reality is more



complex, and it is the play's ambiguities that may have had greater resonance with the Stratford aldermen.

#### 4.3 – POLEMICAL PROTESTANTISM OR POLITICAL HETERODOXY?

Despite the pressure to clarify the relationship between *The Troublesome Reign* and Shakespeare, it is to Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and its commercial success on stage and in print, that the Queen's Men's play has a greater connection, most immediately seen in the latter's mimicry of *Tamburlaine*'s two part format (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 155-58). *The Troublesome Reign*, in print at least, attempts to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Marlowe in the prologue to *Tamburlaine* (Marlowe 1997), where he sneered at the 'jigging veins of rhyming mother wits / And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay' (1-2). In riposte, the author of *The Troublesome Reign* asks his 'Gentlemen Readers',

You that with friendly grace of smoothèd brow  
Have entertained the Scythian Tamburlaine,  
And given applause unto an infidel,  
Vouchsafe to welcome with like courtesy  
A warlike Christian and your countryman. (Prologue, 1-5).<sup>22</sup>

Marlowe's mighty line is all well and good, the author says, but here is a subject with which the audience, provincial or metropolitan, can and should feel a patriotic and Protestant connection. The prologue may or may not have been presented as part of a performance. However, it serves, in print and/ or on stage, to endorse the attitudes of a company generally agreed to have been created to present a pro-Protestant, pro-monarchical face – a stance that would chime with the increasingly orthodox religious and social attitudes of many late-sixteenth-century townspeople.

However, the Queen's Men did not unabashedly present the united face of Elizabethan orthodoxy. Should they have done so, we might expect *The Troublesome Reign* to follow the lead of John Bale's earlier Tudor propaganda play *King Johan*, which 'dramatizes events not primarily in the interests of reconstructing the past but with the idea of illuminating the present' in seeking to justify the Henrician Reformation (Potter 1975,

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<sup>22</sup> All passages from the *Troublesome Reign* are taken from Forker's Revels edition.

101; cited in Bowers 2001, 8; see Bale 1907). In consequence, *King Johan* discards any reference to John's more questionable episodes with a view to presenting a clear-cut parable of good (King John) versus evil (the pre-Reformation Church). While *The Troublesome Reign* ultimately endorses the religious policies of Henry and Elizabeth, this is not its primary or necessarily its strongest emphasis. Rather, *The Troublesome Reign* focuses on issues of legitimacy, presenting an ambiguous and complex John who is both tyrant and victim. While it may be that Cynthia Bowers presses too hard when stating that the author is 'attempting to write "true" chronicle history' – any mention of Magna Carta, for instance, is conspicuously absent – I agree with her that Tudor orthodoxy is called into question (Bowers 2001, 8). The interaction between key episodes and 'unstable contemporary political theory' recasts *The Troublesome Reign* not as John's apologia but as an interrogation of political, religious and monarchical authority – and thus offers a notable challenge to accepted ideals widespread in England.

John faces three sustained threats to his authority over the course of the play: his nephew Arthur's questioning, supported by the King of France, of John's territorial claim to English lands in France; the threat of excommunication and opposition from an opportunist Roman Church; and the rebellious machinations of his own nobility. The events portrayed – John's campaigns on the Continent, his aggression towards the English monasteries, religious wrangling with the papal legate, and the uprising of the nobles and attempted invasion by the French prince Lewis – all appear in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but in *The Troublesome Reign* the chronological order has been significantly altered. The playwright's deft conflation and telescoping of chronicled events serve to maintain a persistent threat to the stability of John's rule, favouring dramatic momentum over the inertias of 'true' chronicle. While audiences might have expected a play performed by the royal company to treat John purely as a proto-Henry VIII, with the king facing adversity full of Protestant morality and decisive royal authority, *The Troublesome Reign* does not do this. John is shown at times as a strong king, ruthless critic of the corrupt Church and brave on the battlefield – unlike Shakespeare's protagonist, this King John, not Philip the Bastard, rescues his captured mother from the French. Yet John is also shown falling into madness and tyranny, seeking the counsel of a charlatan prophet, inept and vacillating in his treatment of his nephew Arthur, and demanding a second coronation that leads his barons to question his legitimacy.

Set against these thematic anxieties, the play's structural principle is that of a series of confrontations in order to 'expostulate' John's shortcomings, as Lady Margaret Falconbridge does, 'with pro et contra' (1. 1. 408-9) (see Peele 2011, 57). Legal process, oath-taking and breaking, questionable paternity and legitimate inheritance are all examined repeatedly. The play exhibits an 'insistent verbal repetition', establishing overarching themes through repeated expressions of concern over law, tyranny and the 'Senecan rhetoric of revenge' (Peele 2011, 69). Less obvious to the reader are the series of repeating physical stage configurations which reinforce and renegotiate the play's political and moral concerns. These comprise both actions and arrangements of stage space that are not explicitly required by the original stage directions but are nonetheless prompted by the text, and must be explored in modern rehearsal and performance if we are to understand their full potential. The spatial arrangements on stage, the location of people and objects of temporal and spiritual authority relative to others, would have immediately informed a knowledgeable audience of an accepted hierarchy which then proceeds to be tested throughout the play. Many of the activities depicted in the play also would have been doubly resonant for an early modern audience in a civic hall space which regularly hosted similar deeds in the course of a corporation's daily business.

In *The Troublesome Reign* these stage tactics are most apparent in a series of tableaux that frame scenes involving key events in the play's narrative: John's arbitration of the dispute between Robert and Philip Falconbridge; the citizens of Angers' arbitration of the claims made by John and King Philip of France; John's second coronation; the oath of fealty made by the rebel nobles to Lewis at the shrine of Bury St. Edmunds; and the nobles' reconciliation with John on his deathbed at Swinstead Abbey. These are, structurally and thematically, the most important scenes of the play, and my subsequent examination of *The Troublesome Reign* and the practical exploration of the play in Stratford focussed on these scenes.

There are, of course, other notable incidents in the play that would have been visually arresting and potentially difficult to produce. The appearance of five moons above King John after his second coronation and Arthur's fall from the walls at the opening of the second part of the play are two scenes that pose particular challenges, and had time and resources allowed the cast and I would have been able to give them their due attention. The problem of staging Arthur's fall in particular raises some interesting questions about what we can hope to discover about early modern staging, and I will

turn to this in the next chapter. However, the purpose of this project was not to tackle the whole play, but instead to focus on structurally pivotal and resonant scenes which pose interesting challenges when performed in a space like Stratford Guildhall. The choice of the key scenes listed above also serves to underpin archaeological concerns with the use of the hall space, both by addressing the practical use of the space by the players, and by thinking about how the themes and processes presented in the play reflected and engaged with the similar activities that normally occupied the space during the everyday business of the civic Corporation. By exploring a small proportion of a play it is possible to develop a series of practices that can later be expanded to encompass a fuller production and a wider repertory.

The following chapter explores how the selected scenes of *The Troublesome Reign* might in theory have been staged in the Stratford Guildhall, before turning in chapter six to our modern company's preparation and performance of those scenes for the workshops held in July 2011. However, we will see that certain previous assumptions about staging are weaker than they first appeared, and this raises further questions about how the early modern company would have approached their texts. Before we can attempt to stage the scenes ourselves, in chapter six we will also need to re-examine the historical evidence for performance that may or may not guide a modern company in its exploration of the text.

## 5 – STAGING THE *REIGN*

The second part of *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* opens with John's nephew, Arthur, entering 'on the walls' of the castle in which he is being kept captive. The young prince seeks his freedom by jumping; but the height proves too great. Arthur falls to the ground and is fatally injured. The scene was not one that the cast and I explored for the workshops in the Guildhall at Stratford-upon-Avon, but in the discussions after both performances this scene and the problems associated with staging it were raised: how might we and the Queen's Men have performed Arthur falling to his death?

What seems a straightforward question belies a more complex issue. Staging demands which to us seem impossible to fulfil in a provincial venue may, as we initially imagine them, be equally impractical in the purpose-built London theatres. Deducing a playwright's intentions for staging can be difficult, and there is little evidence for how early companies might have interpreted them, particularly in provincial venues. Without an elaborate description of how they were to be executed, stage directions can only express a wish that a certain action or arrangement of actors on stage be accomplished. Without further guidance we can only guess, with a varying degree of confidence, how such demands might have been met. The key issue is whether early modern companies would have known immediately, on the basis of past experience or staging conventions, how each new demand set by a playwright could be solved. While many of the staging requirements presented in scripts worked within the bounds of what had already been done, it is a moot point whether in the 1580s the established staging conventions were capable of meeting the challenge of staging Arthur's jump to his death. Moreover, whether a company had experience of staging such spectacles or if they had to devise new solutions, we should not assume that particular effects were accomplished in the same manner by all companies, nor that one company would only have been able to stage scenes in a single way.

Given these difficulties it is perhaps not surprising that the practicalities of provincial performance have not been addressed in modern scholarship. Moreover, the dismissive attitudes towards touring theatre that A. W. Pollard, J. Dover Wilson and W. W. Greg expressed almost a century ago continue to underpin the argument that provincial venues provided inadequate facilities for full scale performances, in spite of the weight of evidence regularly uncovered over the following decades that demonstrates the ubiquity of professional provincial drama (Thomson 2010; see

Pollard and Wilson 1919; Greg 1922; Allen and Muir 1981, xiv; Wells *et al.* 1987, 28.). Nevertheless, these old assumptions have begun to be challenged, and an examination of one play in a particular space may serve to advance the argument for more elaborate performance in provincial venues. However, before turning to discuss the Stratford Guildhall and the scenes from *The Troublesome Reign* I outlined in the previous chapter, it seems prudent first to question some of the assumptions about staging more generally. It soon becomes clear that we have as little idea as we do for provincial venues as to how the staging of scenes like Arthur's fall would have been handled in the London amphitheatres.

### **5.1 – ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT STAGING: ARTHUR 'ON THE WALLS'**

Direct evidence for the staging of early modern plays is comparatively slight and open to interpretation in a way that risks erecting large conclusions on untested assumptions. Except in the few cases where a performance of a particular play is described by a conscientious diarist, the clearest signals as to how a play might have been staged are encoded in stage directions in the printed texts. These directions offer a set of generalised instructions to be followed and interpreted, but not an explicit description of how actions should be realised. In printed texts necessary stage directions do not always appear at the right point in the action, while elsewhere no indication of action is provided despite being clearly warranted. Further complication is added when distinguishing printed text from performed play, as we cannot always be sure whether stage directions in the printed text reflect an author's original instructions, a record of a company's performance, or a printer's amendment. It is possible that each phase followed its predecessor – that the printer included the stage direction that had been performed by the company and that the author had originally prescribed. It may equally be possible, however, that the stage direction was one that the author wished the company to follow but that for some reason the company did not or could not, and that it survived in print as the continuation of authorial wishes. Alternatively, the stage direction may not have been part of the playwright's original plan, but instead reflected something the company had devised in performance. A further possibility is that the direction was added by the printer of his own volition, and without reference either to the author's wishes, or any performance by the company.

If a stage direction is authorial, then we also have to consider the relationship between the playwright and the company he was writing for. Some relationships are more visible than others. That between Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men, and their two theatres, the Globe and the Blackfriars, is one that can be tracked with comparative ease. It is a reasonable assumption that Shakespeare, writing explicitly for his company and these spaces, composed plays designed to make use of the company assets. Certain parts may be written with certain actors and their skills in mind, while certain ambitious stage effects – such as Jupiter's descent on the back of an eagle in *Cymbeline*, for example – suggest Shakespeare knew it was possible to accomplish this type of spectacle in his theatres. We might expect that the stability of the company as a whole, even allowing for an occasional change in its membership, and the specificity of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres, may have fostered and encouraged a set of staging practices to develop that was particular to the company, to their theatres and to Shakespeare's plays. However, such observations move us no closer to identifying precisely how the company might have staged certain actions, not least something like Arthur's death leap.

The relationship between Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men is not a model that necessarily transfers directly to other playwrights and companies in London, and equally their practices may not reflect those of companies such as the Queen's Men. While the Queen's Men included actor-playwrights among its number, notably Richard Tarlton and Robert Wilson, the majority of its plays by named authors were written by professional playwrights whose works were distributed amongst several companies. Tarlton and Wilson, we presume, had a very good idea what their company was capable of staging. Robert Greene and George Peele, whose respective *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *The Old Wives' Tale* were Queen's Men's plays, may have had a more distant relationship with the company. We don't know if their plays were explicitly commissioned by the Queen's Men, were written speculatively but with the Queen's Men in mind, or were written for no particular company to be sold to the first or highest bidder. Therefore we cannot necessarily say whether the playwrights tailored the staging requirements to the company or whether the directions represent what was staged in performance. The plays' stage directions may instead reflect over-ambitious demands by their authors; on the other hand, the directions may represent a pared-back approach to make them equally suitable for a company of lesser talent than the Queen's Men.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men were also in a distinctive situation in that they spent most of their career at a permanent London base. The majority of the London companies moved around a number of theatres and inn yards that varied in shape and size. On tour, companies faced hundreds of different venues that, while possible to group into types, nevertheless presented incalculable variables to the performance space and the facilities available therein. Touring plays had to be able – or be made – to accommodate a huge variety of spaces, and the challenges of doing so would have applied even those companies with a permanent base such as The Lord Chamberlain's Men. The ultimate responsibility for fitting a performance of a play into a provincial venue lay with the company. A helpful playwright might anticipate the problems of multiple provincial performances by including simpler staging demands, but another might write with only the full resources of the London amphitheatres or court in mind. Plays connected to touring companies may not have been purposefully written for provincial venues, and, given the Queen's Men's prominence at court during their early years, it is possible that the company only performed certain plays during those short periods when they played at better-equipped London venues. However, the frequency with which Queen's Men plays demand relatively complex staging suggests that it is more likely the company were happy and able to find ways of presenting these plays while on tour. To do so would seem to require a set of staging practices that are somewhat different to those found at the Globe or the Blackfriars – related, to be sure, but suitable for the multitude of different venues encountered outside the capital.

With these caveats in mind, we can return to the question of Arthur, and how his fall and death might be staged at Stratford. In reality, this presents two questions – how might we, the modern company, have staged it, and how might the Queen's Men have gone about the same incident? It is an important distinction to make. Any solution we offer for the staging of this or any scene can only be accepted as a possibility and within the parameters of a modern performance. We cannot say with any certainty that the same solution was used by the original company.

As we might expect, the stage directions for this episode offer a set of generalised instructions without explicitly describing how the series of actions should be realised: '*Enter young Arthur on the walls*' (2. 1. 1.0); '*He leaps, and, bruising his bones, after he wakes from his trance, speaks thus:*' (2. 1. 11.0); and finally, '*He dies*' (2. 1. 26.1). These directions do not offer an explicit explanation of how or where these actions are to take place. The first question is whether the wall is physically represented, and how. The



second is whether the height of the wall needs to be represented literally. A variety of structures found in many provincial venues, such as a rear wall or hall screen over which runs a gallery, would suffice to give a physical representation – although no such gallery exists at Stratford. Equally, a scaffold stage with a raised platform at the rear and a curtain or painted backcloth to represent the wall face, which served to separate the platform from the main stage, may have been offered a reasonable freestanding alternative – although again there are no records of scaffolds being used by companies at Stratford.

Alternatively, could the wall be represented more figuratively? By having a character identify other characters as being, for instance, ‘on the walls’, as King John does before Angers in *The Troublesome Reign*, does the need to show a physical structure become less pressing? Another option would be to somehow create something temporary, as the rustics do in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – or does the amateur company in *Dream* show itself up by using a device a company like the Queen’s Men would never consider?

The question of the wall’s height is a great concern. How high would an upper level have to be from the main stage? Might height have been symbolically represented by an actor standing on a bench or table? When considering Arthur’s death, how does the prince leap down, and how does he land? Can the action only be staged in a venue with a gallery from which the prince may jump? In the absence of such a gallery, as is the case at Stratford, could there be an alternative? In other words, could Arthur’s leap have been depicted figuratively, whereby the fall was presented through an encoded movement, such as a jump from a lesser height, or having the actor stand at floor level and collapse? Is it possible to convey the fall through verbal description alone?

The text of *The Troublesome Reign*, and therefore the stage directions therein, are almost certainly based on an author’s draft or its fair copy (Peele 2011, 92). The absence of certain entrances and exits, occasional misaligned verse and the omission of speech prefixes in the printed quarto suggest the source manuscript was not used in theatrical production (Peele 2011, 92). This being the case, we must ask whether the author knew how Arthur’s fall could and should be performed, or if he left the problem for the Queen’s Men to solve. Did the company know how such a scene should be staged, based on past experiences and performances of other plays, and on the knowledge of their members’ abilities and of the venues in which they regularly performed? If they did not, how were they equipped to find a solution?

If we cannot answer any of these questions immediately, we can be more certain on one thing: whatever it was, there must have been a solution to this staging problem. The scene from *The Troublesome Reign* is repeated in the same format in Shakespeare's *King John* – to have a scene that cannot be staged in one play may be regarded as a misfortune, but to find the same scene in a second? Of course, the purpose-built theatre in which Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men resided may have given them a significant advantage, as playwright and company were intimately acquainted with the facilities the venue offered and presumably had a number of strategies to deal with staging scenes that they had developed through prolonged use of the space. The Globe certainly offered something which Stratford Guildhall did not: an upper gallery above the stage, which could readily serve as battlements, wall tops, and other locations at a height.

For some members of the audience at our workshop in Stratford, the lack of an upper gallery in the Guildhall would have prohibited a full performance of *The Troublesome Reign*. The play's most recent editor, Charles Forker, would probably have been of the same mind, as although he makes no comment on the staging of Arthur's fall itself, he insists that when the citizens appear 'upon the walls' of Angers, they would have done so 'on the 'above' or upper stage of an Elizabethan theatre' (Peele 2011, 151, n. 191). If this were indeed the case, then the Queen's Men may only have staged *The Troublesome Reign* at court, while resident in one of the London playhouses or when visiting in provincial halls which did have a gallery players could use. However, to take this view automatically assumes that a gallery is the best and only way to show locations at a height, and that only a literal jump from that height serves to show Arthur's fall and death. In reality, how a company might have staged this scene when they did have access to a gallery poses its own serious problems.

It is too easy for modern readers of these plays to make the figurative jump between the existence of a gallery or upper stage and the feasibility of executing the scene either in *The Troublesome Reign* or in *King John*. While a gallery or an upper stage appears to offer an attractive solution for actors needing to signify town and castle walls, it would pose a serious hazard to any actor attempting to descend by any means other than a ladder or a flight of stairs. Whether in provincial halls or in the London playhouses, the drop from upper level to stage floor could be ten foot or more, ignoring any further obstacle banisters and railings would have presented. Any actor required to make such

a jump, regardless of how light he was on his feet or his talent for acrobatics, risked serious injury or worse every time.

The practicality of making and surviving a leap from a height gives recent editors of the texts no pause. None of the editors of the most recent Oxford, Cambridge or Arden editions of *King John* pass any direct comment on how Arthur's death could be staged, and the nearest equivalent episode, when the citizens of Angers appear on the walls (2. 2.), passes similarly unremarked upon (Shakespeare 1954, 1989, 1990). L. A. Beaurline does include a sketch by C. W. Hodges (Shakespeare 1990, 54; see Hodges 1999, 60), which shows Arthur contemplating his jump and then lying dead at the foot of the walls (fig. 15), but he passes no further comment. Hodges observes how in his drawing he has 'thoughtfully provided a cushion of rushes for the young actor to land on' – how successful his solution might prove is debatable, but at least he acknowledges the problem 'that it is no height for making a standing jump without some thought' (Hodges 1999, 61). Forker, as I have already mentioned, also ignores the staging of Arthur's death in *The Troublesome Reign*, and presumes the citizens' appearance on the walls to be an indication that the play was performed in the London playhouses, without considering any further ramifications for the play or the company presenting it.

