

**Players and Performances
in Early Modern
Gloucester,
Tewkesbury
and
Bristol**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the responses in the early modern period of civic and church authorities to local and visiting groups of players in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol. It is also an examination of the venues in which these groups performed. Reactions to these groups varied, and this study explores how these, both positive and negative, were affected by economic, legal and cultural factors. The thesis proceeds chronologically, and is thus divided into twenty-year intervals in order to draw the most effective comparisons between the three urban centres over a number of decades. The first period under examination, the 1560s, records the early reaction of the three settlements to the phenomenon of the Elizabethan travelling company. The relationship between the regional authorities and the patrons comes to the fore in the second period, the 1580s, as the dominance of the ambitious Earl of Leicester grew in the region. Legislation decreeing the withdrawal of mayoral control over itinerant troupes at the close of the sixteenth century, the third period, released civic officials from previous obligations and this influenced the level and character of their hospitality towards the 'noble' companies. Although evidence is scarce, the records of Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol contain clues to an attitude towards these entertainers during the reign of James I, the final period under scrutiny. The study is based on the extant economic records for the region, as these contain much fruitful information. This thesis consciously places itself in dialogue with the internationally acclaimed REED Project, and draws on the information collated by the editors of the volumes for Bristol and Gloucestershire. A parallel examination of the entries into municipal records of the three towns, and the areas around them, in conjunction with genealogical and topographical evidence, has allowed for an interpretation of the data in a wide regional context, revealing that although each town tolerated players in their municipal spaces, with the officials personally entertaining the companies on some occasions, the reception of the companies varied significantly from town to town and across the historic period.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. This thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed

Date.....

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BRL</i>	Bristol Reference Library Archives
<i>BRO</i>	Bristol Record Office
<i>GBR</i>	Gloucestershire Borough Records
<i>GRO</i>	Gloucestershire Records Office
<i>REED</i>	<i>Records of Early English Drama</i> series, published by the University of Toronto
<i>REED Bath</i>	<i>REED: Somerset, including Bath, 2 Volumes, I</i> , ed. by Robert Alexander with James Stokes (1996)
<i>REED Bristol</i>	<i>REED: Bristol</i> , ed. by Mark C. Pilkington (1997)
<i>REED Coventry</i>	<i>REED: Coventry</i> , ed. by William Ingram (1981)
<i>REED Devon</i>	<i>REED: Devon</i> , ed. by John Wasson (1986)
<i>REED Dorset/Cornwall</i>	<i>REED: Dorset/Cornwall</i> , ed. by Rosalind Conklin Hays and C. E. McGee, Sally L. Joyce and Evelyn S. Newlyn (1999)
<i>REED Glos.</i>	<i>REED: Cumberland, Westmorland and Gloucestershire</i> , ed. by Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield (1986)
<i>REED Norwich</i>	<i>REED: Norwich</i> , ed. by David Galloway (1984)
<i>REED Shropshire</i>	<i>REED: Shropshire, 2 Volumes</i> , ed. by J. Alan B. Somerset (1994)
<i>REED Worcs.</i>	<i>REED: Herefordshire and Worcestershire</i> ed. by David Klausner (1990)
<i>TBR</i>	Tewkesbury Borough Records

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University of Gloucestershire, February 2008

INTRODUCTION

“He that plays the king shall be welcome”:¹

Players and Performances in Early Modern Gloucester, Bristol and Tewkesbury

This study is an enquiry into the reaction to stage plays by the civic and church authorities in early modern Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol and an examination of the various municipal and communal venues in which local and travelling players performed. In order to achieve this, I shall reappraise the available economic, legal, genealogical and topographical evidence and previous scholarship for allusions to positive or negative responses to the players, and ask whether these reactions were affected by political, cultural or financial factors. The majority of the extant evidence relates to municipal payments to patronised travelling players which are contained within the receipts of the towns’ treasurers. Although there is little data to gauge personal responses to the visiting actors in the region by mayors and churchwardens it is likely that the existence of such payments represent a town’s positive reaction to these troupes. I shall compare the rewards to entertainers in Bristol, Gloucester and where possible, Tewkesbury to ascertain whether the towns maintained their own protocols in remunerating entertainers or if these payments were discretionary. I shall enquire whether the payments the itinerant companies were influenced by official regulations, the patron whom the players represented, economic factors, or by the personal preference of the city officials who rewarded the actors.

After Elizabeth’s succession in 1558, there was a rise in instances of dramatic activity in Gloucester and Tewkesbury and although Bristol had been welcoming players for at almost thirty years prior to the accession of the Queen, there was a marked increase in the number of companies being rewarded by the city. This was a

¹ *Hamlet*, II:ii, l. 309.

consequence of a statute issued in 1559 which dictated that any strolling players must be licensed by civic officials before a performance could take place in that town, and therefore any payments to such individuals were noted in the treasury accounts. The first identifiable itinerary between Bristol and Gloucester can also be traced to 1560 which demonstrates an early link between the two merchant centres. This ‘southwestern loop’, out of and back into London, was popular with most troupes in Elizabethan England.²

I shall examine two important pieces of evidence relating to Gloucester, an eye-witness account of an early morality play by a professional company at the Booth Hall and a council decree of 1580 regarding players, as a case study of provincial playing to a civic audience in the mid-Elizabethan period. The rewarding of extra expenses to the players, at local taverns and the houses of civic dignitaries, suggests that the Gloucester Corporation favoured playing during Elizabeth’s reign, although the motives for supporting municipal drama were political rather than cultural. A further example from Tewkesbury, an entertainment receipt contained in the accounts of 1584, demonstrates that significant expenses were incurred by a smaller market town when hosting what I suppose was a professional travelling company. I also conjecture that Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, may have used the presence of his players in Gloucestershire and capitalised upon the ‘patronage mania’ of the latter half of the sixteenth century to influence two elections in this decade, in 1580 and 1584, and I shall examine each towns’ response to Leicester’s interference and influence during the Elizabethan period.³

² Peter Greenfield, ‘Drama Outside London After 1540’, in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre* ed. by Jane Milling and Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 178-99 (p. 187).

³ Thomas Baldwin, *The Organisation and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton University Press, 1927; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 11.

Another specific instance of performance in Tewkesbury was a three-day event at Whitsun in 1600 organised by the churchwardens to raise funds for replacing a broken battlement on the Abbey. It has been assumed by historians, such as Peter Greenfield and Frederick S. Boas that these plays must have been performed by local amateurs.⁴ However, I have revisited the detailed balance sheet for this festival and have concluded that the actors, in all likelihood, were professional actors following the southwestern itinerary adopted in the 1560s. No profit was made from the event, which suggests that the plays were purely for entertainment; therefore I presume that the expenses were for a professional troupe, commissioned by the parish for the purpose of community recreation.

Bristol had been welcoming civic-sponsored players into the city since the early 1530s, and the frequency of the practice grew during the sixteenth century. The usual venue for these productions was the Guildhall on Broad Street, although this stage was superseded by private playhouses in the city. The last definite occurrence of playing in Bristol Guildhall took place in 1597, when I believe that visiting strollers probably chose to play in Nicholas Woolfe's Wine Street playhouse. Woolfe was a wealthy cutler and publican, who converted his property in Wine Street, east of Broad Street at the High Cross, into a theatre. A lease for this project, dated 1598, declared that Woolfe had a four-year period in which to convert the property. It is possible, I shall argue, that these renovations were updating an already functioning playing space, as Woolfe had secured the tenancy on the property, *No. X ch/7* in 1581. By 1614, the city could also boast another custom-built playhouse in Redcliffe Hill. The creation of a royally-

⁴ Peter H. Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama in Gloucestershire', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1981), p. 87; Frederick S. Boas, 'Tuesday's Productions at Tewkesbury: An Old Practice', *The Observer*, Sunday 15 January 1933, in Theodore Hannam-Clark's collection of notes and extracts relating to Gloucestershire drama. This collection of loose leaves, press cuttings and book reviews are stored in the Gloucestershire Archives, *GRO D3398/2/2/24*.

endorsed company of boy players in 1615 also suggests that Bristol was a pioneering city in independent provincial drama.

It has been argued, most recently by Siobhan Keenan in *Travelling Players in Shakespeare's England*, that a lack of gifts and rewards in Stuart and Caroline England signified a falling off of visits by itinerant acting troupes.⁵ I will examine this theory in the south west region, to determine whether this phenomenon occurred in Bristol and Gloucestershire or whether alternative venues, and their unrecorded receipts, may have dominated their municipal rivals and gained all of the business from perambulatory troupes. It may also be competition, from Woolfe's playhouse in Wine Street and the theatre purpose-built by Robert Barker in Redcliffe Hill south of the Avon, which has contributed to the theory of the 'decline' of provincial travelling players in Jacobean England.

EVIDENCE

It is important to acknowledge the earlier scholarship of the *Records of Early English Drama* (hereafter referred to as REED) project, which has collated every extant piece of information relating to drama in England outside London from the earliest times to 1642.⁶ The project represents 'the most important archival work [on travelling players] since the days of Chambers and Murray', whose interest in purely provincial theatre was limited.⁷ The REED initiative was borne out of the frustration of international

⁵ Siobhan Keenan, *Travelling Players in Shakespeare's England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 165.

⁶ John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies, II: Provincial Companies 1558-1642* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1910).

⁷ Paul Whitfield White, 'Playing Companies and the Drama of the 1580s: A New Direction for Elizabethan Theatre History?', *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol 28, (2000) 265-84 (p. 268). Alan Somerset has commented that Murray's tabular format in the two volumes of *English Dramatic Companies, 1558-1642* depicts a 'decline in interest', and Chambers 'had no interest in any company' unless it had a

records editors who were anxious to preserve the information before the documents ‘suffered further deterioration, dispersal and misconstruction’.⁸ The intention of the editors was to ‘locate, transcribe and publish systematically all dramatic activity [...] before 1642’ as a ‘primary research tool for the writings of histories of early theatre’, such as this thesis.⁹ Thus far there are twenty three collections published in twenty-five volumes, encompassing eighty percent of all unpublished field research.¹⁰ I have used comparative data from nine of the volumes for this study.¹¹ The project journal, *REED Newsletter*, was published annually from the REED’s inception in 1976 to 1997 detailing research in progress and articles of interest, bibliographies and other relevant data. Ian Lancashire contributed to the first issue in 1976 with the ‘REED Research Guide’ which classified the various genres and subgenres of ‘drama’. He identified three differing types of performance, ‘Dramatic Events’, ‘Ceremonial’ and ‘Folk’ drama. The subgenres of ‘Dramatic Events’ are defined as:

Mystery Cycles, the Creed, Pater Noster and saint’s plays, miracles, moralities and liturgical plays, mummings, interludes, St. George’s plays, mimed dialogues and the repertory of professional troupes or companies.¹²

It is with the performances of these ‘professional troupes’ that I am principally interested as these plays have a financial value attached to them in the records and can therefore be compared with similar instances in other towns and cities. Although it has been assumed that the plays performed in Tewkesbury were religious in nature, I am not wholly convinced, and therefore have chosen to analyse them as ‘Dramatic Events’ using Lancashire’s terminology, rather than place them in his ‘Ceremonial’ category

London connection, ‘The Visits of Shakespeare’s Company of Actors to the Provincial Cities and Towns of England Illustrated by Evidence from the REED Patrons and Performances Website’, paper delivered at the International Shakespeare Conference at the Shakespeare Institute, 9 August 2006, p. 3.

⁸ *REEDN*, 1976:1, p. 1.

⁹ *REEDN*, 1976:1, p. 2.

¹⁰ ‘REED Update Fall 2007’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society Newsletter*, <<http://burgundy.byu.edu/brds/news/archives/000132.php>> [accessed 25 January 2008].

¹¹ In addition to Gloucestershire and Bristol, I have also cited data from the REED volumes on Coventry, Devon/Cornwall, Dorset, Norwich, Shropshire, Somerset and Worcestershire.

¹² Ian Lancashire, ‘REED Research Guide’, *REEDN*, 1976:1, 10-23 (p. 10).

with guild pageants, civic watches, household spectacles or church drama. I shall examine the data for the plays in Tewkesbury based purely upon the raw commercial data from the churchwardens' accounts, rather than defining these productions generically as 'parish plays'. There are numerous instances of pageant drama and civic watches cited in the REED volumes for Bristol and Gloucester, but as these were commissioned by the civic authorities it is not in my interest to examine them here, as I am investigating the responses to stage plays. I am aware that the Tewkesbury plays, for 1584 and 1600 at least, were also commissioned by the town and church and therefore the reception could be easy to gauge, but as I suspect that some of these may have been performed by professional troupes I am analysing these performances alongside those of the noblemen's players.

The problem of a paucity of evidence for early modern drama has been acknowledged by every scholar in the field, and the REED team is no exception. Mary A. Blackstone termed the extant information a 'dramatic jigsaw puzzle' in 1981.¹³ Itinerant performances were ephemeral by nature and it is only thanks to rigorous Elizabethan record-keeping that we are even aware of the mayor's plays performed by strolling companies in the sixteenth century. It appears from Blackstone's analysis of the data available nationally that 'the richest' sources of information in relation to playing and patrons can be found in civic accounts, although she does acknowledge the usefulness of minute books, proceedings, court books and depositions. On a national level, 'ecclesiastical records are generally not fruitful sources', which makes the references in the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts all the more exceptional.¹⁴ The concern that the evidence became 'distinctly patchy' in Stuart England was examined

¹³ Mary A. Blackstone, 'Notes towards a patron's calendar', *REEDN*, 1981:1, 1-8 (p. 1).

¹⁴ Blackstone, 'Patron's Calendar', p. 2.

in the context of the REED project by Andrew Gurr in 1994.¹⁵ The death of Elizabeth altered the record-keeping of the country as with her passing all previous statutes had expired, which included the 1559 act compelling the mayor to sanction performances by patronised players. As civic records contribute most of our knowledge about the strolling companies, amendments to the way in which these accounts were kept were certain to affect our understanding of Stuart theatre. Although the evidence for Gloucester is lost, one can immediately see a change in the Mayor's Audits of Stuart Bristol, notably as the accounting period alters; the Bristol chamberlains noted all expenses on a weekly basis from the earliest record in 1532. However, in 1599-1600 when, as Mark Pilkington comments, 'for reasons which could be explained only by the city chamberlain, the system of accounting by weeks breaks down in this year's second quarter'. The following year, 'each quarter is divided into two parts'.¹⁶ Unluckily, the records are lost from 1601-1603.

James I also removed the privilege of endorsing the itinerant troupes from the individual mayors and centralised all decisions on licensing to the Master of the Revels.¹⁷ It was easier, states Gurr, for the Revels' Office to control the players than it was to trust the local authorities with the management of strolling companies. He regrets this change but acknowledges that it was a general trend to the detriment of theatre history: 'as the government system for the control of the professional companies changed, so do the records', this explains why 'the richest haul of information generally comes in the Elizabethan period'.¹⁸ It is regrettable that Stuart bureaucracy leaves one with even less of an idea of how the local authorities reacted to players in Jacobean

¹⁵ Andrew Gurr, 'The loss of records for travelling companies in Stuart times', *REEDN*, 19: 2 (1994), 2-18 (p. 2).