Only during the design stages for the reconstructed Globe on London's Bankside have the practical risks of an actor descending unaided from the upper playing area in a London playhouse been acknowledged. During discussions over the designs for the new Globe's *frons scenae*, and anticipating Romeo's descent from Juliet's balcony, the gallery height was reduced from an architecturally sound thirteen feet to a safer (for an actor) nine feet, a height estimated to be that at which an actor might safely lower himself off a balcony and leave only a small drop to the stage floor (Orrell 1997, 61). Architecturally the initial result was visually unsatisfactory, and it required several further revisions to the design by Theo Crosby and subsequently by Jon Greenfield before the safer dimensions could be reconciled with a more correct architectural form. Moreover, the nine foot figure contradicted the evidence of two designs for *frons* schemes by Inigo Jones, which gave heights of ten feet and ten feet six inches for structures within significantly smaller buildings (Orrell 1997, 61); in a building the size of the Globe we might expect the height to be greater.<sup>23</sup> While the lowering of the

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<sup>23</sup> It is not clear to which Jones designs Orrell is in fact referring at this point. If one is the

gallery seems prudent in light of modern assumptions about the staging of Romeo's descent from the balcony, it may well have been the case that the Lord Chamberlain's Men had a strategy for coping with a drop from a greater height. The decision to lower the height of the gallery means that modern companies at Shakespeare's Globe are not forced to investigate solutions that might reflect those of the original players. This problem aside, the consideration given to the height between stage and balcony was prompted by the risks envisaged for an actor lowering himself relatively carefully to the ground. Even with the lowered gallery an over-exuberant actor risks injury – one actor broke his leg by abseiling down from the gallery too quickly during the Globe's Prologue season in 1996 (Gurr, *pers. comm.*). At the Globe, danger remains for any actor who would play Arthur, for whom a leap even from a height of nine feet rather than ten or thirteen remains a cause for concern.

The decision to lower the reconstructed Globe's upper stage from thirteen to nine foot was designed to make the staging of one set of circumstances easier, but whether or not the result represents historical actuality it does not offer a panacea for height-based staging problems, nor can it answer the challenges that remain for staging scenes in other venues. Whether discussing a performance of *The Troublesome Reign* in a galleried provincial hall, or of *King John* at one of the playhouses occupied by the Lord Chamberlain's Men over the course of the 1590s, it is not possible to easily imagine, let alone to demonstrate conclusively, how Arthur's fall was accomplished. But the problem did not stop the original companies from performing the plays, no more than it has stopped modern companies from tackling Shakespeare's work in modern theatres: staging solutions are found. But to say that a scene, or an incident within it, *must* have been or *could only* have been staged within a certain, narrowly defined set of parameters is dangerous.

Many of the Queen's Men's plays have staging requirements that may appear to best suit purpose-built London playhouses. But, more than any other company of the time, the Queen's Men's purpose was to tour. If we accept that some of their plays posed staging challenges regardless of the venue in which they were performed, and presume that the company had ways of meeting those challenges – even if we cannot imagine them when reading the text in the present – then we must not discount the possibility that a play may have been performed in venues that to us seem underequipped. Indeed,

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Worcester College Drawings, these have since been reassigned and re-dated to John Webb and 1660-1, but the relevance of the dimensions remains sufficient.

when we look at the repertoires not only of the Queen's Men but of their contemporaries, we see that such a possibility becomes an almost certainty.

## 5.2 – STAGING ON THE ROAD

Having raised some problems over the practicalities of staging one moment of one play, it is worth thinking more broadly about how provincial venues may have accommodated the demands of touring plays. As by now should be expected, scholars who have considered the conventions of early modern staging have invariably focused on the London stages. Whether concentrating on the plays of Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Globe (for example Gurr and Ichikawa 2000), or attempting to establish a set of generic conventions that held true for all early modern playhouses sharing standard features (Fitzpatrick 2011), the conclusions they draw are based on a different set of conditions to those encountered by touring companies.

In the absence of detailed information about the playhouse in which it was performed, the normal starting point for scholars attempting to say something about a play's staging is to search for clues in the text itself, being the closest record of an original performance (see Gurr 2004a). As we have seen, it is based on such approaches that plays like *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* have been assumed inappropriate for a provincial performance. However, Leslie Thomson has proposed that

instead of assuming generally primitive provincial conditions as a basis for speculating about adjustments to playtexts or about which plays might have been taken on the road... the staging requirements of plays belonging to these [i.e. touring] companies are primary evidence for the provincial staging conditions that were available or possible (Thomson 2010, 532-3).

While it is possible that some venues demanded simpler plays whose requirements stretched no further than a bare floor, a few props and minimal costumes, Thomson finds it unlikely that travelling companies would cut technically challenging parts of the play 'that were most likely to thrill audiences' – particularly aspects that required ascents and descents or a curtained discovery space – and would prefer to 'adapt the performance space' to contain the spectacle (Thomson 2010, 533). In Thomson's survey of the thirty-five plays available for performance by companies known to have

toured between the years 1586 and 1594, only eleven require a basic performance space with some means of entrance and exit and simple hand properties (Thomson 2010, 535). Of these eleven, two belonged to the Queen's Men: *King Leir* and *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*. Thomson divides more complicated staging requirements into eight categories: appearances 'above' and ascents and descents between 'above' and the main stage, the use of a trap, the use of a curtain or discovery space, and the need for a large piece of stage furniture, namely a bed, a throne, a chariot or a tomb. At least one of these categories occur in all seven of the remaining nine plays from McMillin and MacLean's A list of Queen's Men plays, as well as in a further three plays, *Locrine*, *James IV* and *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, that Thomson thinks were also Queen's plays. In other words, of the surviving plays of the premier touring company of Elizabethan England, around 80% required a more complex staging than at first glance might seem possible to execute in a relatively simple civic hall space like that at Stratford-upon-Avon. Not only this, but Thomson does not consider some of the more spectacular special effects called for in a number of Queen's Men plays, such as the fire-spewing dragon in Friar Bungay's conjured apple tree in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, or the five moons that appear in the court of King John after his second coronation. *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* features in Thomson's list as one of the less complicated plays in the Queen's Men's repertory to stage, as she cites a single instance of an appearance above, in this case when the citizens of Angers appear upon the city walls (Thomson 2010, 546, citing Anon 1591, C3v; see Peele 2011, 151 [1. 2. 191.1]). In fact, we know that the citizens must return to the walls once more in 1. 4., and that as the second part of the play opens, Arthur appears at the top of the walls of the castle where he has been imprisoned and shortly falls to his death. We must also remember that there may be other staging requirements that are not visible in the stage directions, such as the throne needed for John's second coronation.

For other companies the balance of plays with simple and complex staging demands is similar. Looking at the plays of the four other companies that regularly toured the country between 1586 and 1594, we see that the lowest proportion of plays that demand aspects of 'complex' staging is that of Lord Strange's Men, at 58%, with seven of their twelve plays requiring at least one of Thomson's eight staging categories (Thomson 2010, 547). Comparing the repertories of all five companies, the majority of plays that demand any type of complex staging usually require more than one category. Of the 71% of plays that apparently cannot be performed with only a bare stage, over

three quarters demand several categories of staging, with each company possessing at least one play that required four or more (Thomson 2010, 546-7).

The majority of touring plays posed significant challenges for performance in provincial venues, but the regularity of their occurrence strongly suggests that companies were equipped with a suitable set of strategies to deal with staging challenges as they arose. Such an observation might prompt us to attempt to stage one such play in a venue which seems underequipped to host a full performance. If instead we tackle the problem of staging the plays from a positive position, and assume that the original company knew how to stage their plays in a venue and that we too should be able, we may arrive at solutions to what we thought were impossible challenges. We must be careful not to blur the line between past and present performance – our solutions are not necessarily their solutions. But the shift from impossibility to possibility offers a stronger starting point from which we can begin to explore these plays in performance.

### **5.3 – SPACE, AUTHORITY AND PERFORMANCE IN CIVIC HALLS**

The prospect of staging plays at the Guildhall in Stratford-upon-Avon certainly raises some challenges. While certain challenges reflect the particular construction and organisation of the building, many would have been equally applicable in a great number of venues around the country. The Guildhall is an excellent example of the type of building most frequently visited by touring players, and one which, while neither the largest nor the grandest, replicates the general form and function associated with similar civic halls in this period. While evidently some features of the Guildhall are specific to it alone, the construction and use of the hall will not prompt great surprise in anyone familiar with the developments and functions of town halls throughout the country in the late medieval and early modern periods. In form and dimensions, the Guild building at Stratford, measuring approximately seventy feet by twenty-two feet two inches,<sup>24</sup> can be compared with similar edifices such as the Guildhall at Leicester

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<sup>24</sup> There are a number of published dimensions for the width of the hall, which varies according to the point at which one takes a measurement. Keenan, for example, gives a width of 18 feet 6 inches (2002, 28), while Mulryne suggests that the playing space afforded visiting players measured thirty-eight feet four inches deep by twenty-one feet 8 inches wide, the former measurement representing the portion of the hall's full seventy feet length not taken up by the partitioned room occupied by the grammar school (2007, 17). My measurement was taken at

(sixty-three feet by twenty feet), St Mary's Hall, Boston (sixty-one feet by nineteen feet), and numerous further examples from around the country that hosted performances by touring players through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see MacLean and Somerset n. d.; Keenan 2002, 27-9). It is true that some halls would have offered touring companies better facilities than others – Leicester's Guildhall has an internal musicians' gallery not found at Stratford or Boston, for example – but at the simplest level, all halls offered a rectilinear space with doorways and rooms off that may have been available for companies' use as a tiring house and for making entrances and exits.

Certainly, some of the larger halls visited by the Queen's Men would have posed additional challenges. St Mary's, Coventry (thirty feet by seventy-two feet), St Andrew's, Norwich (one hundred and twenty-five feet by seventy feet), and the Common Hall in York (ninety-three feet by forty-three feet) would all have presented the company with a different size stage and different acoustic demands than the hall at Stratford. Nevertheless, halls both great and small shared a common function in their respective towns as the focus of political, economic and jurisdictional life. Representing centres of power and authority for the civic elite, both the buildings themselves and the organisation of space within them were moulded in order to demonstrate and reinforce the authority of the officials that ran the town. Whether in York or in Stratford, this had direct consequences for the use of civic halls by travelling players.

As John Steane and Robert Tittler have shown, civic halls embodied a town's socio-political identity and contributed to the townsfolk's 'sense of *amour propre*' (Steane 2001, 217; Tittler 1991). The sense of civic pride and of close community had become doubly important with the acquisition of the substantial degree of autonomy and self-government over the sixteenth century, and the civic elite sought to reinforce their enfranchisement and consolidate their position (see Tittler 1991, 75-6). External pressures caused by the erosion of established hierarchies in the countryside and an increased geographic mobility encouraged civic officials to strengthen the trappings of office and reinforce their dominance in the towns (Tittler 1991, 104). Ceremonial processions, in which the mayor took place of honour, and strict observation of 'proper'

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the bay in which the partition wall would originally have been set, and measured from wall to wall rather than post to post, which would account for the discrepancy with Mulryne's figures. The partition wall would have measured somewhere in the region of seventeen feet, leaving a corridor of approximately four feet ten inches wide.



dress helped ensure townsfolk maintained their level of respect towards the authorities (Tittler 1991, 107-110). Citizens who failed to do so were dealt with severely. In Norwich on 17 June 1607 the cobbler Thomas Benson was hauled up in court after he 'did yesterday about viij<sup>t</sup> of the Clocke in the fforenoone Bid a Turd in mr Mayors tethe' (Galloway 1984, xxiv).

It is in this context we should understand guild halls:

In almost all... instances, [the mayor's] presence was intimately bound up with the use of the hall. At least in a metaphorical sense the mayor's stage, manor house, and work-place, it was also the symbol of his authority and, through him, of the dignity and position of the town itself (Tittler 1991, 107).

Within the hall the mayor occupied a privileged position. Hall spaces were strictly hierarchical, with a low end giving access to service rooms and kitchens, and a high end where the mayor and aldermen sat on benches and chairs, often on a raised platform, as at Stratford (see Tittler 1991, 114; Clark *et al.* 2006, 57) (fig. 16). Chairs, while becoming more common in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were still rare enough pieces of furniture to be seen as seats of honour, and associated with power and dignity much as were ecclesiastical cathedra (Tittler 1991, 113; see Eames 1977; Gloag 1964). Even when a council had not invested in a chair for its mayor, it was normal for him to sit on a bench raised above his brethren, as was the case at Chichester and Exeter (Tittler 1991, 114). The mayoral chair was also the place where a newly elected mayor took his oath of office. In Bristol, election proceedings were started when the incumbent summoned the aldermen, councillors and sheriffs to the Council House, where the assembly nominated three candidates. The vote took place the following day, and the new mayor was sworn in in the hall (Tittler 1991, 110). The records at Exeter suggest that oaths were taken in front of the mayor's seat, as the serjeant is described as carrying the oath book up to the bench where the outgoing mayor and his officials sat so that the mayor-elect could make his oath and be invested in his chair (Tittler 1991, 114).

It is essential to stress the importance of the mayoral chair and the raised platform as being the centre of civic authority, particularly when we consider the licensing of visiting companies and their first performance. Siobhan Keenan has previously suggested that

There was likely to be more status... in playing at the upper end of the hall. It might be fitted with a dais, affording a natural platform, too, while an adjacent room might serve as a tiring space... The analogous evidence of performances in university college halls suggests that performing at the upper end of halls was more common and this may have been true, too, for civic halls (Keenan 2002, 36).

On the contrary, we should question whether it was ever the case that players used the mayor's platform for a performance. While it is true that the 1622 Worcester ordinance banning playing 'in the vpper end of the Twonehall' and ordering that 'yf anie players bee admytted to the Yeald hall to be admytted to play in the lower end onelie' (Keenan 2002, 33) suggests that players may have on occasion used the high end of the Worcester Guildhall, this cannot be evidence that such practices had been regularly allowed elsewhere. There is frequent legislation about halls' use by town corporations around the country, as we saw in chapter two, and none of them explicitly ban the use of the high end of the hall. It seems likely that in most towns there was no need for the council to prohibit playing at the high end because players did not use the platform in the first place. I argued in chapter two that the first performance before a town's mayor and council was likely to have been part of the licensing process companies were obliged to undergo before playing elsewhere. The process of licensing was a formal demonstration of the mayor's authority. Visiting players had to prove that both they and the plays they brought were acceptable before they could gain an official blessing. Even in circumstances where it was much less likely that a council would turn a company away, such as when the royal troupe arrived, the ceremonial importance of the licensing process would have remained high. No preference would be seen to be given, and it was in the council's interests to have their townsfolk witness the weight of their influence over that of, indirectly, the Queen.

It is difficult to imagine in such circumstances that a mayor and alderman would cede the locus of their authority to supplicant players. It is far more likely that the council sat in their accustomed places on the benches and chairs at the high end of the hall, while players performed at the low, service end. The modest height of a platform would have offered players no great advantage, particularly if the audience consisted only of the men of the corporation and not the general public, whereas at the low end of the hall there were more likely to be doors or a screen to serve as entrance and exits.

Keenan's analogy to the university stages, which was shared by the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project (PQMc), does not account for the circumstances of performance. The university stages and performances analysed by Alan Nelson were college productions, and not those of visiting professionals (Nelson 1994). The stages occupied the high end of the halls, certainly, but the college authorities remained seated behind the stage in an elevated, privileged position. Even though they admitted the performers into their privileged space, they did not relinquish their authority over it. Moreover, the performers were not professionals gaining a license to play, but students of the colleges who were, if not always academic equals, at least closer social equals to those they entertained. As college members these performers would have already been regulated by college statutes, and had no need of obtaining a further license to play elsewhere. As theatre historians, we need to be sensitive to the uses, meanings and memories of specific places, and not to treat different venues as being spatially the same because their ground plans appear similar. College performances and university stages might therefore be better considered as a separate phenomenon, and as having little in common with playing in provincial towns.

When players arrived in a provincial town hall they would therefore have immediately known which areas of the hall they were likely to be able to use. They would have known that the raised dais platform found in the majority of guild halls would be occupied by their hosts, and that their performance should be directed towards it.

Some venues seem to have provided visiting companies with a scaffold stage, but this was by no means ubiquitous. An early record was made in 1544 of a scaffold being erected at Norwich for the seventh Earl of Sussex's Men (Galloway 1984, 12). In 1559/60 carpenters erected a scaffold in Gloucester Bothall for an earlier company of Queen's Men (Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 298). However, Robert Tittler's examples of similar occurrences in Stafford, Exeter and Shrewsbury do not, in fact, refer either to professional players or to guild halls, and John Wasson remarks that 'only two entries out of the hundreds concerning drama in the county [Devon] suggest that players used anything but the bare floor for a stage' (Wasson 1986, xxvi; see Southern 1973, 338-9; Tittler 1991, 144-5). When it comes to Stratford, we can be fairly certain there was none. The Corporation account books are, on the whole, meticulous at recording expenditure both for day-to-day maintenance and upkeep of the Guild buildings and for expenses incurred for council entertainments and while on council business. It seems

very unlikely that the costs associated with erecting a stage would be omitted, and it is a safe assumption to say that players would have performed at floor level.

Understanding the spatial hierarchies of civic halls is an essential prerequisite for thinking about how companies would have conducted and organised themselves in a mayoral performance. By proposing that the civic authorities would only have occupied the dais end of the hall, it follows that the company staged their performance at the low end, and this arrangement would have been expected at every hall. As I now turn to think about how the Queen's Men might have staged aspects of *The Troublesome Reign* in Stratford Guildhall, I will begin to think about some of the specific demands of the play and the particular features of the building that aid or inhibit staging, but many of the general points would be equally applicable to performances in any civic hall space, and indeed to any of the company's plays.

#### 5.4 – POSSIBILITIES FOR STAGING AT STRATFORD

Having established the broad conditions which the Queen's Men may have encountered at Stratford Guildhall or similar such civic buildings, it is time to return to *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, and consider how key scenes might have been staged in the Guildhall. These scenes provide the central narrative and thematic structure to the play, with each containing within it a visual tableau in which authority and power are displayed and subsequently deconstructed.

The key scenes are as follows: John's arbitration of the dispute between Robert and Philip Falconbridge; the citizens of Angers' arbitration of the claims made by John and King Philip of France; John's second coronation; the oath of fealty made by the rebel nobles to Lewis at the shrine of Bury St. Edmunds; and the nobles' reconciliation with John on his deathbed at Swinstead Abbey. Stage directions give some idea of the requirements for stage configuration for only three of these scenes: King Philip and King John '*summon the town; the Citizens appear upon the walls*' (1. 2. 191.0); at John's second coronation, '*Enter the Nobles [...] and crown King John, and then cry "God save the King"*' (1. 13. 84.0); and finally, as Salisbury swears allegiance to Lewis at Bury St. Edmunds '*upon the holy altar*', '*All the English Lords swear*' (2. 3. 225–6.0) and Lewis swears '*on this altar in like sort*' (2. 3. 229). The first of these, when the citizens of besieged Angers appear on the walls, is the most problematic for an acting company playing provincial halls without a gallery, and one reason why some commentators

have assumed that the play was performed on a London stage where an elevated space was available (Peele 2011, 151, n. 191.1-2). As I have shown, it is unlikely that a company who played in the capital less frequently than in the provinces would have commissioned a play that was impossible, or notably awkward, to perform on tour, and so we must assume the Queen's Men were comfortable staging such scenes in the spaces available. It therefore seems helpful to address the basic requirements of each of the five scenes and situate them within the context of Stratford's Guildhall.

#### 5.4.1 – THE FALCONBRIDGE DISPUTE

The dispute between the Falconbridge brothers is the primary subject of the play's first scene (see DVD scene 1.1). This opens with the entrance of '*King John, Queen Eleanor his mother, William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, the Earls of Essex, and of Salisbury*' (1. 1. 0). Although there is no necessity that John should be attended, he is elsewhere regularly accompanied by '*followers*' (1. 2. 74.0, 1. 6. 131.0), or enters '*with two or three*' (2. 2. 0) or is '*carried between two Lords*' (2. 6. 0). Might we therefore expect John to be waited on by two or three attendants at all times? McMillin and MacLean, basing their estimate of the minimum number of cast needed to perform a play's largest scene, allocate to *The Troublesome Reign* the largest cast of any of the Queen's Men's plays, seventeen members in all. Indeed in this estimate they break their own rule, which requires them to allow for two extras whenever an unspecified number of attendants, priests or citizens is needed. Counting this way would require at least eighteen actors to handle the '*many priests*' (2. 4. 0) and '*all the Nobles from France and England*' (2. 4. 19.0) who feature in the scene (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 99-100, 109). A possible solution to large cast numbers will be offered below, but the estimated minimum requirement for *The Troublesome Reign* suggests 'a large company relatively unconcerned about matters of doubling and economy of casting' (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 109). On this basis it seems sensible to accept the possibility that at least two attendants to the king are in question here.