¹⁶ *REED Bristol*, endnote to pp. 154-56, p. 291.

¹⁷ Gurr, 'Loss of records', p. 4.

¹⁸ Gurr, 'Loss of records', p. 5.

England. A 1618 letter by the mayor of Exeter complaining about the Bristol boys company is an excellent example of the personal opinion of a local authority figure, but such references are unfortunately rare.¹⁹ The extant evidence for the Caroline period is suggestive of a hostile attitude by the provinces towards travelling players, a position which Gurr attributes to the association of plays with the king and his royal prerogative.²⁰ Gurr proposes that the lack of seventeenth-century evidence poses a problem in gauging the reception of players, and that the investigation of such reactions is crucial in our understanding of early modern theatre:

the difficulty in making the assumption that mayors became more and more hostile to the professional companies is one of the central issues here, since hostility to players is chiefly registered by the number of towns [who pay the companies] to leave without playing.²¹

I intend to analyse the reception of civic and church authorities to players and playhouses in early modern Bristol and Gloucestershire in order to establish whether the attitude of the mayors altered with a change in monarch, and will attempt to establish whether this ‘central issue’ affected playing in the south-west. The first article in the *REED Newsletter* relating to playing evidence for Bristol and Gloucestershire came in 1977.²² This was an investigation by Robert Finnegan, although he concentrated his analysis on the medieval drama rather than Elizabethan stage plays. Finnegan stated that the plays which were entered into the Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts were ‘censory in nature, and once the civic dignitaries had approved the play, it was probably given a public airing in the Bothall or elsewhere’, although he does not make the connection that these plays were open to the public; the first instance he

¹⁹ ‘Mayor’s Letter to Sir Thomas Lake’, cited in *REED Devon*, pp. 188-89.

²⁰ Gurr, ‘Loss of records’, p. 17.

²¹ Gurr, ‘Loss of records’, p. 5.

²² Robert E. Finnegan, ‘Research in Progress: Gloucestershire and Bristol’, *REEDN*, 1977:1, 9-10. Finnegan has specifically examined the evidence of Corpus Christi cycles and civic pageantry in Gloucester.

found was in 1602.²³ The visits to Bristol by travelling players took place, as he states, in the ‘guildhall’ until 1595.²⁴

This thesis, as a regional study of early modern theatrical practices, is in active dialogue with the REED project, and with existing research on the region’s theatre history undertaken by scholars such as Kathleen Barker, Peter Greenfield and Mark Pilkington. My intention is to use the REED data for the reason it was created, to aid in the writing of a history of early theatre in the provinces, but extending the study to a region, rather than a single town or county. Alan Somerset commented in 2006 that ‘pursuing a question across volumes is discouragingly difficult’, but as I am principally focussing on the reaction of the towns to players and playing places, I have not been so discouraged.²⁵ Somerset has also identified a prejudice in pre-REED scholarship: ‘the idea grew that the provinces were uninteresting because nothing ever happened there’.²⁶ Paul White, although writing specifically about the stage history of the 1580s, has encapsulated the essence of my project, as I intend ‘by working imaginatively with already existing materials, and by questioning old, weakly supported assumptions’, to demonstrate that the history of drama in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol is ‘very different than we currently suppose’.²⁷

Primary Sources:

It would be ideal to be able to choose from early modern allusions to drama in numerous diary entries, eye-witness accounts, playbooks, prompt copies and playbills,

²³ Finnegan, ‘Gloucestershire and Bristol’, p. 9.

²⁴ Finnegan, ‘Gloucestershire and Bristol’, p. 10.

²⁵ Somerset, ‘Visits of Shakespeare’s Company’, p. 1.

²⁶ Somerset, ‘Visits of Shakespeare’s Company’, p. 4.

²⁷ White, ‘Playing Companies and the Drama of the 1580s’, p. 281.

such as are available for the region in the eighteenth century and beyond. Sadly, this is not possible as the material, had it ever been in existence, has simply not lasted into the twenty-first century. There are no surviving Quarter Session rolls for Gloucestershire from before the Restoration, and the Chamberlains' Accounts for Gloucester, which catalogue all of the gifts and rewards to visiting entertainers, are extant from 1542 but are missing from 1596-7 to 1634-5.²⁸ The one surviving Stuart volume for 1628-9 unfortunately does not detail any visits by travelling players to Gloucester, but does note that wait players received forty shillings for their annual stipend and that the city sponsored musical performances to celebrate Christmas and the proclamation of 'peace with ffraunce'.²⁹ Peter Greenfield has collated all known references to drama in the civic records in Gloucester until 1642 in the REED volume.³⁰ There are other pieces of evidence, such as the Visitation Articles of 1607, 1612, 1622 and 1624 which demand of the Gloucestershire clergy whether plays have been acted in their grounds. These suggest that such a practice was occurring either in the Gloucester see or certainly in nearby parishes.³¹ I have also used rental receipts to determine where certain individuals lived, such as the men who bore the office of Swordbearer in Gloucester city and hosted players in their private residences. In addition I have examined genealogical evidence to determine the identities of various Gloucester civic leaders, for which I consulted the *Calendar of Wills* for 1541-1650, compiled in 1895 by W. Phillimore and Leland Duncan and the computerised database of wills available online

²⁸ *Gloucester Quarter Session Archives 1660-1889 and other Official Records* (Gloucester: Gloucestershire County Council, 1958), the Quarter Session Indictment Books held in the Gloucestershire Archives run from 1660, the Order Books run from 1672, but there are no Sessions files until 1728. For bibliographic details of the volumes of the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts, see Peter Greenfield, 'The Documents', in *REED Glos.*, 261-72, p. 264.

²⁹ *REED Glos.*, p. 321-22.

³⁰ Unless otherwise stated, these citations refer to the Corporation Chamberlain's Accounts, *GBR* F4/3; 1550-96, F 4/4 and 1628-9; F 4/5.

³¹ Greenfield. 'The Documents', pp. 269-70; *REED Glos.*, pp. 345-46.

via the Gloucestershire Archives homepage.³² Much information may be extracted from the maps and street plans of a city; the 1912 volume of maps collated by T. Chubb proves extremely useful in tracing the urban development of Gloucester and Gloucestershire from the late sixteenth century to 1911, beginning with Saxton's map of the county of 1577.³³ Speed's map of 1610 is valuable as it charts the whole county and also gives the street plans of Gloucester and Bristol from a contemporary perspective, with an informative key to major landmarks and parish churches. A most useful map of Gloucester is a 1624 plan of the outskirts of the city, incorporating the hundreds of Dudston and Kings Barton, the area which made up the 'inshire'. This sketch identifies the houses of many of the aldermanic bench, the larger houses surrounding the city and the main routes out to neighbouring towns. This map shows that the inshire radiated on average five miles from the city proper.³⁴

One reason for my choice of Gloucester as a subject is that the city boasts an important piece of evidence relating to the practice known as the 'mayor's play', when the mayor and aldermen supervised the first performance by a travelling troupe, usually in the principal municipal space, in this case the Boothall. *Mount Tabor. Or Private exercises of a penitent sinner* contains a rare eye-witness memoir published in 1639.³⁵ I am interested in this passage for its description of the content and staging of an early

³² *A Calendar of Wills proved in the Consistory Court of the Bishop of Gloucester 1541-1650* ed. by W. P. W. Phillimore and Leland L. Duncan (London: British Record Society Limited, 1895) and <<http://archives.gloucestershire.gov.uk>>>

³³ T. Chubb, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Printed Maps of Gloucestershire 1577-1911, With Biographical Notes* (Bristol: Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 1912).