While the stage direction gives no instruction as to the manner of the king's entrance, there are clues in the text and from across the Queen's Men's repertory that suggest a certain level of accompanying ceremony (see DVD clip 5a). McMillin and MacLean stress the visual emphasis of the Queen's Men's dramaturgy, the frequency of 'unwritten text' and mime, and demonstrate how the notably brief stage directions

imply that a more fully populated scene should be presented (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 128-133). The company evidently specialised in lavish processional entrances, notably in two of their plays, *Selimus* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. With this in mind, and if John is to be presented truly as his country's 'second hope' (1. 1. 6), equal to his deceased brother Richard I, we should expect an entrance which expresses more pomp and circumstance. We might surmise that John would process in, attended by as many as can be spared, and installed on a throne (fig. 17). Given Elizabethan notions of hierarchy and status it seems reasonable to suggest that the throne would be placed upstage centre, dominating the playing space and easily visible to the audience. Proximity to the throne would be determined by rank and influence with the king. It is also possible that John would sit in state under a canopy. Several other Queen's Men's plays, notably *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, appear to require throne and canopy, for example when Hal is crowned king and when Friar Bacon sits in his 'cell... his consistory court' (6. 1-3) (Greene 1969). However, Barbara Palmer has argued that, in the absence of evidence for a company's means of transporting large set items, we should suppose that the Queen's Men 'left their canopied State, curtained bed, curtained pavilion, and other editor-invented appointments back [in London]' (Palmer 2009, 29, 31). This may well have been the case, although Palmer makes certain problematic assumptions. Firstly, she assumes that the company had a permanent London base at the Rose Theatre (Palmer 2009, 31), whereas in fact we only have evidence for a single short season in April 1594 (Henslowe 1961, 21). Secondly, she presumes the company would have been able to use the dais platforms that were usually occupied by authority figures such as the mayor or high bailiff, suggesting that 'the dais end of a great hall already is marked, figuratively if not literally, as the throne or State' (Palmer 2009, 31). However, as I have shown above, there is no explicit evidence that the bailiff and aldermen would have ceded the dais to the players. In any case, at Stratford the small room accessible at the north end of the upper Guildhall behind the dais would not have provided a particularly suitable tiring room, being not much more than an access point to the external stairway, since removed (Clark *et al.* 2006, 64-8).

A more workable solution would have been for the actors to play towards the dais with their backs to the partition wall. This would have meant that the players could use either the partitioned rooms that occupied the south end of the Guildhall or the room in the south range that housed the armoury as a tiring room (Clark *et al.* 2006, 21; Mulryne 2007, 16-17). In this case, the company may well have wished to erect a

canopy in the hall. Alternatively, it might have been enough to place the throne directly opposite the mayor's chair where, positioned carefully, the tableau would mirror its audience. Player king and high bailiff would face each other across the room, creating a visible connection between the authority wielded by each within their respective domains. A confrontation such as this would serve to underscore the sometimes uncomfortable political messages the play is exploring. Whether the Queen's Men travelled with a canopy or not, the company certainly had access to some of their hosts' furniture, and at Stratford the schoolmaster's chair would surely have made an excellent throne, over which a canopy could easily be rigged.<sup>25</sup>

The processional entrance and the hierarchical organisation of characters on stage both serve to present a visual picture of John's secure authority, which he immediately manages to undermine, declaring himself 'far unworthy of so high a place' (1. 1. 10). The legitimacy of John's claim to the throne is further challenged by the subsequent demands of the French ambassador Chatillon, who requires John to resign the crown and rule of England, Ireland and the English lands in France to Arthur, the son of John's elder brother Geoffrey. Although John dismisses Chatillon and commands Pembroke to prepare a force to travel to France, by the time the scene turns to its primary concern, the quarrel between the Falconbridge brothers, the script is already generating questions about the legitimacy of John's position.

The dispute between Philip and Robert Falconbridge is a matter of paternity. The younger, Robert, proclaims Philip's illegitimacy and asserts that he himself is 'lawful heir' (1. 1. 108) to his father 'by certain right of England's ancient law' (1. 1. 110) – that is, by primogeniture. In the face of his late father's belief and his mother's testimony that Philip is legitimate, Robert supplies purely circumstantial evidence that King Richard was Philip's true father (see Bowers 2001, 11-12). John himself dismisses Robert's proof as 'frivolous' (1. 1. 210) and should immediately rule in favour of Philip. He does not. Instead he demands that Philip and Lady Falconbridge disclose the true paternity, causing Robert to exclaim 'My Lord, herein I challenge you of wrong / To give away my right and put the doom / Unto themselves' (1. 1. 218-20). As Cynthia Bowers comments, 'John's response inhibits, rather than advances, justice... he is simply superseding the law by nullifying a decision [already] made by the lower

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<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately the surviving masters' chairs date to the eighteenth century; however, a sixteenth-century illustration shows a master's chair remarkably similar to those that survive (see Green 2012).

Northamptonshire court. In this episode, John rules by whim, the action of a tyrant' (Bowers 2001, 12).

Ultimately the issue is resolved not by the king, but by Philip himself after he succumbs to a trance in which he becomes aware that he *is*, in fact, the bastard son of Richard Coeur de Lion. Philip's retracted claim and withdrawal from the judicial process bring the matter to a conclusion, not royal judgement. Royal authority and judicial process are seen to be arbitrary, potentially tyrannical and unstable. Philip's energies, on the other hand, are unleashed by the decision, and the play will favour him. At the outset of the scene, the formation of the tableau and the centring of John in the middle of the stage evoke the stability and authority of established law. When John refuses to meet the expectations of due process, an anxiety is created: the play invites an audience to become wary of the stable relationships and practices to which they are accustomed lest they not be upheld, to realise that justice has become unstable, and that visual references and tableaux may question deep-rooted assumptions. Though we cannot know the extent to which all audience members would immediately recognise this staging as explicit subversion, the instability of this first scene has now been inextricably associated in their minds with the spatial configuration of the stage. As the tableau is repeated throughout the play, the audience will grow to recognise the implied anxiety.

#### **5.4.2 – BEFORE THE WALLS OF ANGERS**

The first episode to echo this tableau is the scene before the walls of Angers (see DVD scenes 1.2-1.4). Verbal echoes are given by the citizens who, like John earlier, demand proof from the competing monarchs (1. 2. 211, 223) and then refuse to choose their sovereign. Recourse to trial by battle is equally unsuccessful, as neither French nor English forces evidently defeat their opponent. Only in the face of the Bastard's threat to unite French and English forces to destroy the town do the citizens suggest a solution through the marriage of King Philip's son, Lewis, to John's niece, Blanche. Conflict is again settled outside a legal process.

The staging problems of this scene are possibly the most difficult of the play. There is no evidence for the construction of a stage platform within the Guildhall, still less for a galleried stage, which in any case could not have fitted within the upper hall without being obscured by the roof trusses. One option is to avoid representing the walls



altogether. Only one stage direction makes a claim for height, stating that the citizens appear ‘*upon*’ the walls. King Philip in contrast says he has come ‘before this city of Angers’ (1. 2. 178) and King John that he has summoned the citizens ‘to the walls’. It is possible to interpret ‘*upon*’ as indicating an upstage location. The meeting could take place downstage at the foot of ‘the walls’, rather than with the citizens a storey above (fig. 18; see DVD clip 5b).

An alternative staging arrangement could make innovative use of the construction of the partitioned rooms at the south end of the hall. The northernmost partition wall of these rooms rose from the floor to the main roof truss beam, but the frame of the truss itself was blocked by plastered, wattle infill panels. Payments for repair and upkeep of these panels are frequently recorded in the Corporation accounts, and surviving grooves in the beams suggest it may have been possible to remove the panels altogether (see Clark *et al.* 2006, 64; Giles and Clark 2012). By positioning furniture as a ‘platform’ just behind the partition wall, and removing a number of panels, a cast member might appear aloft at the opportune moment, visible to all. However, it is unlikely that such interference with the fabric of the building would have been condoned by Stratford aldermen. Nevertheless, the regularity of payments for upkeep of relatively sturdy components of the partition wall poses the question of how they were damaged in the first place. If visiting companies were not permitted to alter the building fabric, the same effect might be achieved if the stage space was moved one bay further north of the partition wall towards the dais end. The cross-beams of each bay between the partition and the dais-end walls do not have grooves of the type required for infill panels and would have been left open, as at present. By hanging a backcloth under the truss beam and arranging furniture or steps as platforms in the newly-created backstage area, the same effect of an actor appearing at height might be managed.

In this way, the tableau presented at King John’s court could now be repeated, with Philip of France, John and their respective armies assuming the place of the Falconbridge brothers, while the citizens take up John’s judicial role. The anxiety and instability connected with the visual tableau are reiterated by means of the scene’s structural and thematic ordering, and compounded by the displacement of authority from royal prerogative to a dangerously-independent citizenry, a shift of power which could only be recovered through a threat of violence by the Bastard.

### 5.4.3 - TO HAVE YOU CROWNED AGAIN

By the time John demands his second coronation, the tableau arrangement has become a symbol of tyrannical whim. The Earl of Pembroke warns:

My liege...  
 Once were you crowned, proclaimed, and with applause  
 Your city streets have echoed to the ear  
 'God save the King'; 'God save our sovereign, John.'  
 Pardon my fear; my censure doth infer  
 Your Highness, not deposed from regal state,  
 Would breed a mutiny in people's minds  
 What it should mean to have you crowned again. (1. 13. 32–39)

His concerns are dismissed by John with no explanation: "Thou knowst not what induceth me to this" (1. 13. 41). The coronation is denoted by a typically brief stage direction: *'Enter the Nobles [...] and crown King John, and then cry 'God save the King''* (1. 13. 85.0). We might guess that the company would have presented at this point some representative elements of a Tudor coronation ceremony, informed by the well-documented coronations of Henry VIII and his children (see Hunt 2008). 'Encased' within the office of a mass, these coronation ceremonies included an elaborate processional entry, ritual obeisance by the monarch, absolution by the presiding priest (usually the Archbishop of Canterbury), the monarch's anointment with holy oil and chrism, ritual dressing in coronation robes, and the presentation of the trappings of royal office – the crown, spurs, sword and ring (Hunt 2008, 26-30). We cannot know which, if any, of these elements might have been presented by the Queen's Men, but the ceremonial language accompanying the bestowal of the royal ring, for example, 'alludes to the conferral of sacerdotal powers' and would accordingly invest later scenes, discussed below, with greater symbolic potency (Hunt 2008, 31).

The coronation procession echoes John's first entrance when he was declared his country's 'second hope'. Now the true nature of the king's 'rule and virtue' is displayed. John has demanded a second ceremony to test his nobles' 'constancy' (1. 13. 95), but too soon satisfied of their fidelity he offers to grant any request they might make. Essex demands the release of the captive Arthur, insisting that it is the only way 'to guerdon all our loyalties' (1. 13. 109). This is a request to which John accedes, fully aware he has already ordered Arthur to be blinded. John is sufficiently secure to offer the release

of his main rival, whose claim he has successfully undermined. Yet his own authority is undermined once the prophet Peter predicts his downfall by Ascension Day. John must 'cut off the cause, and then effect will die' (1. 13. 195). Arthur must be killed, and the nobles' boon rescinded. John's 'will is law enough' (1. 13. 203), and his tyranny is fully fledged.

#### 5.4.4 – OATH-TAKING AT ST. EDMUNDSBURY

The barons must seek 'rule and virtue' elsewhere and turn to the French Prince Lewis, who through his marriage to Lady Blanche 'Hath title of an uncontrollèd strength/ To England' (2. 3. 90–1). They gather at the shrine of St Edmund to swear allegiance to their new liege-lord (see DVD scene 2.3). In this tableau the king's throne, now the symbol of unstable rule, has been replaced by the shrine's altar, a potent spiritual symbol in opposition to the excommunicate king. As the lords lay their hands on the altar, swearing homage and allegiance to Lewis, the tableau inverts its predecessors (fig. 19; see DVD clip 5c). Spatial hierarchy is maintained while the act of legal process – the oath of loyalty – breaks the same oath first made to John at his coronation. Lewis, like John before him, swears 'Love to you all, and princely recompense / To guerdon your good wills unto the full' (2. 3. 230–1). The scene parodies true justice: Lewis is a perjurer. He dismisses the nobles as 'traitors to their sovereign state' and 'not to be believed in any sort' (2. 3. 240–1), while planning to break faith as soon as expedient:

... Let's smooth with them awhile,  
 Until we have as much as they can do.  
 And when their virtue is exhalèd dry,  
 I'll hang them for the guerdon of their help (2. 3. 248–51).

Ironically, the nobles' belief that they have a right to depose John and bestow the crown on Lewis is not shared by Lewis himself, who appears to think loyalty to one's sovereign supersedes foreign claims to that sovereignty, however legitimate.

The scene at St Edmund's shrine is one of the largest in terms of cast numbers, with some dozen barons being named in stage directions and speech, in addition to Lewis and the French onlookers. One possibility is that actors in addition to the core company may have been drawn from hired men – jobbing actors – some of whom may have travelled with the company, while others may have been drawn from the towns the

company visited (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 11–12, 60–61, 142). The grammar school, housed in the partitioned rooms of the upper Guildhall or in the larger northern section of the hall, may have offered visiting companies an additional resource not often considered by modern scholars: the schoolboys themselves. School drama, and instruction in the rhetorical performance skills described as *actio* and *pronunciatio*, in some schools at least were integral components of the Tudor curriculum (see Potter 2004; Green 2009, 206–9, 214–16; 2012; Gill 2012b). Students would have been accustomed to memorising large tracts ‘without book’, trained in the ‘manner of speaking’, and used to acting out scenes by classical authors in the classroom (Potter 2004, 145–7). The boys would have been well equipped to take on small, non-speaking roles, and in the case of speaking roles could have learned short passages for performance with the briefest of rehearsal. This suggestion is no more than speculation, of course. I have found no record to indicate that a boy at Stratford took part in a show by a visiting company. However, neither was there any restriction, so far as we know, on the boys taking part. It would have been hard for the visiting company to pass up an opportunity to use trained boy actors at little or no cost.<sup>26</sup>

#### 5.4.5 – NO POMP IN PENURY

The final instance of symbolic tableau comes at Swinstead Abbey, as John lies dying, poisoned by one of the monks (see DVD scene 2.8). The English nobles, having learned of Lewis’s treachery, are reconciled to their penitent, proto-Protestant, king, who sits at the banquet table divested of the trappings of state, wishing ‘no pomp in penury’ (2. 8 9). The dying king is unable to speak – in itself a powerful contrast to the behaviour of the previously-eloquent king – but raises his hand in forgiveness to the nobles kneeling before him, who offer their daggers and their lives in recompense for their treachery. John’s twice-raised hand, once to pardon the nobles and again as he dies to assure all that he has returned to the true faith, suggests by these gestures a Eucharistic absolution or final blessing. John recovers his legitimacy, and his rule, by submitting to Rome and the Pope, which demonstrates the king’s spiritual instability that mirrors the political. For an audience, however, who moments ago heard John declare ‘From out

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<sup>26</sup> For discussion of the possibility of a company of boy actors visiting Stratford see Margaret Shewring (2012). A visiting boy company could perhaps have stimulated the Stratford boys to take part in adult shows.

these loins shall spring a kingly branch / Whose arms shall reach unto the gates of Rome, / And with his feet tread down the strumpet's pride' (2. 8. 105–7), the scene recalls Lewis's perjury as he swore on the altar of Bury St Edmunds. Even as the rule of law is reinstated through John's reconciliation and the coronation of Prince Henry, instability remains, informed by the audience's foreknowledge that Reformation lies ahead.

*The Troublesome Reign* would have meant different things to different spectators, but all would have felt an anxious awareness of currently debated questions of legitimacy, rebellion, invasion and religious authority. *The Troublesome Reign* was written around the date of the Armada and the execution of Mary Queen of Scots; the successor to Elizabeth was still unknown. The audience at Stratford, well aware of political and religious tensions within their own town, must have viewed certain scenes with apprehension. Several members of the audience were or had been officers of the court, so that the presentation of due process in the first scene would have been intimately familiar, but John's refusal to engage with the law would have caused disquiet. Equally, the independent-minded citizens of Angers must have struck a chord in a town that had struggled to gain a charter of incorporation, and where disagreement with their local lord over jurisdiction in the courts was a recent experience.

I have tried to show how we might begin to explore a complex text, in an attempt to identify some of the problems we face in imagining its performance, and to situate the play within a surviving stage space. However, the extent to which staging demands can be explored on paper alone is limited. It is possible to imagine how certain moments might be arranged on stage, but it is much harder to describe movement or interactions between characters without attempting to explore scenes in practice. Rehearsal and performance not only allow a modern company to come up with staging solutions for the demands made clear in the text, but also forces us to confront a range of practical problems, from the question of fitting a large cast on a narrow stage, to the matter of speaking difficult early modern verse. It also demands that we think hard about the conditions and practices of early modern acting and training, how those of touring companies must have differed from those of later London-based competitors, and the ramifications these may have had for a provincial performance.

## 6 – PERFORMANCE AT STRATFORD

### 6.1 – INTRODUCTION

In the chapters so far I have focussed on the range of evidence that can help us frame and contextualise performance by travelling companies in Stratford-upon-Avon. It is clear that while the social, political and religious tensions felt and expressed in everyday life in the Warwickshire town reflected wider national trends, the particular conditions found at Stratford were moulded by influences and circumstances specific to the town, and performances by visiting companies should be examined in this light. However, the general focus of early modern theatre history, save the REED-driven work previously discussed, remains confined to metropolitan London. The earlier desire to generate overarching narratives for the whole period (see Aebischer 2010; Gurr 1987, 1992; Postlewait 2009, 27-59; Weimann 1978) may have given way to studies wishing to reveal multiplicity and complexity in particular moments, companies and texts (Aebischer 2010, 31; see for example Gurr 1996, 2004b, 2009; Munro 2005). Nevertheless, discussions of stages and performance practices continue to err towards a homogenisation of theatre spaces, setting the London playhouses against performances at court, and provincial playing spaces against the London playhouses, even while acknowledging evidence for substantial diversity within each category (see Postlewait 2009, 30-5; Dillon 2006, 46, 49-50; Fitzpatrick 2011). Similarly, there is a common tendency, seldom explicitly acknowledged, to treat non-metropolitan performance as a derivative of London practices (see Cockett 2009 and PQM). It is on the basis of this assumption that narratives have described the movement of companies and practices out of London, where, it is implied, they would have done better to stay, and into the backwaters of provincial England, where the ill-equipped playing venues and the arduous of travelling imposed the need for stripped-down performances of cut plays (see Thomson 2010). I wish to question this assumption. On any number of levels we have to accept that conditions for performance in the provinces were different from those found in the capital. Accordingly, we need to readdress how a touring company may have operated, and particularly reflect on how different pressures might have impacted on a company's practices, on actor training and rehearsal, and thus on performance.

It is not enough that we be aware of the specific contexts of performance: we must also pay due attention to the demands of individual plays if we are to say anything useful about staging practices. While it may be possible to extrapolate a picture of some wider

practices from commonalities found amongst a range of early modern texts, these are seldom useful when trying to describe the staging of particular plays. Despite the work by Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson that has done much to help consolidate and expand our understanding of stage directions in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries (Dessen 1984, 2009; Dessen and Thomson 1999), there remain major incidents of staging which we have no clear idea how they might have been accomplished. In consequence there is little to help us imagine solutions to the staging of Arthur's fall from the walls in *King John*, as discussed in the previous chapter, the heaving of Antony aloft to Cleopatra, or numerous other instances where it is unclear how the staging demands of the play would or could have been met (see Postlewait 2009, 42-4). Moreover, it is essential to remember that any solutions to such problems must also meet the constraints of the venue in which a performance is to be held, and it is only by situating a play in a particular space about whose physical dimensions and features something is known that it becomes possible to suggest potential ways in which the play may have been staged.

Until now, no one had considered how *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, or indeed any other play by the Queen's Men, could have been staged in a civic hall, and at Stratford Guildhall in particular. As I showed in the previous chapters, some staging solutions may propose themselves through close reading of the text. But it is only through practical exploration that such solutions can be tried, and further discoveries can be made. When embarking on practice-based research it is important to remember that no performance can recreate that of an earlier company, nor can the particular solutions for staging be said unequivocally to match those employed in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, exploring performance has the potential to open further lines of enquiry, making participants – including both actors and audience – more aware of a play's demands and offering a range of possibilities for meeting them. Moreover, doing so in a specific location, as at Stratford Guildhall, allows a more reciprocal dialogue to develop between drama and its historical contexts.

Performance in the present offers a useful means of understanding early modern theatre only if informed and driven by what we know about practices in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, historical evidence offers only keyhole glimpses into the early modern theatrical world. From these a range of historical practices can be suggested, but they inevitably fall short of providing a full set of methods that can be replicated in the present – and, indeed, we should question whether such an aim is necessarily

appropriate. A useful way of assessing the practicality and effectiveness of following original practices in a research project such as this is to examine other academic projects in a similar mould which have already done so. Fortunately, one recent project in particular lies close to this one: Shakespeare and the Queen's Men, which ran from 2005 to 2008 at the University of Toronto and McMaster University in Canada. The methodologies employed by our team in this project were developed having reviewed the SQM project's processes and discoveries, and where we found difficulties we sought appropriate alternative approaches. To do so it was often necessary to turn towards another part of our theatrical inheritance, that of the numerous directors, voice coaches and actors who have worked on period texts with a sensitivity to their historical contexts and who have sought to help actors meet the varied and challenging demands of the early modern repertory.

In this chapter I propose to examine the state of knowledge of early modern practices, the feasibility and appropriateness of attempting to replicate such practices in the present, and the ways in which more recent approaches may provide suitable tools for tackling *The Troublesome Reign*, before discussing the performance of extracts from the play in workshops held at Stratford in July 2011.

## **6.2 – HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR PERFORMANCE**

The Queen's Men toured the provinces for twenty years, a period during which drama and the theatrical world evolved and changed rapidly. The company itself did not remain the same – actors died or left and were replaced, new plays were performed in new places to new audiences – all factors that allowed for or even demanded change and innovation (see Postlewait 2009, 33). What the Queen's Men's practices and strategies were, and how they developed, are pertinent questions, but we should not assume that the practices of a touring company were shared by companies based primarily in London, still less when comparing a touring company of the 1580s to a London company ten years later. If we take the first year of the Queen's Men's career as a starting point, there are a number of questions that will help us gain a better idea of practices on tour during the early and mid-1580s, and, just as importantly, identify what we do not or cannot know. Firstly, we need to know who was in the company, what skills they likely possessed, and how they might have acquired such skills. Second, we need to consider how the company might have chosen a play, what formed



the wider repertory, and what were its requirements for staging and performance? Thirdly, we can ask where the company intended to travel and on what basis that decision was made, what were the motivations behind splitting into two separate troupes and what were the implications for rehearsal and repertory choice. Lastly, we come to the thorny question of how the company might have prepared for performance, both in preparation for their first touring season and thereafter.

### 6.2.1 – THE COMPANY

While scholars have displayed an interest in players for many years (Bentley 1984; Eccles 1991; 1992; 1993; Edmond 1974; Ingram 1992; McMillin 1976; McMillin and MacLean 1998; Nungezer 1929), the members of the Queen's Men lived out their professional lives at a time for which records are sparse, and only relatively few pieces of evidence have been uncovered (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 194-7 and PQMd). Of the twelve men summoned by Tilney to join the Queen's Men only half can be traced to a previous company, and little more can be said about any of their previous lives. From the recollections of their contemporaries we can infer that certain members had particular skills. Tarlton's fame endured for many years, remembered especially for his extemporising – 'Tarletonising', as one contemporary put it (Harvey 1592) – and quick wit, although the picture drawn from the posthumous *Tarlton's Jests and News Out of Purgatory* (Halliwell[-Phillips] 1844) of a bawdy, boozy man suggests a distinction between the theatrical persona and the real man whose son's godfather was Sir Philip Sidney (see PQMd). Tarlton was a skilled swordsman and was named a Master of Fence in October 1587, while several other members, John Bentley and John Singer, were also quick with their swords, as the disastrous performance at the Red Lion in Norwich demonstrated. Several members are remembered for their skills for physical performance, acrobatics and clowning – John Adams, in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, and Tarlton and John Singer by Dekker in his *Gull's Horn Book* – while Bentley and William Knell were compared with Edward Alleyn in their excellence at portraying tragic and heroic roles (PQMd). Robert Wilson, like Tarlton a playwright as well as an actor, was also remembered for his skill at extemporising in Francis Meres's *Palladis tamia* (1598). In addition to these Thomas Heywood lists the talents of John Lanham and Tobias Mills in his *Apology for Actors* (1612), although he can tell us nothing specific about their particular skills, since he never saw them perform.

Nevertheless, as much as we can be certain that the members of the Queen's Men were highly skilled, there is little evidence to suggest how they acquired them. We know next to nothing about where this generation of actors came from. However, the model described by David Kathman for the training of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century professional actors offers the closest appropriate analogy, and suggests a method whereby the necessary skills were passed to the next generation of actors. (Kathman 2004; 2005; 2006; 2009c; see also Astington 2010). By the end of the sixteenth century, an actor embarked on their professional acting career around the age of fourteen, when they became apprenticed to a master actor. Apprenticeships came under the auspices of the craft guilds, as acting was not recognised as a profession in its own right, but while both master and apprentice were affiliated to one guild they were free to practise alternative trades (see Astington 2010, 77-8). As with traditional trade apprenticeships, apprentice actors were trained through practice, working alongside their masters and learning from them as they performed on stage.<sup>27</sup>

However, the earliest evidence for a professional actor making a formal bond with an apprentice does not occur until sometime around 1582. The actor in question was the Queen's Men's leader, Richard Tarlton, who bound his apprentice Phillip Woodward as a Haberdasher sometime before 1582; Woodward was freed in 1589 following Tarlton's death (Kathman 2009c, 418; 2006).<sup>28,29</sup> Tarlton himself had served an apprenticeship – he was freed from the Haberdashers in 1576 – as had John and Lawrence Dutton, who were freemen of the Weavers (Kathman 2009c, 418) but there is no indication whether they had done so as trainee actors or as craft apprentices. It is therefore difficult to say at what point formal apprenticeship models became standard practice for touring theatre companies. If looser arrangements were a more common phenomenon, there would have been implications both for the organisation of the company, and for the training of young actors.

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<sup>27</sup> For a longer discussion, see Astington (2010, 76-107) and Kathman (2009c)

<sup>28</sup> The actor took on a second apprentice, Richard Haywarde, who Tarlton bound as a Vintner at the time of his own transferral to the company in 1584, and who was never freed (Kathman 2006). Incidentally, we might therefore expect Woodward and Haywarde to be two further members of the Queen's Men, and that they would have toured with the company, playing some of the boy's parts, from around the company's inception until Tarlton's death.

<sup>29</sup> The term 'freed' is used by Kathman both to mean being made free from indenture, i.e. released from apprenticeship, and also to mean being inducted as a freeman of the company, and granted the rights and freedoms due to that company (Kathman, *pers. comm.*).

It is unclear from surviving evidence how early companies were organised with a view to master actors, hired men and boys. McMillin and MacLean talk of companies in the late 1570s and early 1580s as having around half a dozen leading actors, three or four hired men and three or four boys, based on David Bevington's assessment of casting and doubling of the few surviving plays of the period (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 11; Bevington 1962, 86-113). However, Bevington also raises the possibility that the female roles traditionally thought to be played by boy actors may also have been distributed amongst adult actors. He states that the leading boy was '*mainly* confined to feminine and juvenile roles' but that players more generally 'were versatile in assuming female roles along with male' (1962, 87; emphasis mine). The demands of the leading female characters in Queen's Men's plays are substantial, and would better suit a more established actor than a boy with little experience tackling large roles. There is later evidence for apprentices in their early twenties taking on female roles (Kathman 2005, 220), but there is nothing to say that in previous years older adults could not have portrayed such characters. The possibility that female roles were allotted more freely in the 1570s and 1580s than in later years might explain the lack of a formal apprenticeship system, if boy actors were in less demand, although this would not explain how the actor apprenticeship model came to be developed in subsequent years.

Whether or not a nascent or even a more developed actor apprenticeship system was in place in the 1570s and 1580s, the practical question of how actors learnt their trade remains a mystery. There must have been some training on the job, as the art of performing a complex role demands a certain amount of specialism unobtainable elsewhere. However, we might look elsewhere for a system that trained young boys in some of the basic skills employed by professional actors. Since the 1550s, the reformed Edwardian grammar schools had taught a humanist curriculum that instructed pupils in the arts of rhetoric and oratory, and equipped them with a set of foundational skills that were uniquely suited to furthering a theatrical career.

A grammar school boy would have quickly learned to memorise – known as learning 'without book' – and was required 'to commit to memory the figures of Latin oratory and the rules for making verses' before he was allowed to progress to mimetic exercises (Potter 2004, 146; Robertson 1974, 36). Students were taught the correct manner of speaking, where accent, articulation, rhythm, emphasis, timing, pitch, volume and tone were examined. Good control and use of the voice were not only deemed an essential component of oratory, but seen to promote robust health,

boldness and masculinity (Potter 2004, 149). Drama was used as an essential tool in this process. Charles Hoole, in his 1660 treatise *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole*, aimed at resurrecting the pedagogy of the previous century, states: 'This acting of a piece of Comedy, or a Colloquy sometimes, will be an excellent means to prepare them to pronounce Orations with a Grace' (Hoole 1913, 142). Following Erasmus' belief that learning was enhanced when exercises were presented in dramatic modes, students used the comedies of classical writers such as Plautus and Terence both to study Latin and to learn about the portrayal of character through depictions of stereotypes (Potter 2004, 150; see Erasmus 1904). Through role-playing, boys also used the works of Corderius, Aesop, Terence, Ovid and Virgil to learn to 'expresse the affectations and persons of Sheepeheards; or whose speech soever else, which they are to imitate' (Brinsley 1917, 213, cited in Potter 2004, 151). Role-playing was taken a step further in the teaching of rhetoric through the use of *prospopoeia*, or personation, as discussed in the teachings of Cicero and Quintilian, where the orator was expected to draw on their personal memory and experiences to simulate realistic emotions (Potter 2004, 152). Schoolboys were taught a form of memorised emotions to make up for lack of life experience, termed 'mnemonic branding' by Judy Enders; a fuller range of intense experience may have been assisted through the use of corporal punishment by school masters (Enders 1996). The final requirement for rhetorical delivery, action, which was understood to mean 'facial expressions, deportment, movement and gestures' (Potter 2004, 153), was best accomplished through acting. William Malim, Headmaster of Eton and writing around 1560, may have thought acting a 'trifling' matter, but acknowledged that 'when it comes to teaching the action of oratory and the gestures and movements of the body, nothing else accomplishes these aims to so high a degree' (Mottet 1929, 51). 'Action is eloquence', Shakespeare's Coriolanus is told, and the grammar school education provided pupils with both. The plays performed by the Queen's Men, while not as intricate or sophisticated as later works by Shakespeare or Jonson, nevertheless presented significant challenges for actors grappling with lengthy parts and complex rhetorical structures. For a boy to play leading female roles in *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, Eleanor and Constance, or one of Leir's daughters in *King Leir*, he would have had to have acquired an accomplished set of skills to cope with the plays' demands. Therefore some form of formal training would have been required prior to embarking as a player's apprentice on a professional theatrical career. Of those Queen's Men whose ages we know, John Dutton was the oldest, born in around 1548, meaning that all the actors in the company would have been able to benefit from the new school system. With its focus on good

speaking, presentation, and rhetorical dexterity, a grammar school education was one of the few ways to equip pupils with the tools needed as an actor to tackle play texts which were often rhetorically technical and complex.

### 6.2.2 – THE REPERTORY

Turning from personnel and training to plays and repertory, we need to consider what the surviving Queen's Men plays can tell us about the company's practices. While we can name many plays that have been attached to the Queen's Men with varying degrees of certainty, their survival is thanks to the printing industry rather than as a relic of performance itself (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 84-96; Knutson 2009).<sup>30</sup> Although there have been several estimates as to the percentage of drama that has been lost (for example Gurr 2004a; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 87), there is no way of knowing what proportion of Queen's Men plays survive. Printing was a phenomenon that only took off in the 1590s, and it was not a medium in which the Queen's Men thrived (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 84). However, by counting those plays with title page attributions to the company or lost plays mentioned in other records, and even including those plays which are more tentatively connected to the company, we accumulate a body of around 26 plays for a career spanning twenty years – a substantially smaller number than the figure suggested from Philip Henslowe's record of plays at the Rose Theatre in the 1590s.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> It is often difficult to date these plays accurately – McMillin carefully sidesteps the problem by concentrating on publication date rather than date of composition or performance – so it is not possible to say exactly when these plays became part of the company's repertory. Nevertheless, Roslyn Knutson has suggested a number of plays that may have been performed by the Queen's Men during the first five years of their existence, including *Clyomon and Clamedes*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, *King Leir*, *The Peddler's Prophecy*, *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, *Soliman and Perseda*, *Lochrine*, 'Phillyda and Corin' [lost], 'Felix and Philiomena' [lost], and 'Seven Deadly Sins' [lost], as well as any plays actors brought from their old companies (Knutson 2009, 102). Knutson believes Tarlton's 'Seven Deadly Sins' to be the same as the 'Five Plays in One' and 'Three Plays in One' performed at court by the company in early 1585, despite McMillin listing all three separately; there is added confusion with the survival of the plot of *2 Seven Deadly Sins*, an unrelated play owned by Strange's Men in the 1590s (Knutson 2009, 102; McMillin and MacLean 1998, 92-3).

<sup>31</sup> McMillin and MacLean point out that only 20 to 25 percent of Elizabethan drama has survived in some form (1998, 87), and therefore we might presume that the Queen's Men boasted a larger repertory during their career than I have suggested here, but nevertheless the number is noticeably smaller than that of a London-based company in the 1590s and onwards.

The Queen's Men's plays' lack of success in the printed book market might account for the smaller proportion that survives today. However, there may have been other reasons why the company did not require as many plays as a later rival based primarily in the capital. Later, when the London theatres were fully established and had healthy competition, it was presumably good business to maintain a good mix of new material, while continuing to perform and revive plays as long as they proved profitable, safe in the knowledge that should a play fail it could be replaced with relative ease. However, there is insufficient evidence to give a detailed account of repertory turnover in the London playhouses before the 1590s. Companies spent less time in the capital – McMillin and MacLean point out that in the early 1580s Leicester's Men spend most of their time touring the provinces despite having a London base at the Theatre (1998, 5) – and may have been able to sustain a shorter residency in the city with fewer plays. There may also have been a multiplicity of economic models that drove repertory decisions - the agreement between James Burbage and his partner and brother-in-law John Brayne as owners of the Theatre, and the owner of the Curtain, Henry Lanman, to pool and share the combined profits of the two theatres over the period 1585-1592 (see Berry 2002, 151; Berry 2000, 330-387, 404-418) presumably encouraged a spirit of co-operation rather than competition, reducing the need for a quick turnover of plays.

On tour a company might only have stayed in one location for a few days. A Gloucester ordinance of 1580 states that the Queen's Men were permitted 'to playe three interludes or playes within three days or vnder... and no more nor oftener' (Douglas and Greenfield 1986, 306-7), although one would assume the company would seek to maximise the number of performances, and revenue, where possible (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 42) and other cities such as Norwich and York were more lenient about companies' length of stay. Nevertheless, there is no reason to suppose that a company could not survive with a small repertory, which could be performed repeatedly as it moved around the country, constantly finding new audiences. If the preferred treatment extended to the Queen's Men at Gloucester represents a more widespread tradition of allowing the royal company a longer stay in a town than their lesser rivals, we might speculate that the Queen's Men may have had to maintain a larger repertory than other touring companies, but even so, the relative increase would be marginal. In any case, it is more than possible that companies would have encouraged repeat performances of the same play on consecutive days, reducing the number of plays that needed to be taken on a single tour.

What factors must have influenced a company's choice of repertory? The criteria were deceptively simple: a company needed plays that could be performed by its available actors, whose costume and property demands could be readily met with items that could be found or carried long distances, and whose staging demands could be contained within a variety of venues of varying dimensions and facilities. There was, we might assume, a practical limit to the number of plays one could comfortably tour in terms of costumes and properties. Barbara Palmer has convincingly argued that many of these would be recycled between plays, but also that in the absence of strong evidence for companies using wagons to transport large properties it is safer to assume all costumes and properties had to be carried (see Palmer 2009). Although generic costumes are easily reused, items specific to a character may be less so – the lion skin worn by Limoges and later Philip the Bastard in *The Troublesome Reign*, for example – and a broad range of hand properties and weaponry begin to accumulate if you start to consider the whole range of plays the Queen's Men had available by the end of their career. On the one hand, a smaller selection of plays that employed a complementary set of costumes and properties would have had a certain advantage for ease of touring. On the other, plays such as *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* that employed a series of spectacular properties, costumes and magic tricks may have been better received by some audiences, and crowd-pleasers may have promised a better return for a company with a keen nose for a profit.

The practicality of staging must also have been a key point. Certain plays appear to demand more ambitious staging practices which to us might seem unsuitable for some spaces. Two possibilities present themselves. One is that the company knew of ways to stage such plays in relatively Spartan venues, or were able to adapt them accordingly, despite it seeming difficult to us now. The second is that the company may have toured with an expanded repertory, ensuring that a substitute might replace any play whose staging demands were too great for the venue in which the company found itself. Whichever strategy the company employed – and there is no reason to suggest they could not have adopted both – the primary aim must have been to ensure the highest performance rate and the greatest chance of reward, so that wherever the company found to play, they had a play to hand.

### 6.2.3 - DIVIDING IN TWO

A significant factor which hitherto has passed unremarked concerns the number of actors required to perform the Queen's Men's plays. While we cannot discount the possibility that the Queen's Men possessed plays designed for smaller casts, possibly inherited from the companies its members left, the majority of the surviving Queen's plays require more than twelve actors - only two plays on McMillin's A-list require fewer than twelve. Even if we add Tarlton's two apprentices, the full complement of Queen's Men could not have performed the majority of their plays without making alterations to the text or employing additional actors. The addition of a small number of hired men may not appear to be an insurmountable problem, but it starts to become a greater hurdle when we consider that the company divided into two, if not immediately, then soon after its creation. The two branches of the company, each with six Queen's Men and maybe a handful of boys, would need to source at least another dozen hired men between them. When we consider that the previous elite company, Leicester's Men, comprised of only five named sharers and three or four hired men, the scope and ambition of the Queen's Men project becomes evident.

The question of when the company split has been discussed by McMillin and MacLean, but the ramifications for casting have been addressed less fully, and it is worth reviewing what we know about the company's first touring season. The Master of the Revels, Edmund Tilney, was instructed by Francis Walsingham to form a new company on 10 March 1583, and their first dated performance was at the home of Lord North at Kirtling, near Cambridge, on 3 - 4 June, from where the company would continue to Norwich and loop round to Aldeburgh and Ipswich (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 41-2). Within three months of their first performance the company had split in two and were performing both in the Midlands, at Nottingham and Leicester, and around the towns of the south east (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 44). It is possible the company split earlier, perhaps even at the outset of their tour (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 43). Splitting allowed the company to cover more ground, all the better to spread their political message. It may too have offered the prospect of greater profit (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 44), although the base costs of touring would presumably also increase (see Ingram 1993). I am inclined to lean towards political motivation as the primary reason for splitting. Two companies touring simultaneously would double the opportunity for receiving rewards, but the shortfall of actors would have had to be made up by employing hirelings. While the wages they received may have been less



than a permanent member's share of the profits, hirelings nevertheless represent a significant additional base cost. If financial profit was subsidiary to political purpose, then we can discount the possibility that the company split because it met with insufficient financial success in the first few months – against which, in any case, the high reward rate of between 20s. and £2 for performances during their first summer is proof enough.