³⁴ Anon, Plan of 1624, 'Map of Gloucester showing the Hundreds of Dudston and Kings Barton incorporated with the city by Charter of Richard III [1483]', George Sheffield Blakeway, *The City of Gloucester: Its Royal Charters of Liberties and Varying Fortunes* (Gloucester: L. A. Smart and Son, 1924), kindly reproduced by the Gloucester Record Office. This map was not included in Chubb's study of 1912.

³⁵ R. W[illis]. Esquire, *Mount Tabor. Or Private exercises of a penitent sinner: Serving for a daily practice of the life of faith, reduced to special heads comprehending the chiefe comforts and refreshings of true Christians: also certain occasionall observations and meditations profitably applied. Written in the time of a voluntary retrait from secular affairs.* (London: Printed by R[ichard] B[adger] for P. Stephens and C. Meredith, at the gilded Lion in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1639).

modern morality play, which has been discussed in Peter Greenfield's PhD thesis on medieval and Renaissance drama in Gloucestershire, but principally because the piece relates the reaction of the mayor to noblemen's players.³⁶ It was written by 'R. W.' and recalls incidents of his life, such as 'upon my breeding up at Schoole', 'upon the Diall of Gloucester Colledge Clock' and 'Upon a Pedegree found in a private man's house'. Although one must be conscious of his age, piety and occupation throughout one's reading of the piece, the comments he makes in the tale of 'a play upon which I saw as a child' illuminates our understanding of the politics and patronage inherent in such displays of largesse. It was the Shakespearean scholar Edmund Malone who commented that R. W. was R. Willis: 'as appeared from writing on the back of a vellum cover in which it was originally bound'.³⁷ The Christ's School archives record the attendance of a Richard Willis from 1571-2 to 1577-8, which suggests that this was the same individual.³⁸ Joan Johnson in her study of Tudor Gloucestershire states that the author was Robert Willis whilst D. M. Palliser and F. P. Wilson believe that he was called Ralph.³⁹ In order to prevent confusion, I shall refer to the author as Willis.

Mount Tabor was a 'little manual' of anecdotal tales, meditations, and translations from Latin, and biblical extracts compiled by the author to offer Christian instruction for its readers, although he humbly stated in the dedication to his 'Deere Wife and Children' that the book was 'not worthy nor so for publicke view'.⁴⁰ The author was seventy-five when the book was printed, thus his interpretation of events at

³⁶ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama in Gloucestershire', pp. 172-82.

³⁷ This is cited in T. N. Brushfield's contribution to *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries*, 'Morality Plays at Gloucester', V, 42-4, p. 42. I have also inspected this copy [British Library call number C.38].

³⁸ Roland Austin, *The Crypt School Gloucester: Established as a Free Grammar School and first known as Christ School, 1539-1939* (Gloucester: John Bellows Ltd., 1939), p. 51.

³⁹ Joan Johnson, *Tudor Gloucestershire* (Gloucester: Gloucestershire County Library and Alan Sutton, 1985), p. 113; D. M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors 1547-1603* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 375, and cites F. P. Wilson, *The English Drama 1485-1585* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 77 (p. 410, n. 32)

⁴⁰ Willis, *Mount Tabor*, p. 5, A3.

the end of his life should be borne in mind, as he was recalling incidents from his schooldays and adolescence. Greenfield states in his preamble to the printed extract in REED that ‘the conclusion Willis draws gives us reason to trust his remarkably detailed account’, although this surely refers to the comments about the staging not to the moral overtone of the mediation.⁴¹ Although appearing to enjoy the play as a child, Willis was using this section of the manual to compare the ‘plays and harmless morals of former times’ with the contemporary theatrical displays of Caroline England, ‘those which have succeeded’ by which he was appalled.⁴²

Although there is no precise date attached to this play, one can use Willis’ biographical references in *Mount Tabor* to calculate an estimated date. If Willis was seventy-five in 1639, then he was born in 1564. Whilst watching the play in the Boothall, Willis’ father had ‘made [him] stand between his legs as he sat upon one of the benches, where we saw and heard very well’.⁴³ The author was brought up in Gloucester as he had been educated at Christ’s [Crypt] School on Southgate Street.⁴⁴ Greenfield believes Willis ‘must have been fairly young, and yet old enough to remember what he saw [so] it seems likely that the performance took place during the 1570s, when he was between six and fifteen years of age’.⁴⁵ This places the play at some point between 1570 and 1579. Both parties ‘saw and heard well’ whilst the father was seated and the son standing: therefore I would suggest that the boy was not yet of adolescent years, and the play would then have taken place in the early 1570s.

⁴¹ Appendix 2, ‘Willis’ Description of a Play at Gloucester’, *REED Glos.*, pp. 362-64 (p. 362).

⁴² Willis, *Mount Tabor*, pp. 113-14.

⁴³ Willis, *Mount Tabor*, p. 110.

⁴⁴ Willis, *Mount Tabor*, ‘Upon my breeding up at Schoole’, pp. 96-99.

⁴⁵ Peter Greenfield, Appendix 2, ‘Willis’ Description of a Play at Gloucester’, in *REED Glos.*, p. 362.

A second piece of specific evidence relating to playing in Gloucester demonstrates the framework that the mayor could employ in using his discretion towards the players at the mayor's play. An Ordinance, dated 3 November 1580, was noted in the Corporation Common Council Minute Book.⁴⁶ The edict demonstrates that the Gloucester authorities felt that their control over the city was threatened as much by the patronised playing companies as the journeymen and idle poor who attended the performances. The playing data for municipally-sponsored performances in the 1580s is unusually detailed, in that they precisely date almost half of the productions which took place in the presence of the mayor, which may have been a consequence of the authorities' interest in the plays, evidenced by the Ordinance.⁴⁷

Although the city of Gloucester was thorough in keeping municipal records, such as noting the amount of gifts and rewards presented to companies of travelling players for the mayor's play and extra expenses, the borough council of Tewkesbury was less vigilant in recording civic expenses in the Borough Minute Book. Peter Greenfield has conceded that 1584 was a 'rare year' in which the accounts were 'itemised to some extent', therefore there may have been numerous other instances of playing in the town, but the city neglected to record them.⁴⁸ In addition to the references in REED regarding the 'lone parish offerings' of the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts and evidence of the rental of costumes to local and regional players, I have cited rental receipts received by the Abbey which relate to the hire of

⁴⁶ Corporation Common Council Minute Book, *REED Glos.*, pp. 306-7.

⁴⁷ Out of the forty-two stage plays recorded in the Gloucester Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts which we can say for certain took place in the 1580s, nineteen have a date attached.