McMillin and MacLean see the split as 'a sign of purpose', but there is reason to read it as a sign of foreknowledge. The company did not divide as an act of desperation after a failed opening series of performances; it had planned to do so. The company's choice of plays and their preparations for touring must have been based around this plan. During the three months before the company's first performance the lead actors presumably assembled, selected plays, hired additional actors, and rehearsed, although at what stage any of these events occurred or how long they took can only be speculation. Imagining the preparation process is complicated by the company's division into two branches. In one scenario, one might suggest that two full companies were assembled, with the named Queen's Men dividing between the two branches. In this case, we ask unanswerable questions - did the companies prepare together, or did they do so separately? Did they both prepare the same selection of plays, or was there a bias towards plays the actors may have brought with them from their previous companies? Alternatively, the first troupe may have assembled and prepared, while the remaining Queen's Men waited until the first branch left London before starting their own preparation process and then heading west. Again, it is impossible to know what plays they might have selected and why.

Despite not knowing how the Queen's Men spent those three months before their first performance, it is enough to suggest that the pressures of preparation were, if not less, different to those a professional company may have felt performing regularly in London fifteen years later. As I turn to examine evidence for rehearsal and preparation more closely, we should remain sceptical over the applicability of models based on a specific point in time to a longer, or earlier, period.

#### **6.2.4 – REHEARSAL AND RECRUITMENT**

While literary scholars have imagined non-specific 'rehearsal' processes to explain a range of ambiguities and inconsistencies in printed texts (see Stern 2000, 5), concerted

efforts to gather and evaluate historical evidence for such processes have been rather less forthcoming. The subject is dominated by Tiffany Stern, whose *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (2000) remains the primary work to address and outline the practical process of taking a play from page to stage both before and after the Commonwealth. While it is not my intention to offer an extensive critique of Stern's work, it has become the standard model on which 'original practice' performance and research is based, both in the commercial and academic worlds (see Cockett 2009), and therefore warrants discussion.

Stern shows how a completed play was read to the general company – although probably without any hirelings who might take on the smaller parts present – in part to see if the company were happy with the finished product or wanted changes made, and in part as the one opportunity the author had to illustrate how he envisaged actors presenting their parts (Palfrey and Stern 57-60, see also Stern 2000, 59-61). Parts – cue scripts containing an actor's lines and the cue words preceding them – were distributed shortly afterwards, and the players would retire to learn them in private (Palfrey and Stern 2007, 62-5; Stern 2000, 61-72). Actors may have rehearsed amongst themselves in small groups (Stern 2000, 64), but only the boy actors received any substantial instruction. Usually this came from their adult masters, although in the case of the London children's companies the playwright himself sometimes played a larger role in the boys' direction (Stern 2000, 43, 66). Stern suggests that a rehearsal with the full cast before the first public performance was held 'if there was time for it' (Palfrey and Stern 2007, 70), but given the ferocity with which Henslowe legislated against and fined actors who missed the general rehearsal it seems highly unlikely that a company would skip such an essential part of preparation (Greg 1907, iii, 24, 124; Stern 2000, 76). Rehearsal time was restricted to quiet periods of the day, usually in the morning before the theatre opened and began to admit playgoers to see that day's play.

Practitioners seeking to explore early modern rehearsal and performance practices have taken Stern's model and attempted to replicate the processes she describes, and often comment on the relative ease with which they have done so and the marked contrast to modern practices (see PQMe). However, practitioners have sometimes seized upon methods drawn from Stern's work without critically assessing whether they are in fact appropriate. Stern's model focuses strongly on the London theatres, and draws particularly on the records left by Philip Henslowe in his diary. However, Henslowe's diary is 'limited to seven scattered periods between 1591 and 1597 at the

Rose Theatre' (Stern 2000, 46), and while Stern's description of the circumstances of theatrical production in London may be true from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, they might not be the case either for the London theatres during their first two decades of existence, or for touring theatre throughout the period. Stern supplements her historical data with a number of references to episodes recorded in plays themselves, of which the rehearsal and performance by the Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the most prominent (Stern 2000, 22-123). However, while such episodes may have ghosted or mimicked real practices, it is doubtful we should rely fully on incidental textual references whose literal truth may be questioned.

In basing her research around Henslowe's Diary, Stern firmly roots her model in the playhouses of 1590s London, by which time demand in the capital required a frequent rotation of plays to make sure there was a constant supply of new material to entertain the play-going public. Competition was stiff; as well as theatrical performances in a number of playhouses, Londoners could also choose to watch bear baiting, cock fighting and fencing displays. High turnover of plays required actors to be adept at learning their parts swiftly, and retaining many parts at once with little prospect of time for rehearsal. Stern also seems to imagine an environment in which actors could expect to perform at a single venue for the duration of the season. For particular companies, especially the Lord Chamberlain's Men, this may have been the case, and familiarity with the performance space may have allowed such companies to develop standard conventions for the staging of types of scene. However, we also know that other companies moved around, from purpose-built playhouses to converted inn yards, and both peripatetic and settled companies may have been called on to perform at court. Stern's model does not address how companies may have coped with the demands either of one space, or of moving between multiple spaces.

Clearly, the circumstances and pressures described by Stern were the product of a specific period in the development of the theatres. It seems unlikely these pressures were felt in the same way a decade before, and they were certainly different to those encountered by touring companies. We should therefore be wary of relying upon this evidence as a strict model of rehearsal practice for such companies.

Moreover, while Stern's model offers a possible way in which rehearsals and performances were scheduled in the London playhouses, she does not offer much evidence for the practical matter of rehearsal itself. As a model that could be followed by modern practitioners, no imitable practices are outlined that offer actors a toolkit

for meeting the demands of the early modern repertory. For example, there remains the question of how actors knew to whom they should speak, or how they should occupy or move through the playing space. It is true that the former may have been indicated by the playwright at a reading – although if, as Stern suggests, only the main actors would have attended such a reading there would have remained a number of minor actors left in the dark – but the staging of even relatively simple movements would have demanded more extensive rehearsal than a single run through before the first performance seems to allow.

How the Queen's Men may have rehearsed did not receive much attention in either of the two studies of the company. Scott McMillin approached the subject obliquely as a consequence of his examination of the mislineation of passages in *The True Tragedy of Richard III* and *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. He sees textual discrepancies in the surviving printed versions of the plays as the result of one compositor's failure to recognise that prose had been written as verse by a playhouse scribe. The scribe's error can only be understood, McMillin argues, if he was writing from dictation, for which evidence of several mishearings in both plays suggests he was. Although he does not exclude alternative explanations, McMillin thinks it likely that dictation took place in the playhouse, the purpose of which was to provide a new prompt-book that presented a streamlined and readjusted version of what had been a large-cast metropolitan production to better suit a smaller company on tour, particularly if that company was in the habit of splitting in two, as the Queen's company was. The process of devising new doubling patterns and cutting and altering speeches would have been problematic and would have required a certain amount of attention and work, McMillin argues. The preparation of a new prompt book could only have come at a late stage of rehearsal, once it was clear 'how many new roles each actor would have to double, which characters would have to be cut out altogether for the doubling to be possible, and where patches of additional dialogue would be necessary to provide the new doubling to be possible in each case' (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 115; 114-6).

This may have been the manner in which the *printed* texts came about, but we can be less certain that the same held true for a newly commissioned play. It is possible that following a court production or a spell at one of the London playhouses or inns, for which the whole company had gathered, a period of re-rehearsal was needed to turn a script designed for the London stage into something more suitable for touring, particularly if the company was planning on splitting once more. However, it is unlikely

that this was the case at the outset in 1583. Some of the three month period before the company's first appearance at Kirtling in early June may have been spent rehearsing in London, but it seems unlikely that they would have started at the outset by learning a play which was impossible to tour and then having to amend it. We could imagine such a process might have occurred if they altered a play written specifically for a large scale production at court, but the company would not perform at Whitehall until the following December. McMillin's observation may indicate one mode of practice under specific circumstances, but they cannot necessarily be applied more broadly.

On the other hand, for the first decade of their career the company did spend time each year in London playing the amphitheatre and inn playhouses and at court. During a London season, the company may have selected, prepared and performed a repertory of plays that was suitable for provincial performance and could embark on their tour circuits without much in the way of extra alteration. However, following the company's failed season with *Sussex's Men* at the Rose in 1594 the Queen's Men avoided the capital. Despite this, it enjoyed nine further profitable years touring the provinces. This raises the possibility that the company was able to rehearse on the road. Alternatively, it might suggest that the company rehearsed very little, if at all, either on the road or when staying in London.

The question of rehearsal has ramifications for that of recruitment. We might assume that the Queen's Men hired additional actors in the capital, and for their first season at least this seems a reasonable assumption – although there would have been time to summon someone from the provinces if necessary. However, if the company was not restricted to rehearsing in the capital, it is possible it could recruit while on tour. We might not expect a company to set out on tour with substantial roles unfilled, but it is possible that smaller parts, particularly supernumerary, non-speaking roles, could have been taken by local actors. In later years playhouse practices included picking boys out of the audience and inviting them to take walk-on parts in exchange for seeing the play for free – Thomas Killigrew reminisces to Samuel Pepys how he played a devil at the Red Bull as a child (Stern 2000, 77). There is no evidence particularly for this having happened with touring companies, but there is ample evidence of children attending provincial performances (see for example Keenan 2002, 38-40). As was the case at Stratford-upon-Avon, there were often grammar schools closely associated with the town corporation, and the schoolboys, already used to dramatic performances through the course of their studies, may have represented a cheap way of filling silent

or small roles as a company moved from location to location. More substantial roles would presumably have required a commitment to travel with the company for the duration of the tour. A company would generally want to secure actors before they set out around the country as the larger population of the capital offered a greater choice and better chance of acquiring a full complement of actors. However, while amateur drama in the provinces may have been fading following the suppression of the medieval Corpus Christi cycles, last performed in York in 1569 and in Coventry in 1579 (Johnston and Rogerson 1979, 355-58; Ingram 1981, xix), the growth of provincial grammar schools meant that many towns would have been home to boys and men with a good grounding in one style of theatrical performance, which could then be groomed to meet the needs of professional theatre.

This must have been the case at times. Queen's Men actors had a disconcerting tendency to expire while on tour – John Bentley, Tobias Mills and Richard Tarlton, three of the twelve founding members, did so, Bentley and Mills in 1585 and Tarlton in 1588; William Knell was killed in a fight with a fellow actor in 1587, as was Robert Moon in 1597 (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 194-7). They all would have had to be replaced at some point, and the company does not interrupt a circuit and return to London to do so. It is possible that an actor might be sent for from the capital, or a local man might have sufficed. Actors including John and Lawrence Dutton, John Garland, John Singer and John Symons regularly transferred to and from other companies, and may have done so following the demise of another actor. Roles may have had to be reassigned temporarily or permanently. Ad hoc replacements were not unheard-of: Tarlton famously took on the role of the Lord Chief Justice as well as his usual part, the clown Derick, during a performance of *The Famous Victories of Henry V* at the Bull in Bishopsgate, when as the former he received a clout on the cheek from William Knell, who was playing the Prince of Wales, and on returning to the latter role later joked about still feeling the hit (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 89).

Despite the blow that the Queen's Men must have felt whenever one of their members passed away, their methods and practices were flexible and stable enough to be able to accommodate change, even when away from the capital. New players must have been able to join the company without having had the opportunity to rehearse with their fellows at a London base. In a predominately oral culture, and equipped with the ability to quickly memorise and interpret lengthy texts after years of grammar school training, we cannot envisage many difficulties with actors learning and delivering lines, even if

the broader staging and presentation strategies of the company took longer to assimilate.

How we might move from the historical evidence for performance towards a practical method of approaching texts is more challenging. It is clear that much about early modern practice is unknowable, while some of what can be recovered is difficult to replicate in the present. The early modern grammar school curricula, for example, about which we know a reasonable amount, might offer the training and tools that could help modern actors approach early modern texts with some confidence. However, it is unrealistic to suppose that these could be employed again as extensively – the skills of performance and rhetoric were acquired over many years. As we cannot rely solely on historical data to inform practice in the present, it is clear that we need to look elsewhere for guidance.

### **6.3 – MODELS FOR THEATRE PRACTICE RESEARCH – SHAKESPEARE AND THE QUEEN’S MEN**

The *Shakespeare and the Queen’s Men* project provides a good example of what can be achieved by using performance as a tool to investigate early modern theatre. As the most significant and extensive project to examine the performance of early modern touring plays it serves as a benchmark for similar investigations. Although the aims and emphases of the project’s research were somewhat different to the current project, it nevertheless offers a methodological starting point from which we can progress.

The project situated itself and its approach within the context of ‘original practice’ production and research, although it resisted any attempt to use labels such as ‘recreation’ or ‘reconstruction’. The claim for original practice was justified through the ‘insistence on a relationship between our productions and historical evidence’, and was seen as a way of avoiding elision between modern and early modern circumstances of performance, where ‘modern dress and... modern rehearsal techniques... might lead to an equally problematic implication that the Queen’s Men were in some way our contemporaries’ (Cockett 2009, 229-30). Original practices, it reasoned, allowed ‘a sense of historical distance’, an essential condition for engaging with McMillin and MacLean’s original statement of intent:

Shakespeare was not our contemporary, and one way to insist on that fact is to study the things which he had to deal with and which our age is free to ignore. Shakespeare

had to deal with the Queen's Men. We are free to ignore them - the first summer festival of Queen's Men plays has yet to be held. But if measuring the difference between Shakespeare and ourselves makes for good history, and if the Elizabethans are to be thought of as not another version of ourselves but as strangers from the past, and if things nearly forgotten are the proper objects for historians to keep in view anyhow, then we think the plays of the Queen's Men are worth careful consideration (McMillin and MacLean 1998, xvi.)

The initial focus of the project was on establishing a suitable casting model, and solving problems of doubling (Cockett 2009, 230-5). While this decision was underpinned by the Queen's Men's presumed historical casting decisions, it seems heavily, and necessarily, influenced by the practicalities of assembling a suitable cast in the present day. The structure of the SQM cast was meant to resemble the hierarchy of early modern companies (Cockett 2009, 231). Three Equity actors represented Elizabethan master actors, while eight paid but non-union actors were appointed to represent hired men. A musical director would also take on small parts where necessary. Initially the project wished to cast two students in the place of boy apprentices who would play the female and boy roles. However, students were difficult to recruit and could not commit to rehearse full time. Granted some licence by David Kathman's research, which suggested apprentice actors ranged from age fourteen to twenty-two (Kathman 2005), the project instead hired young actors aged between twenty-four and twenty-seven who might stand in for a slightly younger apprentice who has nevertheless worked with a professional company for several years (Cockett 2009, 232).

The *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* rehearsal process was 'constructed to reflect the current understanding of the early modern rehearsal process as presented by Tiffany Stern' (Cockett 2009, 235). Inevitably some concessions were necessary, and Peter Cockett took the role as facilitator, giving textual and historical guidance where needed, and maintaining the research agenda. Before the start of the rehearsal period, the company gathered for the 'playwright's reading', where the full play was read out by Cockett, standing in for the playwright and simulating similar events recorded at numerous times in Henslowe's Diary (Stern 2000, 59-61; Henslowe 1961, 88, 201). Actors were given their individual parts – along with a full copy of the play for reference – and rehearsed in several groups simultaneously over the course of seven to



nine days,<sup>32</sup> before coming together to have one full rehearsal and run of the play a few hours before the first public performance. Importantly, the SQM project recognised the gap between the education and training of modern and early modern actors. Not only were Elizabethan actors trained in the rhetorical skills of *actio* and *pronuncio* which fostered an easy comprehension and delivery of a play's speeches, but the original members of the Queen's Men counted musicians, singers, dancers, acrobats and master fencers amongst their number. The SQM project developed a series of pre-rehearsal workshops that came to be known as the 'Renaissance Boot Camp'. In the workshops actors 'were taught songs... learned traditional dances, practised sword fighting, and were given instruction in the physical comportment befitting the nobility of the day'. Those actors playing female parts were given additional instruction on how to sit, stand and hold themselves, using the physical constraint of petticoats and corsets to help give a sense of restricted movement. All actors were given a 'Players' Handbook', a four page brief that gave the actors an overview of Elizabethan attitudes towards religion, social hierarchy, patriarchy and love. The Boot Camp initially lasted three days, and subsequent days' rehearsals were always started with singing, dancing and sword fighting practice (PQMf).

Three plays, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, and *King Leir*, were prepared and performed in 2006. In 2008 the process was repeated for a production of *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamedes*, but the process was adapted to suit the different demands of the play. Here the Boot Camp process was extended to a week, and a 'Rhetoric Boot Camp' was added to the training in singing, dance and sword-fighting. The Rhetoric Boot Camp, given by Dr Jane Freeman, offered an overview of sixteenth-century rhetorical training and promised to show modern actors how rhetorical figures were linked to the 'precise awareness of a character's thoughts and feelings' (Freeman 2011, 3). Freeman also invoked a number of more recent practitioners, including John Barton, Patsy Rodenburg and Kirsten Linklater, to suggest that the rhetorical figures in the play offer 'hidden hints' that should be allowed to affect the actor 'sensorily' (Freeman 2011, 3-4; Barton 1984, 13; Linklater 2005, 79). In practice Freeman followed exercises designed to help connect rhetorical figures with physical movement: 'throwing or hitting a ball between speakers while talking (antanaclasis); tug-of-war (antithesis); standing or moving in an opposite mood to that

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<sup>32</sup> According to the PQM website; however, Peter Cockett records a period of eight to eleven days (Cockett 2009, 235).

of the words being spoken (irony); climbing stairs (climax); and kicking an object on key words (emphasis)' (Freeman 2011, 5). Freeman went on to show how the playwright altered word order, or added or removed syllables for poetic cohesion or emphasis, and outlined the use of rhetorical questions, repetition and vivid descriptions to evoke different responses. The purpose of the workshop was ostensibly to offer actors a set of tools with which they could unpick a complicated text, and design a 'rhetorical workout' to help 'prepare them for the demands and the pleasures of early modern texts' (Freeman 2011, 6).

### 6.3.1 – REFLECTIONS ON THE SQM PROCESS

The *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project's Boot Camp process represents one of the most concerted efforts to lessen the gap between modern and early modern practitioners and to provide a sound basis for original practice performance. It is not always clear, however, exactly how either the boot camp or the original practice approach informed the rehearsal process and staging decisions. This aspect of the productions, like their early modern equivalents, remains opaque.

As far as it is possible to see from the literature the project has published so far, the production team seemed to believe that those Elizabethan practices to which an original practice approach aspires, coupled with a model of rehearsal such as Stern describes, would provide an early modern company the tools to perform their plays. This being the case, any modern attempt to reproduce similar conditions and to follow an original practice approach, even if such approach was necessarily approximate, would inevitably allow a modern company to recreate a performance that was more closely connected with the original. In such a case, the logic goes, they needed only to find ways to lessen or remove that gap in order to understand early modern practices. However, even if we were to take Stern's organisation of rehearsal time as a reasonable model for Queen's Men practices, there are no guidelines to inform staging decisions or the movement of a play through space.

The focus on what appear to be the less familiar aspects of early modern practice – the singing, dancing and sword fighting – risks underplaying the importance of tackling the range of problems thrown up by the texts themselves, and emphasises aspects of performance that are not necessarily central elements of particular plays. This risk was evidently acknowledged before the production of *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamedes*, where

the Rhetoric Boot Camp aimed to tackle some problems presented by the text, especially the play's use of unfamiliar fourteeners throughout. Nevertheless, the project's current model falls short of offering a fully supportive set of guidelines with which to approach early modern texts. While the focus of the 2006 Boot Camp on physical activities was felt by the actors to help develop their appreciation of the different physical postures demanded by those activities and by the costumes they wore, the overriding feedback from the interviewed group was that the workshops worked primarily as a team-building exercise (PQMf). The extent of the actors' unfamiliarity with period dance, singing and stage combat may reflect a difference between present day Canadian and British training traditions, but in any case the relevance of the training in these skills during the Boot Camp process can only be linked to those specific elements in the SQM productions that contained dance, singing and fencing, rather than the full performances overall. As the dance and sung components of the SQM performances tended to be confined to moments introduced by the modern company rather than being prompted by the original texts, little more can be discovered about the specific staging practices used for the bulk of the plays. Jane Freeman's 2008 Rhetoric workshop offered actors a more structured way of reading the text, but while she acknowledged the early modern context of rhetorical training, the practical exercises she suggested to connect rhetoric to physical performance were drawn from and couched in terms of modern techniques.

Rather than reducing the distance between early modern actors and their modern counterparts, the Renaissance Boot Camp process throws that distance into sharper relief. It may be possible to acquire cursory knowledge over the course of a week of workshops that can help comprehension of a text, but they can do little to inform staging practices. Moreover, a significant gap remains between comprehension of a rhetorical text and the act of conveying meaning. Rhetoric is above all the art of persuasion, which is why the focus of the Elizabethan rhetorical education was on *actio* and *pronuncio*, and on conveying meaning and argument through performance. The long rhetorical education undergone by an Elizabethan actor cannot be replicated under modern conditions in the space of a few days. Even had an extensive period been made available for such training, it is unlikely a modern actor would be able to subsume the full range of memorisation and performance skills of an Elizabethan grammar school boy, let alone those of an experienced professional actor, nor is it likely that modern practitioners could divest themselves of their own modern worldview that inevitably permeates any process of rehearsal and performance. Once

they embarked on rehearsal, the Elizabethan practices imposed on the SQM company were hindered by the actors' unfamiliarity with the rehearsal system and by their wish, sometimes unstated, to be supported by modern techniques.

The casting decisions for the SQM project were necessarily born out of compromise, particularly when constrained by restricted finances. As Cockett points out, 'a company of 17 professional actors was ground-breaking in 1583 and a company of 14 is prohibitive today' (2009, 230). Nevertheless, while the distribution of Equity and non-union actors in the SQM cast seems to reflect the organisation of most Elizabethan touring companies with three to five master actors (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 11; Bevington 1962, 86-113), the Queen's Men were unique precisely because of their extraordinary size. They were notable in particular for the number of named master actors – two to four times those of competing companies. Even when the company split we might expect each branch to have six, and not three, senior actors, suggesting that the hierarchy of the Queen's Men was balanced somewhat differently. The original company's practices must have reflected this, but the SQM project does not seem to have considered the variations in practice that having six master actors together in a company might have demanded, nor how the company would have had to adjust when both branches and twelve senior actors were brought together and performed as one.

The question of master actors also highlights the way in which the SQM sometimes unconsciously blurred modern and early modern practices. The young professional actors employed in the place of apprentices were expected to work closely with the Equity-master actors, in replication of the master/ apprentice model put forward by Tiffany Stern (Cockett 2009, 232-3). However, Stern insists that the master actor's role was to offer a prescriptive pronouncement on how an apprentice should present his speech. Hamlet's advice to the players to 'Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you' (3. 2. 1) is more specifically a direct instruction to one player (Stern 2000, 69; Shakespeare 2006). Hamlet expects the player to repeat the speech quite literally as he, Hamlet, had spoken it. This kind of direct and prescriptive instruction is alien to modern theatre practice, and even more so when coming from a fellow actor rather than a director. Don Allison, one of the Equity actors and who took the role of King Leir, discusses his role as master actor in terms of subtlety and insinuation:

What the master actor became and I found difficult at first was that I had to be not only responsible for my role but to be observant of what other people were doing and be able to... as subtly as possible, insinuate the

difference between what they were doing and what they should be doing (PQMg).

He describes offering the two actors playing Gonoril and Ragan a short personal insight into his own experiences and shortcomings as a father in order that they 'extrapolate from that the kind of analysis they should be doing on where their badness came from' (PQMg). This process seems rather at odds with the relationship described in Stern's model, and reflects a modern concern for emotional experience and motivation that strays from the project's goal of 'original practice'.

It is clear that while the Renaissance Boot Camp provided the actors with some of the historical context of the plays they were to perform, and the rehearsal process raised several interesting challenges to the actors' accustomed modes of practice, neither offered the actors a set of tools with which to simulate the Elizabethan acting experience. Beyond some discussion of 'physicality' there was no further attempt to explore staging principles that may have held true in the sixteenth century. Rather, decisions appear to have been made for convenience's sake:

For example, one of the principal tasks of the modern director is to guide the traffic on and off the stage and given the lack of a director in the early modern process we experimented with ways in which the company could direct the traffic from within. We therefore developed blocking protocols that could be relied on when the actors approached new scenes. The most obvious example was the fact that actors always entered stage left and exited stage right. This decision was based on analysis of surviving texts, prompt books and parts in which I could find no reference to particular doors for entrances or exits unless two sets of characters entered simultaneously. It seemed possible that the early modern actors might have had an unspoken protocol in place that made such annotation unnecessary and I therefore decided to make all entrances and exits uniform. This cut down on decision-making and gave the actors a beginning and end for each scene (Cockett 2009, 236).

It is not clear to which texts, prompt books and parts Cockett refers, as the Queen's Men's plays survive only in printed editions. Indeed, as very few early modern plays prescribe which door actors should use at any one time, we would not expect to find explicit references in any case, particularly in plays owned by a touring company

performing in many different venues where the arrangement of doors may have greatly varied. Rather than seek to find a logical protocol that might have been used by early modern actors and that was supported by the text, the decision to enforce an unconditional uniformity of stage entrances and exits not only closes off a number of staging possibilities that might arise from the texts, but inevitably undermines what Tim Fitzpatrick has called the 'concrete spatial geography of the fictional world' (Fitzpatrick 2011, 12). If, within a scene, someone is sent away to perform some errand and subsequently returns, spatial logic demands that he exits and enters through the same doorway. Movements on and off stage between scenes may have been determined by factors other than convenience, and more sophisticated protocols would have been needed to accommodate stages with only one, or more than two, exits.

Whether trying to explore methods of approaching language in the texts or possibilities for their staging, it is clear that, despite valiant attempts by the SQM project to make up the shortfall, the distance between the individual and collective knowledge of a modern company of actors and that of their early modern predecessors is too great to be adequately bridged. If the addition of the Rhetoric Boot Camp to the SQM process in 2008 showed an appreciation that closer attention needed to be paid to the language of a play, it also served to demonstrate that while it is possible to use early modern practices as tools to aid comprehension of text, modern practices are needed to help interpret them in performance. Our understanding of original practices does not of itself offer much in the way of strategies for tackling voice or the practicalities of movement across a stage.

Nevertheless, if taken further or adapted, many aspects of the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men's* approach could be usefully employed across a future, longer project. For example, the focus of the 2006 Boot Camp on physical activities was deemed generically useful to develop an appreciation of the physical postures demanded by these activities, particularly within the constraints of period costume. However, while the SQM actors, notably Julian DeZotti, used the process to help develop their own personal idea of their characters' physicality (PQMh), there was no attempt to connect the demands and structures of period dancing or fencing either to a closer appraisal of the play texts, or to strategies for movement or occupation of the stage space. The (modern) process of developing 'character' with the aid of period costume is relatively trivial. That the codes of body, physical posture and bearing were radically different in

the sixteenth century from the modern day is a more pertinent observation. In a future programme, it may be that an extended exploration of codes of bodily etiquette and gesture, for example, and their connection with activities such as dance, could help give a better grounding for physical movement and comportment on stage (see Howard 1998).

Jane Freeman's rhetoric workshops in 2008 seems to have been implemented in part because of the extra unfamiliarity of the verse structure of *Clyomon and Clamedes*, whose use of fourteeners is more alien to the modern actor even than blank verse (Freeman 2011). Although they form a significant part of *Clyomon and Clamedes*, the rhetorical devices discussed by Freeman are no less prevalent in other Queen's Men plays, and close attention to the verse is needed to allow comprehension and clear articulation. However, the practical advice given by Freeman was not drawn from early modern practice, and, despite invoking the leading modern practitioners, it does not offer a nuanced method for dealing with complex rhetorical verse. A longer exploration of early modern grammar school exercises, coupled with an explicit discussion of more recent practices, may both hold the key to making these texts more accessible to modern actors. Further investigation into rhetoric and gesture in early modern legal practices is also sorely needed, and work that bridges the gap between the schools and the courts may well also elucidate stage practices.

A production of a Queen's Men play faces two major hurdles: how to coordinate the physical staging of the play, and how to meet the demands of the complex, rhetorical verse. The *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project acknowledged the gap between past and present and attempted to close it, but it is clear that in many respects our historical knowledge is insufficient to provide the tools needed to face these hurdles. If we are to seek to perform an early modern play in a way in which something might be revealed about its historical context, circumstances and manner of performance, or interpretation of the play itself, then we need to gather a set of tools for preparation that satisfy as best as possible both the demands of the text and the requirements of modern actors. While it is impossible to imagine the circumstances in which the full gamut of the Elizabethan experience and educational practices could be realised by a group of modern actors, it is nevertheless clear that the linguistic and rhetorical distance between modern and Elizabethan texts is such that additional training is required before a modern actor can successfully grapple with even relatively simple scenes. Fortunately, there is a long tradition of historically sensitive professional

theatre, stretching back to William Poel, which offers useful practical methods for the production of early plays.

#### **6.4 – THE PROFESSIONAL INHERITANCE**

Academics are not the only ones to recognise the distance between modern and early modern texts, and numerous professional practitioners have offered methods by which actors may approach Elizabethan and Jacobean plays with sensitivity to original circumstances. Directors and voice coaches that include Sir Peter Hall, John Barton, Cicely Berry, Kristin Linklater and Patsy Rodenburg have published handbooks that aim to help actors cope with the demands of these plays (Barton 1984; Berry 1993; 2001; Hall 2003; Linklater 1993; 2009; Rodenburg 2005). While they have done so with a different set of circumstances in mind – those of modern productions and modern stages – they nevertheless offer an additional toolkit to that provided by the SQM Boot Camp.

In particular, John Barton's exploration of Shakespeare's plays demonstrates how close text work not only clarifies meaning, but can inform actors' portrayal of character and helps them to uncover emotion and purpose, suggesting ways to present a more nuanced interpretation. While such a process does not reflect early modern approaches to preparation for performance, it offers modern actors a reasonable substitute, aiding comprehension and guiding them through difficult texts. Of course, rather than expecting an actor to work alone, such a method demands that actors work closely with a director or text coach.

Although the focus of Barton's approach is primarily on text-speaking, rather than staging, it is a smaller step to combine speech with suitable action. Rather than concentrating on the rhetorical form of a speech, and broadly applying movement to mimic a certain trope, as Freeman suggested in her Rhetoric Boot Camp, a nuanced understanding of rhetorical argument can help suggest subtler physical accompaniments, and movement across a stage can be driven by and rooted in the text. The exercises employed by Freeman to demonstrate rhetorical devices – ball throwing, tug-of-war, movement in opposition to intent, and so on (Freeman 2011, 5) – risk producing a broad brush performance, in the same way that John Barton and Ian McKellen demonstrated the dangers of playing the quality or mood of a line, rather than an intention (see Barton 1984, 11-12).



Textual comprehension has important ramifications for breathing and speech. Much of Cicely Berry's work is concerned with tackling the deceptively simple problem of delivering multiple lines in a single breath in order to maintain the sense and phrasing of a speech (for example Berry 2001, 81-94). The control of breath and verbal dexterity needed to complete the Player King's 'Rugged Pyrrhus' speech in only three breaths is substantial. Berry's exercises are the product of modern rehearsal processes, to be sure, but exercises that help train actors to breathe and control breath while speaking are as much a prerequisite for academic research performances as for a modern production. This is particularly the case for original practices performance – actors in the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* project reported how their breath was severely restricted while wearing original style costumes, particularly women's corsets (PQMh).

One justification for using original practices in *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* was to avoid the implication that the Queen's Men were our contemporaries. However, with the form and content of their plays being so removed from those of today, there is little risk that adopting modern rehearsal techniques could prompt such an illusion. The key is to adopt and appropriate those methods which are best suited to the pursuit of specific research questions. The SQM project suggests that 'the impossibility of recreating the past does not stop historians making arguments in order to communicate their understanding of the available evidence' (PQMb). On the contrary: performances cannot be arguments. They are the product of argument; they are both the product and the process of exploring the evidence, and they are a way in which to test our assumptions, questions and understanding of past performance.

When it came to devising structures for the preparation and performance of *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* at Stratford, it was clear that an alternative approach was needed. We wished to be sensitive to the original contexts of performance, and the way in which an original company might have approached the play in a particular venue, but we recognised how it was not possible to equip the company of actors with the tools to accomplish an 'original' performance. As our process was driven by research questions aimed at the staging of a specific play in a specific building, and less concerned with problems of repertory, doubling schemes, or portrayal of gender tackled by the SQM project, it was important to select methods that allowed our company to tackle such problems directly.

### 6.5 – *THE TROUBLESOME REIGN AT STRATFORD*

In July 2011, a cast of undergraduate students gathered to perform extracts from *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* in the Guildhall at Stratford-upon-Avon. The rehearsal process and final workshops in Stratford took place within the confines of one part of a PhD project, and consequently was subject to strict financial and time pressures, as well as relying on the availability of a cast of student actors.<sup>33</sup> Both rehearsals and the workshop had to accommodate these pressures, and their scope was restricted to what was feasible. The aim of the project was to explore a small selection of material in a way that could address a focussed set of questions, and to devise methodologies that might inform future research and a fuller production of this or other Queen's Men plays.

The project distinguishes itself from the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men* not only through its preparation processes. For the SQM, 'original practice' was paramount and underpinned the interpretation of the plays in performance, but the performance was the end product of historical research rather than a means in itself. In contrast, my explorations attempted to approach Queen's Men plays from a number of different angles. As an archaeological experiment, it sought to use evidence for the material remains of an extant venue to inform the staging of a specific play, and to use the performance of that play to discuss questions about the material structure of the building and the socio-political contexts of the built environment. As a theatrical process, it too sought to discuss the staging of a play, but within a specific, extant venue. It also focused on how questions raised through our process of rehearsal and performance have ramifications for early performance more generally, both by querying assumptions about early modern staging and performance practices, and by suggesting an alternative methodology for working with early texts. As a result, the workshop held at Stratford constituted something that was the product of one stage of

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<sup>33</sup> Our Stratford-based project cast fourteen undergraduate actors, drawn from a variety of academic departments, who had to work around their studies and other extra-curricular commitments. Financial support from the Department of Archaeology, the Department of Theatre, Film and Television, the York Alumni Annual Fund and the Office of the Vice Chancellor covered expenses incurred through travel to and accommodation in Stratford, and for the filming of the performances. A small proportion of funds was reserved for basic rehearsal props and costumes to be used as placeholders for the more elaborate substitutes expected of a full production.

historical research, but was also the first step of an ongoing discussion to be had between archaeological, historical and theatrical disciplines.

With these aims in mind, it was not necessary to adhere strictly to a full range of 'original practices'. Of the seven characteristics of 'original practice' I identified in the introduction, we complied with the majority: the Stratford performance took place in the Guildhall during the day, the hall was generally lit and the audience visible; we used the smallest cast as defined by McMillin and MacLean's appraisal of the play; staging of scenes was continuous; and there was no fixed set. Of the remainder – an all-male cast, period music and costume – were set aside largely as a matter of practicality. We wished to use the best actors available, which included both male and female undergraduate students. Music is not called for in the play's stage directions and so was largely absent from our performance. Although it was an expansion on the original staging requirements, King John's coronation at the opening of the play did seem to justify the use of music. However, as the music was incidental to the performance overall, pre-recorded music was played as a rehearsal placeholder. Period costume was prohibitively expensive, but a modern alternative was found to act in its stead.

The act of situating a performance in a specific venue imposes a particular set of demands and restrictions on a play's staging, as well as offering possibilities that might not exist elsewhere. Inevitably, where various options for staging and performance arose, a single choice had to be made, but we make no claim that our solutions were the same as those of the Queen's Men.

The initial research questions focussed on the physical practicalities of staging the play in the Guildhall. As previously discussed, the archaeological and historical evidence for the occupation of the dais by the Stratford Aldermen dictated the orientation and division of the performance and audience spaces, although the exact configuration of the venue was a matter of speculation. On the principle that a performance for licensing would be given to the mayor and alderman and not the general public, we allocated the northernmost bay of the hall for audience seating. A cloth partition was erected at the south end of the third bay to represent the early modern partition wall, and the two bays in between were left clear as the stage space (figs 16, 17, 19).

We operated under the principle of basic requirements. While it is possible that platforms were erected in the Guildhall for visiting players – there is evidence of a scaffold being erected several times for such events at Gloucester (Southern 1973, 339)

– there is no hint of a stage being built at Stratford in the fastidiously kept Corporation accounts. In the absence of direct evidence for a raised platform being built, or for a curtain to be hung at the back of the stage, it is safest to remain conservative and discount their presence. It was decided that all staging decisions should be fitted to suit the bare space. We were concerned with a number of key questions about the space itself and how it might accommodate the play, as well as some more generalised questions that might apply to any venue. Firstly, we were concerned whether it would be possible to negotiate the many entrances and exits, sometimes involving large numbers of people, when the hall provided us with only one point of access. Secondly, we were concerned about the prospect of trying to stage scenes with largest number of actors the script appeared to require on stage at once, and whether it would prove difficult to fit the seventeen actors needed on the narrow stage. The size and orientation of the stage, being significantly deeper than it was wide, also posed significant challenges. Thirdly, we needed to decide how actors would appear ‘above’. More generally we wanted to think about how hierarchy might be displayed spatially, how actors moved through the space, and how they interacted amongst themselves and with the audience.

Such questions, while specific to the venue, would apply to any play performed in the Guildhall under similar conditions. Answering them requires looking at a play in detail, during the course of which more questions arise. I chose *The Troublesome Reign* primarily due to the high minimum number of actors needed, following McMillin’s analysis of largest scenes across the A-list of Queen’s Men plays (McMillin and MacLean 1998, 99-102). *The Troublesome Reign* requires at least 17 actors if the text remains uncut, and the size of the cast, along with some of its extravagant staging requirements, is what have led some scholars to insist that the play was designed for, and could only be performed in, a London playhouse or at court (see Peele 2011, 53, 151). On the assumption that it is unlikely that the Queen’s Men would have commissioned a play they could not stage outside the capital – even if that play was originally prepared with a court performance in mind – I wanted to demonstrate that it is possible to stage *The Troublesome Reign* in a guild hall.

Scott McMillin had identified a series of tableaux throughout the play, discussed in my previous chapter, which presented a sequence of repeating images (see McMillin and MacLean 1998, 142-3). These demanded a statement and reinterpretation of spatial hierarchy, from which patterns of movement and spatial arrangement might be

explored. The selection of scenes in the first instance focussed on these moments: King John's first entrance, the confrontation between the English and French armies in front of the citizens on Angers' walls, John's second coronation, the oath-taking by the English rebel nobles on St Edmundsbury altar, and finally John's death bed. Due to time pressures, John's second coronation scene was omitted, but, as explained in the previous chapter, his initial coronation was included at the beginning of the play. Looking at the circumstances of these tableaux, we began to identify the types of scenes that surround them, namely oath-taking, legal processes of pleading cases and passing judgement, and lastly, reconciliation. Exploring these scenes demanded close attention to the detail of the text. To do so with any actors, but particularly inexperienced students, requires a programme of exercises and rehearsal to help structure and guide the process (fig. 20).

#### **6.5.1 – THE REHEARSAL PROCESS – APPROACHING THE TEXT**

Casting was completed in March 2011 and there was a short period of familiarisation with the text for the remainder of the academic term before the break for Easter. The cast reconvened in Stratford for three days of workshops. Rehearsals restarted in May and continued intermittently until the end of June, when it was possible to gather the whole cast for the first time and rehearse intensively over the course of the fortnight running up to the workshops on 9 and 10 July. Initial encounters with the text revealed significant barriers in comprehension. Both vocabulary and grammatical structure proved difficult for the actors to grapple with, and while attempts to render speeches in modern idiom for comprehension proved helpful they did little to guide delivery. The students were daunted by the language and so I sought a way to let them become more accustomed with Elizabethan texts.