⁴⁸ *REED Glos.*, 'The Documents', p. 268.

church lands; these may have also been appropriated as performance spaces within the Abbey precinct in the early modern period..⁴⁹

In the absence of municipally recorded data, I have also used genealogical records to identify the personalities who may have encouraged drama in early modern Tewkesbury. I have researched the families of some Tewkesbury dignitaries, such as Thomas Crumpe and Edward Millicheape, whose family names appear to be associated with the few extant occurrences of dramatic activity in the town and have traced their kinship links to ascertain whether there was a private theatrical community active in Tewkesbury. To achieve this, I have analysed the probate records and inventories of Tewkesbury residents, collated in two volumes by Bill Rennison and Cameron Talbot of the Tewkesbury Historical Society.⁵⁰ There is a useful resource, the Woodard Local History Database, which is held on an on-site terminal in Tewkesbury Library. It is a work in progress, but contains much information on local and family history, census returns, press cuttings and published histories of Tewkesbury. In addition, an invaluable source for tracing the genealogy of the town has been *They Used to Live in Tewkesbury*, a small volume collated by Norah Day containing details of residents and their occupations, apprentices and masters, the streets on which these tradesman lived, how much they contributed to local funds, where they sat in the Abbey, and where and when they were buried.⁵¹ A further contemporaneous record of families and their whereabouts was a muster roll commissioned by Henry Berkeley in 1608. John Smyth, Lord Henry's steward at Berkeley Castle, an 'industrious antiquary' and later

⁴⁹ Peter Greenfield, 'Parish Drama in Four Counties Bordering the Thames Watershed' *English Parish Drama* ed. by Alexandra F. Johnson and Willliam Hüsken (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 107-18 (p. 107); *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts 1563-1624* ed. by Caroline J. Litzenger (Bristol: J. Arrowsmith, 1994).

⁵⁰ *Wills and Inventories of Tewkesbury Testators to be found in Gloucester Records Office*, ed. by Bill Rennison and Cameron Talbot, 2 Volumes (Tewkesbury: Tewkesbury Historical Society, 1996 & 2000).

⁵¹ *They Used to Live in Tewkesbury: Trace Your Ancestors*, ed. by Norah Day (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1991). An A5 typed surname index to this volume is kept in the Local Studies Section of Tewkesbury Library.

biographer of his master, collated the names, occupations and military skills of all men under Berkeley's manorial control, published as *Men and Armour*.⁵²

Fortunately for students of Bristol's theatrical history, those who kept the Mayor's Audits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were fastidious in their noting of dates and payments to travelling players who performed in the Guildhall, and Mark Pilkington has collated them all and catalogued them in the REED volume for Bristol.⁵³ It is regrettable that most instances of strolling companies in most towns and cities only exist because of an episode which occurred to make the event noteworthy, but in Bristol the plays are recorded as events, regardless of incident. Sally-Beth Maclean praises the 'weekly accounting style' of Bristol Corporation, which 'enables us to pinpoint more precisely than in many locations the dates of payment'.⁵⁴ N. Dermott Harding, who was appointed to organise and catalogue the archives in 1924, examined all the extant material.⁵⁵ She believed that 'the chamberlain kept merely the feet of the accounts as a remembrance book'.⁵⁶ The Mayor's Audits, in this form, 'stretch in an almost unbroken series to 1785', and record all expenses and vouchers for Bristol Corporation.⁵⁷

Roger Leech has meticulously categorised 'individual tenement histories' for almost all properties in early modern Bristol in two volumes published as *The Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol* in 1997 and a second volume in

⁵² John Smyth, *Men and Armour*, ed. by Lord Sherborne (Berkeley, 1608; repr. Gloucester: Sutton Publishing, 1980), p. viii.

⁵³ Unless otherwise stated, these citations refer to the Mayor's Audits, *BRO* 04026 (1-21); 1531-1644 & 04027, 1552-3.

⁵⁴ Sally-Beth Maclean, 'At the End of the Road: An Overview of Southwestern Touring Circuits', *Early Theatre*, 6:2 (2003), 17-32 (p. 22).

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Ralph, *Guide to the Bristol Archives Office* (Bristol: Bristol Corporation, 1971), p. xi.

⁵⁶ N. Dermott-Harding, 'The Archives of the Corporation of Bristol', *TBGAS*, 48 (1926), 227-49 p. 229.

⁵⁷ D. M. Livlock, *The Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1966). For a detailed bibliographic description of the twenty-one volumes see Mark Pilkington, 'The Documents' in *REED Bristol*, pp. xlv-xlvi.

2000, evaluating the properties in the University district of St. Michael's Hill.⁵⁸ This information has been crucial in identifying residents of the city in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and especially in regarding the location of the Wine Street playhouse, although Leech offers no data for tenements south of the Avon, such as those on Redcliffe Hill, where Barker's playhouse is thought to have been built.

Kathleen Barker was a prolific theatre historian, who collected a number of important documents on the history of the Bristol stage in the 1960s and 1970s. Her 1976 work, *Bristol at Play: Five Centuries of Live Entertainment* is the most comprehensive study of the city's theatrical history, although her work on the early modern stage is frustratingly brief.⁵⁹ Barker collated six ring binder-files of notes and extracts on the history of the Bristol stage whilst researching *Bristol At Play*, which are deposited in the stores of the Theatre Museum, part of the Drama Department of the University of Bristol. The first file, KB/11/1, is a collection of typed notes relating to information on playing between 1461 and 1839, the later files correspond to data for the following years: 1886-1904, 1905-1918, 1919-1930, 1931-1951 and 1952-1991.⁶⁰ That Barker sought to divide the data up into one large section for early theatre, covering 378 years, then into five smaller sections suggests that there was very little data to be found for the first four centuries of the five Barker wished to investigate. Many of these typed leaves are citations from nineteenth-century antiquarians, although the annotations to the references demonstrate that Barker was aware of the limitations of this evidence and that she exercised caution in interpreting these views as evidence.

⁵⁸ *The Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol* ed. by Roger Leech, (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1997), p. xviii; *The St. Michael's Hill Precinct of the University of Bristol: The Medieval and Early Modern Topography of Bristol, Part 2* ed. by Roger Leech, (Bristol: Bristol Record Society/University of Bristol, 2000).

⁵⁹ Kathleen Barker, *Bristol At Play: Five Centuries of Live Entertainment* (Bradford-upon-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1976).

⁶⁰ These are held in the Theatre Museum Archives, at the University of Bristol Drama Department, reference number KB/11/1-6.

For example, in citing from Matthews' *New History* of 1794 she notes in a post-script: '[Matthews gives the opening of the King Street Theatre as 1965!]'⁶¹ Although it is disappointing that most of Barker's work on the early modern drama of Bristol has not been published, scholars such as me can benefit from examining and interpreting the raw data from a fresh perspective.

The documents relating to the Wine Street playhouse are possibly the most valuable source of information we have on playing in the city, as the existence of this performance space embodies Bristol's importance in English provincial theatre history. The most important of these documents is the will of the building's owner, the cutler Nicholas Woolfe, dated June 1614.⁶² The will not only allows one to hear the 'personal voice' of Woolfe's concern regarding the potential threats towards his playhouse, but also that he had amassed enough money to donate large sums to his family and various charities, possibly due to the commercial success of the business. Ernest Honigman and Susan Brock have examined the wills of metropolitan playhouse owners and investors, yet none of these wills express anything like as much concern for their enterprises after their death.⁶³ It was usual for a testator to leave 'spiritual dues' for the poor of the parish in which they were born or lived, but Woolfe's bequests out of the playhouse cover three charities, plus donations to the poor in four parishes, suggesting either that he had lived in various parts of town, or that he wished the playhouse to act as a wide philanthropic legacy.⁶⁴ The parishes to be awarded, Christ Church, St. Peter's, St. John's and St. Michael, all surrounded Wine Street and Broad Street, areas which most

⁶¹ Typed citation of page 18 of W. Mathews, *Mathews's New History of Bristol, or Complete Guide: Bristol Directory for the Year 1793-4* (Bristol: 10 Broadmead, 1794), in KB/11/1.

⁶² A photocopy of Woolfe's will is in the Bristol Record Office, 'courtesy of Kathleen Barker', *REED Bristol*, endnote to pp. 195-99, p. 295.

⁶³ E. A. J. Honigman, and Susan Brock, *Playhouse Wills 1558-1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 10.

⁶⁴ Will of Nicholas Woolfe, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 195-99.

likely made up his core audience.⁶⁵ His wish for the executors, Henry Yate and Joseph Rattle, to maintain a ‘fatherly respect’ for his only son Miles do not appear to have been heeded, as five years after Nicholas Woolfe’s death, Miles issued a lawsuit against the overseers of his father’s will, plus his stepmother, accusing all three of fraud. The 1619 answer to Miles’ suit by Henry Yate refers to a ‘stage’ in the property.⁶⁶ An earlier lawsuit states that the building was also let to lodgers as a complaint by Richard Cooke in 1606 over a subletting clause gives one further information about the structure of the playhouse; it relates that there was accommodation for the actors within the property. It has been supposed that the Wine Street playhouse began operating around 1602, according to a copy of a 1598 lease, transcribed by Kathleen Barker and deposited in her Collection in the Theatre Museum, which permits Woolfe to renovate the property within four years from that date. A further will, compiled by Sarah Barker in 1638, states that she was in possession of a private premises in, it is supposed, Redcliffe Hill, which had been built by her late husband ‘for a playhouse’.⁶⁷

It is a fact of early modern theatre history that there is very little textual evidence of stage plays performed in the provinces. We are fortunate that the Bristol chamberlains of the 1570s felt it appropriate to note the names of the plays which were performed, although these texts are not extant. We know that the Chamberlain’s Men performed *The Red Knight* in late July / early August 1576; that Leicester’s Men played *Myngo* in October 1577, and that four performances, with titles, were entered into the Mayor’s Audits in 1578: Berkeley’s Men played *What Mischief Works in the Minds of Man* in July, Lord Charles Howard’s servants acted *The Queen of Ethiopia* and

⁶⁵ St. Michael’s parish covers most of the city, from St. John’s gate northwards, St. John’s parish covers the west side of Broad Street, including the Guildhall, and Wine Street was divided with Christ Church parish to the west and St. Peter’s to the east.

⁶⁶ ‘Replication of Richard Cooke’ and ‘Answer of Henry Yate to Miles’ Woolfe’s suit’, *REED Bristol*, p. 292; p. 213-14.

⁶⁷ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, in *REED Bristol*, xlvi-lxv (p. xl).

Sheffield's Men performed *The Court of Comfort* in September; October saw a version of *Quid Pro Quo* by the players of the Earl of Bath.⁶⁸ However, there is no evidence to confirm the genre of these plays.⁶⁹ It was unusual for the names of the productions to be entered into municipal accounts, as David Galloway states: 'clerks and provincial towns and cities seldom, apparently, recorded the names of plays', therefore these instances are exceptional in provincial theatre history, as well as in the region.⁷⁰ The Bristol Corporation may have viewed the metropolitan operations as the official signal to encourage performances by theatrical companies and to begin to compete with the capital. The players that entertained Bristolians during 1576-8 were the same companies that were contemporaneously performing in the purpose-built Theatre and Curtain in London, and perhaps the actual recording of the names of the companies was proof to the Bristol burgesses that their money was being spent on metropolitan players.

Secondary Sources:

There are numerous references to playing in the histories of the towns and region published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but these are unsubstantiated and in some cases dubious. Peter Clark identified a 'growth of urban antiquarianism' in Victorian authorship, where the authors chronicled the achievements and improvements of the towns.⁷¹ These volumes may have been collated merely for the sake of publication to improve the reputation of the author, without any which could explain some of the questionable material contained within and the lack of acknowledgements

⁶⁸ REED *Bristol*, pp. 112-17.

⁶⁹ David Galloway, 'REED in the Provinces and what they may tell us about the Elizabethan Theatre', *Elizabethan Theatre* 7 (1981), 82-110 (p. 93).

⁷⁰ Galloway, 'REED in the Provinces', p. 93.

⁷¹ Peter Clark, 'Introduction' in *The Transition of English Provincial Towns* ed. by Peter Clark (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984), 13-61 (p. 45).

and references. An excellent example of such unreliable historiography lies in the 1910 work *The Bristol Stage* by the Bristolian theatre critic G. Rennie-Powell who believed that William Shakespeare visited the city in the period circa 1586, and states, somewhat anachronistically, that Shakespeare would have accompanied the players who performed in Bristol to the Globe ‘on their return to London’.⁷² This is impossible given that the Globe Theatre was only built on London’s Bankside in 1599, some thirteen years later. Anthony Holden, one of Shakespeare’s twentieth-century biographers, believes that the ‘Lost Years’ ended when Shakespeare joined a band of touring players, and that the visit of the Queen’s Men to Bristol in 1586-7 ‘was the occasion on which it may be surmised that the 23-year-old [...] volunteered his services [...] setting forth to seek his fortune in London’.⁷³ The Queen’s Men visited Bristol in July 1586 and were paid twenty shillings and this is perhaps from where Rennie-Powell drew his conclusion.⁷⁴ The idea that Shakespeare visited the region on tour has occupied the minds of other historians, allowing them to create some interesting theories on his ‘Lost Years’. For example, Richard Castle, vice-consul of the United States of America, speaking to the Bristol Rotary Club on 20 January 1920, dated Shakespeare’s attachment to a strolling company to 1578 and thought it reasonable to assume that the sixteen-year-old would have visited Bath and Bristol in 1580.⁷⁵ Another twentieth-century historian, Frederick C. Jones, also believes that Shakespeare visited the city, and that: ‘it is natural to think that William Shakespeare at some

⁷² G. Rennie-Powell, *The Bristol Stage: its story / As Told by G. Rennie Powell*, (Bristol: Bristol Printing and Publishing, 1919), p. 11.

⁷³ Anthony Holden, *William Shakespeare: His Life and Work* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1999), p. 79.

⁷⁴ REED *Bristol*, p. 128. The entry for 17-23 July is not conclusive evidence as to whether the company actually played. The fact that they visited is enough to suggest that if Holden is correct, Shakespeare may have played with the Queen’s Men.

⁷⁵ ‘Bristol and the Drama’, *Bristol Evening Post*, January 1920, BRL 16204. There is unfortunately no precise date attached to this press cutting, but an extract from the *Bristol Times and Mirror* of 12 Jan 1920 stated that Castle was to give his talk on early drama in Bristol ‘before the Rotary Club to-day’. Therefore the *Evening Post* review would have been shortly after the speech in mid-January.

portion of his crowded life' played in Bristol.⁷⁶ A lecture given by the Bristol Group of The Society for Theatre Research in July 1951 was hopeful that 'Shakespeare's company visited the city several times, though there is no direct evidence he was with them'.⁷⁷ These examples briefly demonstrate how poetic licence and the historian's fancy can affect later works if such accounts are not read in the correct context. I will examine here some of the main general secondary sources, identifying which works do not reference their sources correctly.