Fortunately, there is a relatively standard method used by professionals to help prepare themselves for work on Shakespearean texts. Whether or not it is the 'best preparation' – Oliver Ford Davies thinks it is (2007, 83), Bill Gaskill disagrees (2010, 116) – actors frequently use Shakespeare's sonnets as a useful starting point. While there may be other poets, for example Philip Sidney, whose verse might prove as or better suited for the preparation of non-Shakespearean texts such as *The Troublesome Reign*, we chose to follow an established path that would allow actors to progress to the play text as quickly as possible; with the luxury of more time we undoubtedly would

have explored more widely. The cast worked individually and in small groups with a selection of Shakespeare's sonnets, exploring them as examples of 'mini-dramas' or short arguments, which pose a question, discuss it and offer a resolution (Ford Davies 2007, 83). The plotting-out of moments and the division of component parts between actors was used as a quick and manageable way to explore the structure of argument that might later be encountered in longer speeches. Particular sonnets gave their own challenges, as with sonnet 29, whose single sentence must be navigated while maintaining a central thread. It proved a useful exercise to show the range of problems that could be contained within a short space of text, and how they might be solved.

Bill Gaskill warns against using sonnets for this purpose, declaring that they 'are not dynamic, they do not move' (2010, 116). However, while the sonnets may not be as forward-thrusting as other examples of Shakespearean verse, there are a number of times when the verse in *The Troublesome Reign* is becalmed, and the sonnets offered the actors a means to learn how to cope with almost non-dramatic verse. Philip the Bastard's speech to Limoges after their first skirmish is a case in point (see DVD scene 1.4 and clip 6a). Coming after a heated exchange between King John and King Philip, the Bastard cuts in with an attack aimed at Limoges which quickly becomes lethargic:

Philip indeed hath got the lion's case,  
Which here he holds to Limoges' disgrace.  
Base duke, to fly and leave such spoils behind!  
But this thou knewst of force to make me stay.  
It fared with thee as with the mariner,  
Spying the hugy whale whose monstrous bulk  
Doth bear the waves like mountains 'fore the wind  
That throws out empty vessels, so to stay  
His fury, while the ship doth sail away.  
Philip, 'tis thine. (1. 4. 31-40)

The simile of the mariner, despite only taking five lines, is sufficiently convoluted and structurally difficult that the actor must work hard to avoid losing the energy the scene has previously generated.

Rather than offer the cast an extensive introduction to Elizabethan rhetoric, for which we did not have time, we worked through a series of exercises based on Bill Gaskill's discussion of rhetoric and its application in Hamlet's 'O that this too, too solid flesh

would melt' soliloquy and John of Gaunt's 'Sceptred Isle' speech in Richard II. Rather than focus on the names and functions of particular rhetorical tropes, Gaskill explains rhetoric in terms of dramatic function:

In a speech, when you follow one sentence with another you make a structure. If the structure has an active function we call it rhetoric. Rhetoric was originally the art of persuasion through speaking – words used to influence people. It uses repetition with variation to make its effect. Think of Antony talking to the mob with his 'honourable men', which starts apparently sincerely but ends up in savage irony.

A sentence is a completed thought which is expressed as a unit... When you get to a full stop, something has been said, something has changed, something has moved forward. When speaking, you must not lose the thread of development. That does not mean you cannot pause or interrupt the thought, but your audience must know that you haven't got to the end. The timing within the sentence is personal to the speaker. (Gaskill 2010, 75)

Gaskill, of course, argues anachronistically, particularly when talking about punctuation, which is largely the product of editorial revision. Nevertheless, the principle of following the thread of argument through a speech, and furthering that argument with every phrase or sentence, is fundamental to negotiating longer speeches.

The aim of the exercise was to identify the central thought that drives Hamlet and John of Gaunt's speeches forward, yet without anticipating the climax. Of the two, Hamlet's soliloquy in which he tortuously questions the speed with which Gertrude remarried had the least in common with passages from *The Troublesome Reign*, Shakespeare's verse demonstrating a mature and dynamic verse rarely found in the earlier play. However, the way in which Hamlet struggles to speak his mind is faintly mirrored at times in *The Troublesome Reign*, particularly when Lady Margaret Falconbridge reveals Richard the Lionheart to be Philip's true father (see DVD scene 1.1 and clip 6b). Margaret seems always on the verge of telling Philip, before resolving to say more to 'extenuate the guilt'; the driving thought throughout the speech is only spelt out in the final of twenty-one lines, that 'fair King Richard was thy noble father' (1. 1. 415). John of Gaunt's dying speech offered an extended example of the problem posed by Sonnet

29 of carrying the sense and drive of a long single sentence, as well as the inherent challenges of learning to breathe correctly in order to accomplish it. Gaskill's observations here underlined some of the challenges actors faced in *The Troublesome Reign*:

The rhetorical device is excessive but effective if the actor can sustain it with variety and power. The richness of each individual phrase must not clog the movement of the sentence... That does not mean that Gaunt's despair must be anticipated. The knowledge of where the sentence is going will colour the actor's feeling but it must not become clear until we hit the verb (Gaskill 2010, 83).

Key moments of *The Troublesome Reign* were helped by applying similar exercises. Forker's re-punctuation of *The Troublesome Reign* breaks extended passages into highly debateable fragments of meaning. However, thoughts and arguments contained within a speech often run for longer, and in *The Troublesome Reign* there are plenty of examples where long speeches can only be sustained by a similar level of variety and power to that needed in *Richard II*. One episode in particular ghosts the John of Gaunt scene. In his final speech, the actor playing King John must outline the king's 'catalogue of sin', his failings and betrayals, and ultimately die pronouncing his vision of a reformed, Protestant church. The speech differs from that in *Richard II* in many ways, not least that it can be broken down into several distinct thoughts and moves in a number of directions, compared to the single-mindedness of John of Gaunt's scorn. Nevertheless, John's long list of rhetorical questions also threatens to clog the forward movement of the speech, and must be navigated with a dexterity work on the Shakespeare soliloquy encourages (see DVD scene 2.8 and clip 6c).

It quickly became clear that tackling even moderately lengthy passages of rhetorical verse placed greater demands on actors' breathing and voices than they were accustomed. Cicely Berry's exercises, developed while working with the RSC, offered a quick way of learning how to cope with the need to deliver relatively long stretches of speech in one breath. Her exercise culminated by working through the Player King's 'the rugged Pyrrhus' extract from *Hamlet*, which demonstrated how to deliver a dense, complex passage in the minimum number of breaths (Berry 2001, 81-94). We were able to transfer the exercise to any longer passage of speech in *The Troublesome Reign*, but it particularly helped to reveal how often each point of an argument was contained within one breath. The scene at Bury St Edmonds, where the rebel nobles put forward



their reasons for defecting to the Dauphin Lewis, demonstrated this admirably (see DVD scene 2.3).

These exercises inevitably prioritised speaking. The sources I have been working from, in their concentration on vocal demands, pay little attention to movement in this repertoire. Cicely Berry does offer an exercise where the second half of the Pyrrhus speech is divided between the cast and each image given some kind of action (Berry 2001, 96-107); but this is her method of helping actors to visualise what they are saying, rather than a process to follow in performance.

### **6.5.2 – STAGING MOVEMENT**

For our performance of *The Troublesome Reign*, we needed a set of protocols to guide actors where to stand, where to move, and when to do so if not indicated explicitly in the text. Clearly, all the decisions taken during the rehearsal process were our own, and not those of the original Queen's Men. At this juncture, any discussion of staging necessarily reflects upon our own solutions, which were the product of one particular approach and set of circumstances. Another company might have followed a different approach and have come up with different solutions, or might have found alternative solutions while following a similar approach. Equally, we were unable to replicate the original Queen's Men's practices, and cannot say to what extent our solutions matched those of the early modern company.

In the first instance we tried to develop principles for movement based on hierarchy. Characters were permitted freedom of movement according to their relative rank. John, being King, was allowed the freedom to move where he saw fit, while others were more restricted according to their status. A hierarchy of rank suggested a hierarchy of spatial organisation. For example, Queen Eleanor, closest in rank to John, most frequently drew John aside in conference or assumed authority, admonishing Chatillon (1. 1. 51-61) and steering the marriage pact between Blanche and Lewis (1. 4. 99-102, 163-167) (see DVD scenes 1.1 and 1.4). Senior nobles would situate themselves near the king or the symbol of authority, whether a throne, or an altar. Lesser, unnamed lords, servants and suchlike remained at a distance, often withdrawing upstage or to the extreme sides of the stage space.

However, in key moments this general principle of staging is broken. When pleading their cause, supplicants approach their judge. The Falconbridge brothers approached the king as they argue their inheritance claims and the process is repeated when the English and French kings approach the citizens of Angers. At several points the play introduces or raises the importance of a character who has previously gone unmentioned. In these instances, the arrangement of the stage must change to acknowledge the newcomer. The first instance comes as the Falconbridge brothers debate Philip's legitimacy (see DVD scene 1.1 and clip 6d). Here their mother, Lady Margaret, who entered with her sons but has stood silent for almost fifty lines, interrupts the proceedings to plead for dismissal. To do so she must move past her sons and approach the king; she seeks to raise her status above that of her sons' – partly through an appeal to Eleanor and the 'honour of womanhood' – and does so through movement. Whether her movement is licensed is not clear in the text; Margaret evidently responds to Eleanor's reproach to Robert – 'Ungracious youth, to rip thy mother's shame -/ The womb from whence thou didst thy being take!' (1. 1. 135-6), but Eleanor is more concerned with uncovering Robert's motivations rather than indicating permission for Margaret to speak – 'But gold, I see, doth beat down nature's law' (137). It is possible that another lord, or indeed the king, indicates that Margaret may step forward, or she may break protocol and approach the king illicitly. If the latter, it may explain why she does not succeed in wresting control of the situation. John dismisses her and she must fall back to the sidelines, where she stays until she is left alone with Philip.

An example of a successful move to dominate the proceedings occurs in 1.4, following the citizen's suggestion that Blanche marry Lewis (see DVD scene 1.4 and clip 6e). Previously, Blanche has been compelled mostly to observe the main action, during which the two kings, Constance and Eleanor, Lewis, Limoges and the Bastard all clash. Following excursions between the opposing armies, Blanche's potential power is revealed – the Bastard, who has been promised wealth, lands and titles by Eleanor, sees an opportunity to seal his claim through Blanche. He offers her an appropriate token, but does so outside the focus of the main quarrel between the kings, which seeks to establish whose army won. When the citizen suggests Blanche and Lewis marry, Blanche immediately becomes the focus of the argument and the obstacle to peace that must be overcome. John asks her if she will take the Dauphin for a husband, but she has to be coached by Eleanor while the detail of the marriage is worked out. Blanche does not reveal her opinion in speech, but whether this is through canny diplomacy or lack

of licence is not revealed by the text. This can only be shown through Blanche's movement – where she moves, and how she does so.

The instance of Margaret intervening in the Falconbridge inheritance debate shows the way in which supplication may be accompanied and amplified by movement towards the arbitrator. The next question to ask is whether and how the process of licence and movement alters when the relationships between, and relative status of, plaintiffs are changed, particularly when the argument is between two individuals of a similar rank, as we see at the end of the first scene with Lady Margaret and Philip the Bastard, and later at the end of the fourth scene with Arthur and his mother, Constance (see DVD scenes 1.1 and 1.4, and clips 6b and 6f). These scenes differ from the previous examples in two key ways. Firstly, the initial status and authority of each pair is more balanced; there is no John or citizen figure to act as arbitrator or sit in judgement. Secondly, in both cases the stage has been cleared of any extra characters and the two actors can occupy the whole of the available stage space.

We worked to develop movement protocols that responded to rhetorical pressures asserted in the text and characters' responses to them. It is, of course, possible that an early modern company staged certain scenes entirely statically. In our production, however, we felt that frequently the text prompted something more dynamic. In the confrontation between Margaret and Philip the ebb and flow of control of the argument suggests impulses for movement. Margaret seeks to distance herself physically from her son as she avoids answering his questions, particularly at points when Philip closes in on his mother at moments of high pressure. Philip, whose speeches are more fluid, is permitted more freedom. He moves away from his mother a little when appealing to a higher authority, whether Nature or heaven, and at points of gentler supplication fixes himself in a static location, sometimes by kneeling,

In comparison, the shorter exchange between Arthur and Constance offers an example of how different responses to argument can impact on decisions for movement. Where Philip and Margaret's argument moved back and forward, prompting numerous opportunities for movement and engendering a fluid scene, Constance's railing at circumstance allows Arthur little opportunity to put forward an opposing view. Arthur is left relatively static; or, at least, any movement or reaction to his mother's tirade goes unnoticed and provokes no response from Constance until the end of her speech. Constance, moving from one target to the next in a litany of curses and vituperative derision interspersed with pleas to heaven, has the opportunity to demonstrate her

instability through movement about the stage. Indeed, if a decision is taken against Arthur standing static, whether recoiling from his mother's outburst or going to divert or comfort her, then Constance's movements must anticipate and ignore those of her son.

While in smaller scenes we can take decisions for movement prompted by the flow and impulses of the scene, when larger groupings of people occur on stage we need more than the content of speeches to guide the organisation of bodies. The scenes which more fully populate the stage generally involve two large opposing groups, such as when the English and French armies face each other before the walls of Angers. In such circumstances, it seems reasonable to make a general assumption that there should be a spatial separation between the two.

However, scenes in which a large number of actors is required on stage can pose a problem. As tempers rise between opposing sides at Angers we move swiftly from King Philip, to John, to Constance, Eleanor, Arthur, Lewis, the Bastard, Limoges and back (see DVD scene 1.2 and clip 6g). The supporters of each side add to the number of bodies on stage, and in a space the size of the Guildhall it could become impossible to see the principal characters and follow the argument. The only practical way of negotiating such a problem is to introduce a certain amount of movement. The scene is dynamic, and, used at the right times, movement helps convey the growing heatedness of the interchanges, which is then brought to a pause, both verbally and physically, by King Philip's 'forbear'. The rapidly escalating threats and sabre rattling allow a blurring of the strict divisions, if the quarrelling lords leave the safety of their armies to approach each other more closely. Philip's 'forbear' not only pauses the quarrel but resets the spatial division as the armies regroup on either side to show support for their king.

There are points in early modern drama when space and place are blurred, and these may offer analogous solutions for the staging of episodes in *The Troublesome Reign* that appear difficult to stage in the Guildhall. The key example we explored was the arrival of the citizens of Angers. The stage direction indicates that they '*appear upon the walls*'. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of a physical structure at Stratford, be it a gallery or a raised platform, to serve as a predefined, separate space posed a problem. We kept the citizens on the same physical level as the English and French armies. To do so risked admitting the citizens into hostile space, and yet, as they are not seized by either force, an alternative logic of space must hold true. An explanation might be that

the manner in which the citizens enter the stage, under the context of negotiation, invests in the stage space which they occupy a privileged status, as if, indeed, they still occupied their city walls. In this case, it might be understood that they may not be harmed, and that the terms of parley guarantees safe passage. We can't say what might have happened in the sixteenth century, but certainly the decision to bring the citizens forward proved effective in our production.

### **6.5.3 – PERFORMANCE SHAPED BY BUILDING**

Our staging decisions were often prompted by observations about how the building could shape performance. The material structure of the building, its posts, studs and trusses, offered actors a series of reference points to help them move around the space. They also helped frame certain scenes and moments. The stage space occupied two bays of the Guildhall, and was divided in the middle by a Queen post truss. Normally, Queen post trusses consist of vertical timbers placed symmetrically on the tie-beam of a roof to support the purlins. However, at Stratford the timbers form a 'Y' shape, the effect of which was to draw the eye down to an obvious focal point in the centre of the stage. This framing of space helped emphasise a particularly powerful position to occupy, and it was around this position that it felt natural to stage the series of tableaux that run through the play, particularly John's coronation and the altar at St Edmundsbury (see DVD clips 5a and 5c). The exchange in front of Angers, and the arrival of the citizens on the walls, also formed a similar tableau (see DVD clip 6g), and moving the citizens forward from the rear of the stage had the added benefit of positioning them directly under the Queen post; the building could also give an indication of control and importance within a scene.

The building shaped performance in more immediate ways. The single entrance and corridor running back to the library turned tiring room caused some difficulties but also revealed certain benefits. Our initial concerns were assuaged when we found it was possible to get large numbers on and off without too much difficulty. While a second entrance would undoubtedly have allowed us to make some scene changes swifter, there was no moment where the action was especially hindered by its lack. Perhaps the most unhelpfully lengthy scene changes came as the English and French armies exited, allowing Philip the Bastard and Limoges to return, duel and exit again, and then re-enter (see DVD scene 1.3). We do not know what the Queen's Men might

have done had there been two available exits. If only one doorway could represent the exit to the battlefield then the two armies would still not have been able to exit or enter any quicker. However, there is no reason to suggest that the Queen's Men would not have had each army exit by a different door if such an opportunity arose.

Frequently, however, the largest movements were separated by short coda scenes between two actors. The change between the first and second scene of the play, as the English go to prepare their voyage to France and the French antagonists arrive to discuss Arthur's claim, would demand a high level of traffic across the stage and could cause a bottleneck. Instead, once the majority of the English lords have left, Philip the Bastard remains behind with Margaret, easing the flow of actors off and onto stage (see DVD scene 1.1 and clip 6b). A similar exchange between Arthur and his mother Constance at the end of the fourth scene also permits the English and French armies to exit before they re-enter at the top of scene five (see DVD scene 1.4 and clip 6f). Later scenes follow a similar pattern, and exits involving greater numbers of actors recur throughout the play.

Moreover, in some instances the long corridor helped make sense of particular entrances, although this may have been a product more of happenstance than design. The notable example comes as the rebel English lords gather at Bury St. Edmunds (see DVD scene 2.3 and clip 6h). Essex and Pembroke have already assembled and await the remainder:

*Essex:* Now wanteth but the rest to end this work.

In pilgrim's habit come our holy troop

A furlong hence with swift unwonted pace.

Maybe they are the persons you expect.

*Pembroke:* With swift unwonted gait! See what a thing is zeal,

That spurs them on with fervence to this shrine.

Now joy come to them for their true intent,

And in good time here come the war-men all,

That sweat in body by the mind's disease.

*Enter [the] Bastard etc.*

Hap and heart's ease, brave lordings, be your lot. (2. 3. 18-27)

Essex either sees or reports the approach of Philip the Bastard and other troops, and while Pembroke's reply might indicate that he sees the group immediately, he has

certainly seen or heard them by the time he says: 'And in good time here come the war-men all'. Pembroke's two lines from when he recognises their imminent arrival gave ample cover for the Bastard and his entourage to enter along the corridor.

The single entrance also meant our actors did not have to worry about choosing the right entrance or exit. This kept stage traffic relatively simple, which has benefits when working in an unfamiliar space. The boys from King Edward's School, who joined us for only a few hours of rehearsal prior to the first performance, in which we concentrated mostly on blocking, found this feature particularly helpful. As they were unfamiliar with the play and were relying on the more experienced actors to direct their movements, having a single means of egress simplified matters significantly. This is not an argument for the single entrance model being preferred by the Queen's Men, or that they would have had more difficulty staging a play in a venue with more doorways. Nevertheless, being restricted to a single doorway would have demanded appropriate alterations to staging decisions if the company more regularly performed in a differently configured venue. While describing in detail how a play might have transferred from one venue to the next would require a closer evaluation and comparison of another space, we might still suppose that actors could map their performances onto the spatial reference points offered by the timbers and windows of halls like the Stratford Guildhall offered.

#### **6.5.4 – FURTHER REFLECTIONS**

Our workshops at Stratford explored the scenes from *The Troublesome Reign* with one particular set of circumstances in mind, that of a performance for licensing by the High Bailiff. Nevertheless, we should not think that our interpretation or our staging solutions necessarily represented those of the Queen's Men, nor should we disregard the possibility for multiple alternatives, some of which in a longer project could have been explored more fully. Where we choose to designate only a small area of the hall for seating, imagining a small audience consisting of only the High Bailiff and aldermen, we could have instead imagined a larger public audience, filling the majority of two bays and leaving the actors a stage area half the size they occupied in our workshop. In such a scenario the spatial pressures might be felt more keenly. A moderately increased early modern audience might have included the boys of the grammar school, who could have sat near or with the aldermen, or on the benches that evidence for peg

holes show extended some distance along the east wall of the hall. If audience members sat or stood along one or more sides of the hall, much as gallants sat on stools in the indoor theatres twenty years later, we could speculate how staging and performance might change accordingly.