The nineteenth-century antiquarians of the region do not appear to have commented much upon the theatrical history of the towns which they studied. Two works on Gloucester are based on the political history of the city. These are of particular interest to this project as it appears, from a twenty-first century reading of the extant evidence, that Gloucester viewed the hosting of players of nobly patronised strolling companies as a political obligation; such an examination of the political engineering at work in Gloucester is useful in ascertaining the motives behind welcoming certain travelling troupes. William Retlaw Williams explored the history of the Gloucester government from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century in his study on *The Parliamentary History of the City of Gloucester*, published in 1898. This catalogues the candidates returned to Parliament by Gloucestershire and contains biographical information on each member.⁷⁸ William Bradford Willcox published a similar work in 1940, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government*, a narrative of

⁷⁶ Frederick C. Jones, 'Broad Street and its Shakespearean Associations', No. XV in the 'Legends of Old Bristol Thoroughfares' series, extracts from the *Bristol Adventurer*, 1922-1923, p. 19, BRL 17593.

⁷⁷ *The Theatres of Bristol: An Exhibition Illustrating Bristol's Theatrical History: Festival of Britain 1951*, Arranged by The Society for Theatre Research [Bristol Group], Theatre Royal, Bristol, 10-14 July 1951), p. 2.

⁷⁸ W. R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the County of Gloucester* (Hereford: Jakeman and Carver, 1898).

political events from 1590 to 1640 and their significance to the history of the county.⁷⁹ Willcox also explores the relationship between the central government in London and the economic development of Gloucestershire and examines the city's defiance in maintaining political independence from the rest of the county and the region. Willcox offers a brief comment on corporate entertainment, as he believed that the authorities were receptive to the drama which they 'permitted or provided [...] for the citizens'; he presumed that the travelling players and other civic amusements 'were welcomed by the magistrates'.⁸⁰

Many of the historical works focus upon the county as a whole, rather than exploring Gloucester as a separate topic while the city of Bristol is perceived as belonging within the county of Gloucestershire, despite Bristol having gained economic and political independence from Gloucestershire in 1373.⁸¹ Even a relatively recent regional study of 1972 by county archivists Brian Smith and Elizabeth Ralph states that 'no history of Gloucestershire is complete without the inclusion of Bristol'.⁸² However, there are very few references to the drama of the city of Gloucestershire or to the history of the theatre in the studies of the county of Gloucestershire. Neither Samuel Rudder in *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester* of 1781 nor Thomas Rudge in *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* published c.1814 mentioned any dramatic history of Gloucester.⁸³ Rudge was writing his 'rather pedestrian history of the county' shortly after the first national census, so it is probable that his interest was in this new demographic data as opposed to cultural

⁷⁹ William Bradford Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government 1590-1640* (London: Yale University Press, 1940).

⁸⁰ Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government*, pp. 231-32.

⁸¹ Brian Smith and Elizabeth Ralph, *A History of Bristol and Gloucestershire* (Beaconsfield: Darwen Finlayson, 1972), p. 13.

⁸² Smith and Ralph, *History of Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 11.

⁸³ S. Rudder, *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester* (Cirencester: S. Rudder, 1781); Thomas Rudge, *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Gloucester: Hough and Pace, c.1814).

history.⁸⁴ Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke merely devotes a single sentence to the subject of ‘Theatre’ in his 1819 study, *A New History of The City of Gloucester, almost wholly compiled from new materials*, which Christopher Elrington has described as ‘more scholarly and critical in its approach’ than Rudge.⁸⁵ The subtitle of this book states that it will act in ‘correcting the errors, of preceding accounts’ yet can only offer a short statement on drama,

THEATRE

This is erected on Westgate Street, on the usual plan, and is the property of Mr. Watson, the manager of the Cheltenham Theatre.⁸⁶

Ten years later, G. W. Counsel compiled *The History and Description of the City of Gloucester* but again did not explore the history of the drama in the city in any great detail.⁸⁷ He does devote a chapter to the provenance of the main public buildings, but does not comment upon the theatre to which Fosbrooke had referred in 1819. The reference to the Booth Hall, the venue for the recorded plays in Elizabethan Gloucester, is referred to as ‘the ancient Guildhall’ which was rebuilt in 1606 and part of its Jacobean use was as a prison. By 1829, as Counsel describes, it was ‘a lofty building, full of windows [...] a large uncomfortable room, supported by double rows of pillars of chestnut timber’. The fact that the Booth Hall was converted in 1606, in the context of the dramatic history of Gloucester, is extremely useful in tracing the usage of the building after the records disappear in 1597, yet Counsel does not make any connection between the end of recorded playing and the change of use of the principal venue.

⁸⁴ Peter Ripley, ‘Parish Register Evidence for the Population of Gloucester 1562-1641’, *TBGAS*, 91 (1972), 199-206 (p. 200).

⁸⁵ Christopher Elrington, ‘Foreword’ to 1976 edition of James Bennett, *The History of Tewkesbury*: this is cited in the third edition (Malvern: Capella Archive, 2002), xvi-xxi (p. xix).

⁸⁶ Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke, *A New History of the City of Gloucester, almost wholly compiled from new materials; supplying the numerous deficiencies, and correcting the errors, of preceding accounts* (London: John Nicols and Son, 1819).

⁸⁷ G. W. Counsel, *The History and Description of the City of Gloucester* (Gloucester: J. Bulgin, 1829).

The *Gloucester Court Guide and County Blue Book* of 1899, a ‘fashionable record’ and ‘general survey of the county’ narrates a concise and informative history of the city from the Middle Ages to the Victorian age.⁸⁸ However, this description does not record the dramatic history of Tudor Gloucester and the Georgian Theatre Royal, erected at 30 Westgate Street in 1799.⁸⁹ The ‘descriptive and historical’ section of the *Guide* discloses the main personalities in the gentry and the clergy who were instrumental in improving the economy and defending the city against heretics and Royalists during the Civil War conflict. T. A. Ryder’s 1950 book, *Gloucestershire Through The Ages*, is a similar work of general history, narrating the major events of the city and again explaining the relationship between the Crown and the county in terms of the Gloucestershire land bequeathed to local landowners and courtier favourites after the Dissolution of the monastic lands.⁹⁰ Ryder also attributes the increase in cloth production and quality to the influx of foreign weavers into the Stroud Valleys but makes no mention of any cultural production during the Tudor or Stuart reigns.

The most recent studies on early modern Gloucester were undertaken by county archivists Brian Smith and Elizabeth Ralph in the early 1970s and the local historian Joan Johnson in the 1980s. Smith and Ralph open by making the assertion that Gloucestershire and Bristol were successful in merchant terms as they profited from being served by the Severn to the north and the navigable Thames to the east, and from Atlantic trade routes, in addition to lying on the convergence of three Roman roads.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Anon, *The Gloucester Court Guide and County Blue Book* (London: Charles William Deacon & Co., 1899).

⁸⁹ Philip Moss, *Historic Gloucester: An Illustrated Guide to the City, Its Buildings, The Cathedral and The Docks* (Moreton-in-Marsh: The Windrush Press, 1993), p. 54.

⁹⁰ T. A. Ryder, *Gloucestershire Through the Ages* (Worcester: Littlebury and Co./ The Worcester Press, 1950).

⁹¹ Smith and Ralph, *History of Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 13; p. 91.

These road and river connections certainly made it easier for travelling players to plan their itineraries, although Smith and Ralph do not refer to theatre as one of the passing trades. Joan Johnson traces the county's financial and social boom to the reign of Henry VII in *Tudor Gloucestershire*, also believing that the economic framework was bolstered by the ancient and pilgrim road networks in place throughout the county.⁹² Johnson allocates an entire chapter to the 'pleasures and pastimes' of Tudor Gloucestershire, and offers observations upon the travelling players of the nobility in Gloucester and at Thornbury Castle and Berkeley Castle.⁹³ She also revisits the theme of patronised professional players in her 1989 book on *The Gloucestershire Gentry* and enquires as to whether these itinerant performers were welcome visitors or parasites, but makes no concrete conclusions.⁹⁴ Regrettably, like earlier studies of the county, Johnson does not cite her sources in either volume, save for references to the Gloucester Borough Records already cited in REED. However, Gloucester is not the only city to have an incomplete history of its drama in the historiography; the antiquarians of Tewkesbury and Bristol also failed to trace a coherent narrative of drama in their towns.