While our staging decisions were provoked by the text, they very much reflect a modern interpretation. While we aimed to produce the best solutions we could in the circumstances of the project, we were not attempting to reproduce a simulacrum of an early modern performance. The project was concerned with the staging of key moments and the use of space within them. As such the numerous opportunities and challenges that might have arisen if we had selected different scenes or attempting the whole play, or by choosing to take an original practice approach, were less of a concern than in a project with greater time and resources.

Our production permitted relatively free and fluid movement around the stage, which has less in common with the more formal style that the strict observance of early modern hierarchy and polite protocol might have required. Had we done so, certain characters, particularly King John, might have become more isolated as those of lesser rank were prevented from either appearing too familiar or drawing too near. Our John was rather more approachable, and greetings and exchanges between the king and his nobles, the French ambassador and the Abbot, for example, were relatively relaxed and informal. Early modern decorum would probably have demanded a much more formal exchange. While we included a more elaborate procession and coronation at the opening of the play, there were other opportunities for further display that could have been explored, such as the meeting of the two kings at Angers, and heralds' summons to the citizens. To what extent the Queen's Men might have responded to these potential cues we can only speculate.

As the focus of the project was on staging and the use of space, other facets of what would be expected in a full production necessarily took a back seat. We did not try to recreate the original lighting conditions. The performances took place under natural light, certainly, but the large glazed windows in the Guildhall, which are relatively recent installations, were not reduced to the size we might have expected in the late sixteenth century, which would have reduced the ambient light considerably. Although performances in the Guildhall were likely held during the day, there may nevertheless have been a need for candles to raise light levels. Equally there is nothing to suggest evening performances could not have taken place, especially if there were a way of



lighting the hall sufficiently. There are now, of course, practical restrictions over introducing naked flames into an ancient timber building, so the possibility of carrying out such an experiment is somewhat restricted.

The choice to dress our actors in black trousers or skirts and coloured t-shirts was primarily due to the prohibitive cost of commissioning period costumes, but also reflected the extent of the research still needed to fully inform the use of costumes by touring companies. While the cast might have been able to make generalised observations about the effect of period costumes on posture and movement, much as the actors in the *Shakespeare and Queen's Men* project had done, such observations are not overly helpful without a deeper understanding of the protocols and embodiment of etiquette and identity that accompanied early modern clothing and social interaction. While some research into the materials and designs used for Elizabethan clothes has been conducted at the Globe (see Tiramani 2008), finding a way of conveying the nuance of social identity and rank displayed in Elizabethan dress to a modern company and a modern audience is challenging. In this our concession to modernity perhaps benefitted our audience's comprehension, even if it was born out of external pressures. The idea that an Elizabethan audience would have read social status and affiliation in costumes prompted the decision to distinguish different groups through a range of coloured t-shirts – the English in green, the French in blue, priests in purple, monks in brown, and the citizens in white. Higher rank was denoted by darker shades amongst the English and French. While this was a purely modern solution, it helped the audience quickly identify and track allegiances, and was a particularly useful way to distinguish between multiple roles played by one actor across the course of the workshop.

Of course costumes can have an impact on the use of space in performance. Original design dresses could prove a particularly interesting challenge, not just because of the greater space the actor wearing one occupies, but also the way in which they alter movement. However, most observations will inevitably describe how the motions of a modern actor are affected by this, rather than revealing much information about movement on the Elizabethan stage. Perhaps here we should look for evidence further afield. Early modern dancing and orchesography, for which some manuals survive, might offer a useful means to learn more about posture and physicality, and to gain a better understanding of patterns and strategies for movement that could transfer to stage space (see Arbeau 1967; Howard 1998).

Physicality and movement are also bound up with gesture, and together form an essential component for rhetorical speech. More, perhaps, could be made of contemporary, often legal, handbooks detailing rhetorical and gestural devices, such as the illustrations given in John Bulwer's *Chirologia* and *Chrionomia*, a 1644 account of rhetorical delivery (see Joseph 1951; Bevington 1984, 67-98). While there is a danger of assuming that the illustrations, which show the numerous hand and arm gestures used to make specific rhetorical points, current in 1644, are an accurate representation of rhetorical delivery in the 1580s and 90s, they are closer to the fact than we can hope to be five hundred years later.

However, while all of these are valid and pertinent avenues of investigation, to explore them fully is the prerogative of a later project. For our workshops, the preliminary challenge of providing the actors with the basic tools for tackling difficult early texts, and the initial attempt to stage a small number of scenes in an unexplored space, were sufficient hurdles. It is inevitable that more questions have been asked than we were able to answer, but it is from asking them that new opportunities and directions for future research may be generated.

## 7 – CONCLUSION

Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean once argued that the Queen's Men would have found provincial indoor spaces 'versatile and accommodating for their accustomed needs', but that in fitting their plays to the venues, 'players also had to be remarkably quick-witted and resourceful in mounting their performances' (1998, 83). Until now, however, no-one had attempted to see how a complex play might be staged in provincial spaces based on the full range of available historical and related evidence.

Discussion of performance has continued to have a metropolitan focus, and studying the move from London to the provinces has been thought to have diminishing returns. If provincial performance has been discussed at all it has been in terms of the playing practices that arose in the capital's playhouses, despite the conditions of each being distinct. However, this thesis has shown that there is ample evidence to support the investigation of provincial drama in its own right, informed by the venues and places visited by touring companies.

Our workshops at Stratford-upon-Avon were designed to address specific questions about the staging of key scenes of *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, and were particularly concerned with the use of space in those scenes. By doing so we challenged the position taken by many that the demands of the play could only be met in the London playhouses, and showed that all of the scenes we explored could have been staged in a venue whose shape and size initially appeared unsuited to performance.

My background in the archaeology of historical buildings has allowed me to use the latest archaeological and historical understanding of venues like the Stratford-upon-Avon Guildhall, and the discussion concerning its specific social and political contexts, to enhance the investigation of theatre historical and performance questions. The impact of having done so is immediately clear when we consider how the archaeological evidence for a partition wall in the Stratford Guildhall has significantly altered our understanding of what space was available for use for performance by visiting players. Moreover, the acknowledgement of the role Stratford's aldermen played as the overseers of their town's political and jurisdictional independence allows us to recognise that a licensing performance was in part a means to display their authority over the players they hosted. The implications for performance are clear: unlike the university student performances, during a command performance in a civic

hall touring players would not have been permitted to use the dais platform on which the mayor and aldermen sat.

The choice of Stratford as the case study for this project was aided by a critical mass of historical and archaeological investigation that has inevitably accrued, at least in part, because of interest in the birthplace of William Shakespeare. At another site significantly more historical and archaeological groundwork would have to be completed before a similar project could take place. Nevertheless, this thesis has suggested that the benefits of undertaking such research are substantial. There are several extant venues, once visited by the Queen's Men and their contemporaries, for which an approach that draws together the methodologies used here would be appropriate, including Hardwick Hall and St Mary's, Coventry, and comparison of such sites and performances in them with Stratford would offer a fruitful avenue for future research.

In our exploration of *The Troublesome Reign* we took the first steps towards investigating performance in provincial venues. The practical difficulties in doing so largely lay with the problem of equipping the actors with the tools needed to tackle the challenges of the early modern repertoire. We should remain sceptical as to whether the Bootcamp model proposed by the *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men*, or other approaches followed in the name of 'original practice', offer the best method by which to stage these plays. In their current forms they do not provide modern actors adequate support, and were insufficient for our needs. To help the actors work with *The Troublesome Reign* we chose to draw on the work of modern practitioners such as Barton and Gaskil, particularly as they seemed to offer the most direct way of meeting textual demands. However, in different circumstances we might adopt alternative or additional approaches, and a longer project might explore a much wider range of texts and authors closer to the style of the play.

This thesis has shown that you cannot understand how a touring company operated, or how it staged its plays, without first understanding the venues and spaces in which it performed. It is only by subjecting those venues visited by companies to historical and archaeological scrutiny that the contexts of performance can be informed, and it is through the staging of plays in these venues that we can best explore the challenges both space and text pose.

It has been almost fifteen years since McMillin and MacLean published their seminal work on the Queen's Men, but in many ways study of touring theatre companies and their plays is still a nascent subject. Nevertheless, as this project has shown, the potential for examining companies, plays and the spaces in which they performed is great, and will be able to support fruitful further research.

**FIGURES**

All photographs are the author's.

Figure 1 – Plan of Globe foundation/ wall remains (all phases) (Bowsher and Miller 2009, 93)

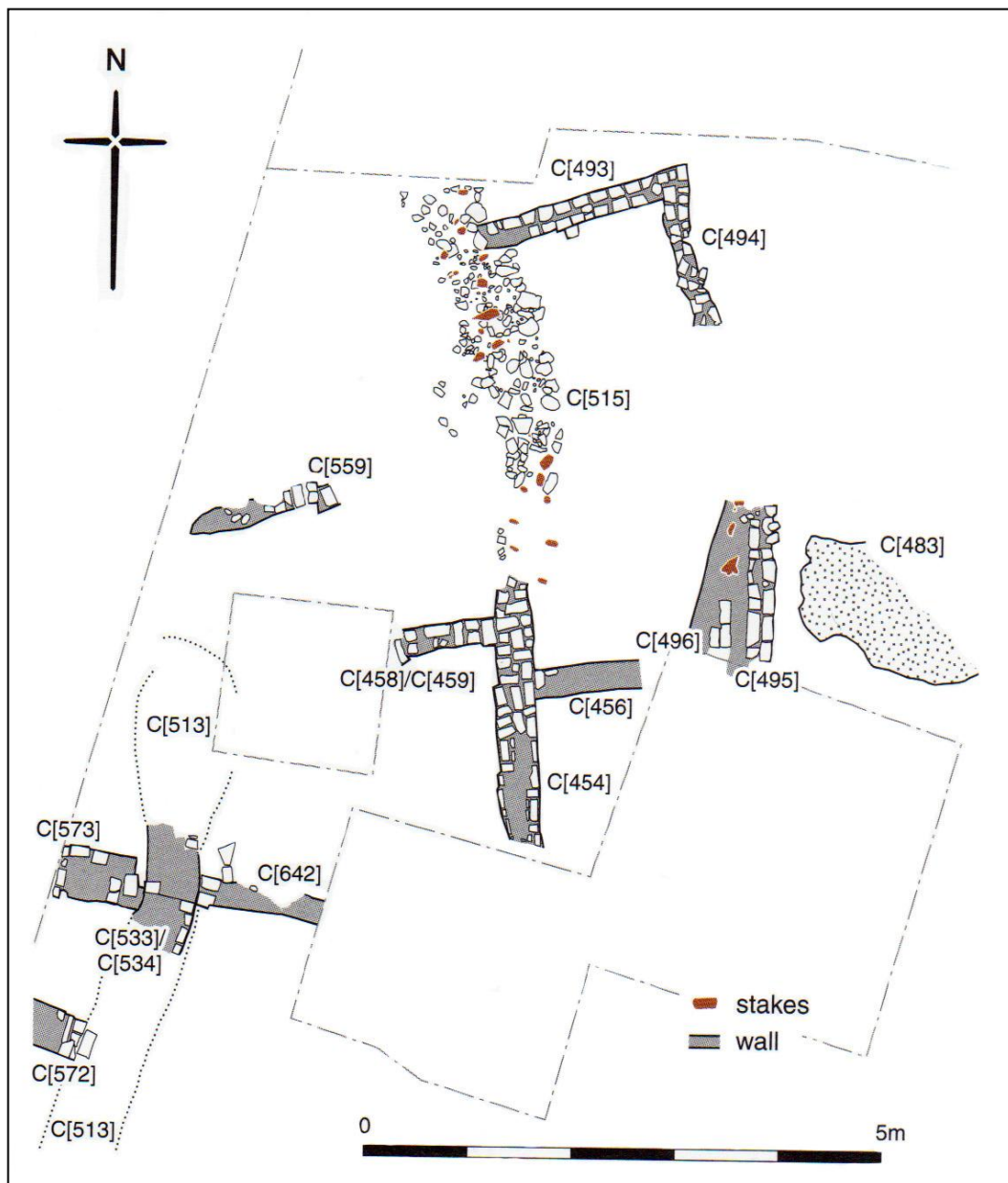




Figure 3 – The Guildhall, west elevation



Figure 4 – The Guild Chapel





Figure 5 – The Pedagogue’s House



Figure 6 – The Almshouses



Figure 7 – The Guildhall, east elevation



Figure 8 – Five sections of plastered infill, decorated with pre-dissolution religious iconography





Figure 9 – The upper hall



Figure 10 – The blocked door to the 'prevey'



Figure 11 – Trusses showing grooves for infill panels.



Figure 12 – The South Range



Figure 13 – First floor plan of the Guild complex at the start of the sixteenth century  
(Clark et al. 2006, 19)

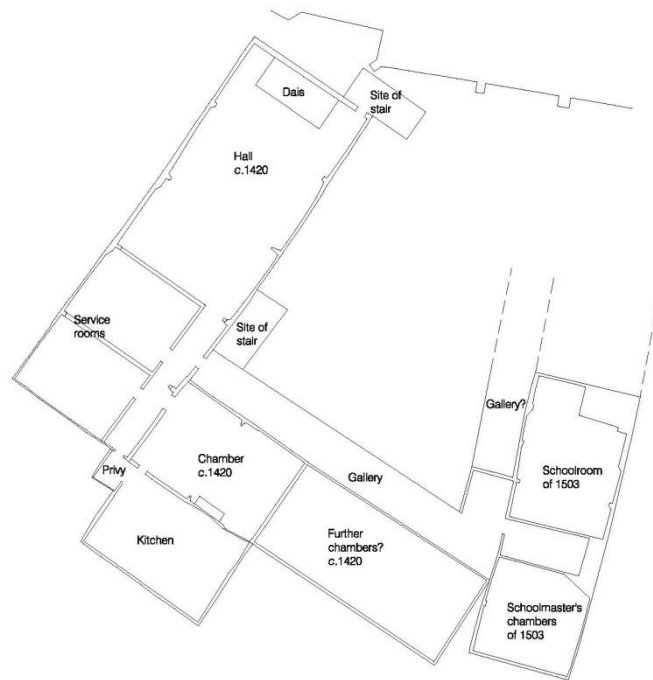


Figure 14 – First floor plan of the Guild complex at the end of the sixteenth century  
(Clark et al. 2006, 33)

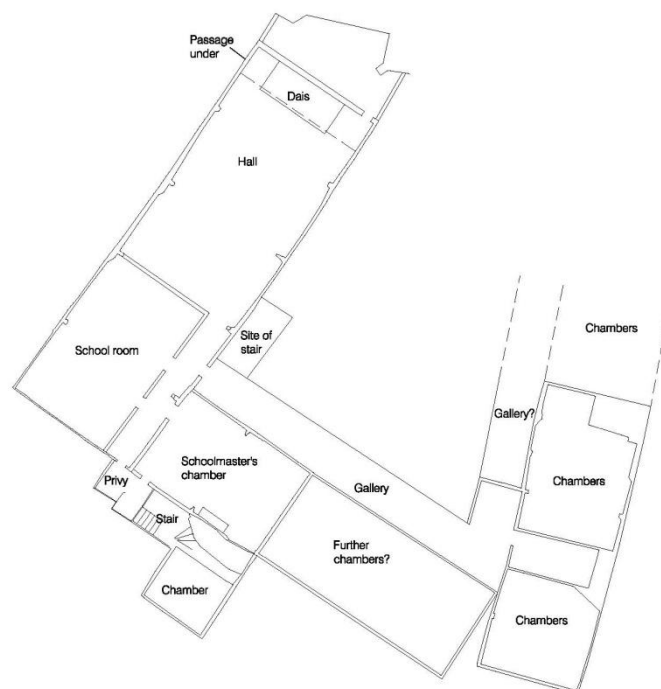




Figure 15 – Arthur on the walls (Hodges 1999, 60)

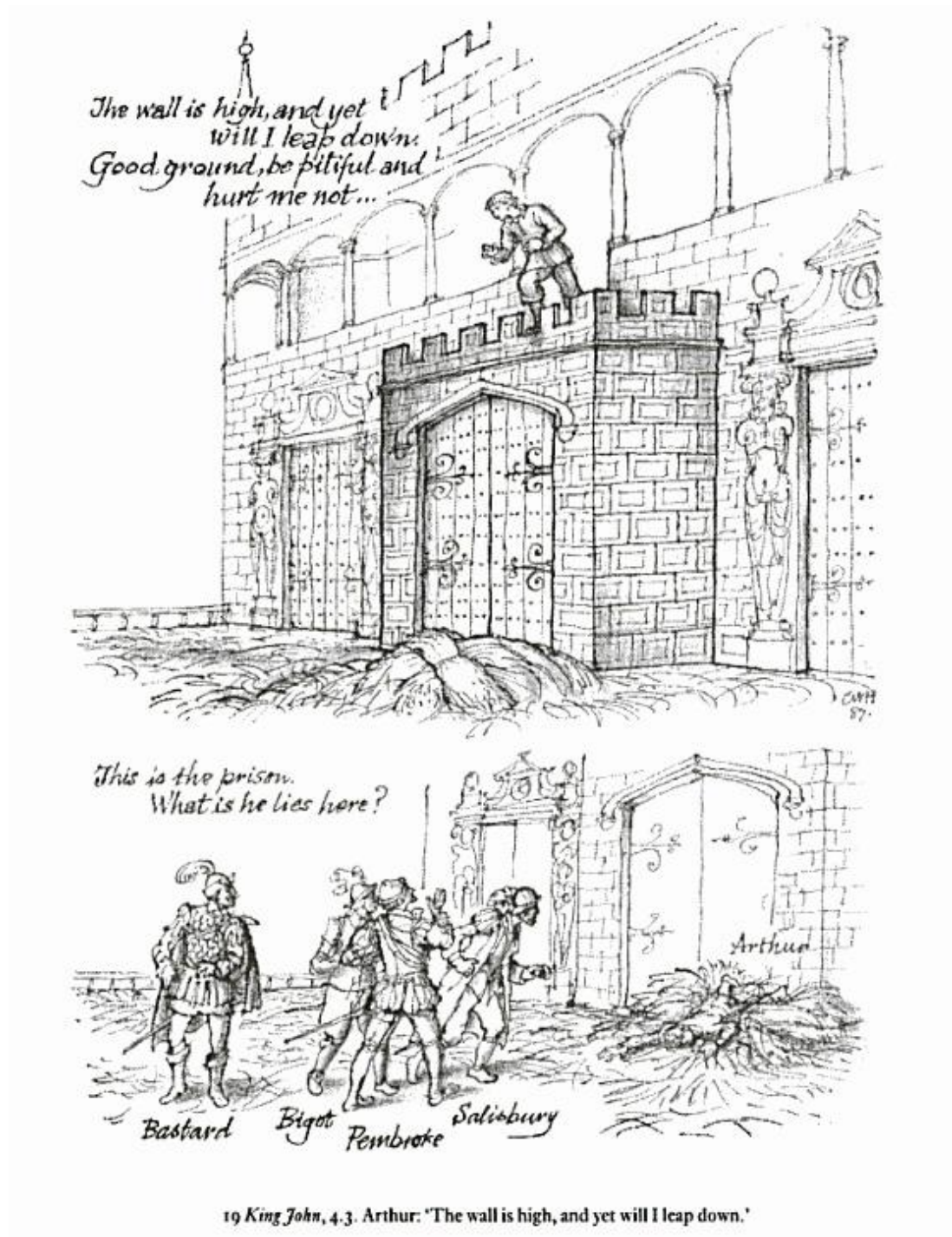


Figure 16 – The high end of the Guildhall. The chair is an eighteenth-century schoolmaster's chair, although it is similar to one shown in a sixteenth-century illustration (see Green 2012)



Figure 17 – Performance at Stratford – John's coronation





Figure 18 – The citizens of Angers



Figure 19 – Oath-taking at St Edmundsbury





Figure 20 – Early rehearsals in Stratford



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