Although many of the references to corporate playing in the nineteenth-century scholarship cannot be independently verified, the annual *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* offer a more trustworthy source. The *TBGAS* is a peer-reviewed periodical which has been published since 1876 when the Society was founded in Bristol. The editors have maintained a balance between archaeology and reports of field work excavations with 'articles of historical research',

⁹² Johnson, *Tudor Gloucestershire*, p. 15-16; p. 33.

⁹³ Johnson, *Tudor Gloucestershire*, pp. 134-49.

⁹⁴ Joan Johnson, *The Gloucestershire Gentry* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1989), pp. 172-95.

which have benefited this study enormously.⁹⁵ Roland Austin, a Gloucester town librarian in the early twentieth century, stated that the purpose of the project was ‘to promote an interest in archaeology and to secure the preservation of antiquities’.⁹⁶ The *TBGAS*, argued member John Pritchard, were also a reaction against the publications of the *Victoria County History* volumes, which were ‘not fulfilling the requirements of local historians’.⁹⁷

The *Victoria County History* [*VCH*] project, begun in 1900 and endorsed by Queen Victoria herself, sought to catalogue the natural and chronological history of England publishing editions as ‘an historical encyclopaedia of the English counties’.⁹⁸ These accessible county ‘sets’ comprise volumes on pre-history, the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, Domesday, and elements of history such as political and administrative, ecclesiastical, economic and social.⁹⁹ Although ‘some of the early publications had a preoccupation with the Middle Ages, recent volumes have shed valuable light on a considerable number of early modern towns’.¹⁰⁰ It is unfortunate that there is not a series, or even a single volume, devoted to Bristol; this was due to the realignment of county boundaries in the Local Government Act of 1972, which created the county of Avon, where Bristol lies, out of Somerset to the south and Gloucestershire to the north. As most of the topographical information for Avon has been included in the Somerset set, the *VCH* did not intend to create an Avon history.¹⁰¹ A note in the *Supplement*

⁹⁵ Homepage of Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, <<http://www.bgas.org.uk/tbgas/index.php>> [accessed 20 March 2007].

⁹⁶ Roland Austin, ‘The Society’, *TBGAS*, 48 (1926), 49-56 (p. 53).

⁹⁷ J. E. Pritchard, ‘The Work of the Society’, *TBGAS*, 14 (1918-19), 11-25 (p. 13).

⁹⁸ Ralph B. Pugh, ‘The Victoria County Histories’, *The Local Historian*, 13:1 (1978), 15-22 (p. 15).

⁹⁹ C. R. Elrington, *VCH: General Introduction Supplement, 1970-1990* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Clark, ‘Introduction: The early modern town in the west: Research since 1945 [1] in *The Early Modern Town: A Reader* ed. by Peter Clark (London: Longman, 1976), 1-42 (p. 20).

¹⁰¹ Elrington, *VCH Supplement*, p. 6.

states that, ‘at December 1990’ a volume on the City of Bristol was ‘to be started’, but there is no evidence of this.¹⁰²

The *VCH* series has devoted an entire volume to the history of Gloucester, published in 1972.¹⁰³ The early modern data on the city of Gloucester has been collated by Peter Clark who, in addition to his body of research on the development of early modern urban centres, has undertaken major studies on convivial culture and leisure.¹⁰⁴ My 2001 MA thesis on the relationship between Henry Peacham’s 1626 conduct manual *The Compleat Gentleman* and Thomas Randolph’s short play parody, *The Drinking Academy* drew heavily on Clark’s theories on class and the idea of the ‘alternative society’ which was fostered in provincial alehouses, which in turn aroused my interest in a similar perception of actors as untrustworthy ‘others’ who also had associations with the drinking culture of early modern England.¹⁰⁵ Alehouses were perceived to be breeding grounds for criminals, vagrants and the idle poor, who included itinerant players amongst their number. Although there is no direct evidence to suggest that travelling players performed in public houses in Bristol, Gloucester or Tewkesbury, I will briefly examine the relationship between victualling houses and strolling players in the region with reference to the activities of certain landlords who may have profited from the practice.

¹⁰² Elrington, *VCH Supplement*, p. 11; the journal *Local History News* publishes regular reports on *VCH* volumes. There is no progress on the Bristol volume as yet.

¹⁰³ *VCH: A History of the County of Gloucester, II*, ed. by William Page (London: Oxford University Press and University of London Institute of Historical Research, 1972).

¹⁰⁴ Peter Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester 1547-1720’ in *VCH IV*, 73-123. The footnote states that this chapter was written in 1983-4. See also ‘The Alehouse and the Alternative Society’, in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth Century History presented to Christopher Hill* ed. by Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 47-72 and Peter Clark *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London: Longman, 1985).

¹⁰⁵ Sarah Lowe, ‘Rare he is a refin’d gallant already: Conduct, Conviviality and Criminality in Thomas Randolph’s *The Drinking Academy*’, (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Reading, 2001).

Peter Clark's contribution to the history of the city in the *VCH* concentrates upon 'Early Modern Gloucester 1547-1720', although he has divided this era into three periods, 1547-1640, 1640-1660 and 1660 to 1720. Clark examines the data thematically, analysing population, economic development, social structure, city government and politics, and the religious and cultural life of Gloucester. Clark makes a general overview of the economic, social and political history of early modern Gloucester and directs the student to the original source through extensive footnote references. However, when referring to the cultural life of Gloucester, Clark only refers to examples of civic ceremony, rather than relating any details of the instances of travelling players visiting the city which were recorded in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts: 'as for popular rituals, country lords or abbots of misrule disappeared/ in the city after the 1560s. Old fashioned morality plays probably vanished a couple of decades later.'¹⁰⁶ N. M. Herbert, in his examination of Gloucester's 'Public Buildings' in the same *VCH* volume does refer to the sporadic use of the Boothall as a theatrical space: 'from the mid 16th century the Boothall was used by visiting companies of players, and concerts, plays and performances by travelling showmen were regularly staged there in the 18th century and early 19th.'¹⁰⁷ Although this short reference does not serve the general student of drama in Tudor and Stuart Gloucester well, it is convenient for the purposes of this thesis as the *VCH* contributors have not entered into any analysis of the drama and its relationship to patronage, politics or economics of the period. There are references to plays, but only to those advertised in *The Gloucester Journal* in the 1720s and visits of travelling theatre companies in the later eighteenth century.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', pp. 90-91.

¹⁰⁷ N. M. Herbert, 'Public Buildings', *VCH II*, pp. 248-58; p. 248.

¹⁰⁸ *The Gloucester Journal*, 'References to Gloucester City, 1722-1899', File F, Gloucester Reference Library.

William Dyde, in his *History and Antiquities of Tewkesbury*, did not deem it relevant to mention any information on the theatrical legacy of the town despite two of the subscribers to the volume, George Shuter and Mr Watson, being impresarios of the nearby Cheltenham theatre; the former had possibly sponsored performances in the Tewkesbury theatre in November 1795.¹⁰⁹ A later playbill of 8 August 1796 for this theatre states that it was managed by Watson.¹¹⁰ Tewkesbury could in fact boast a playhouse from thirty years earlier; a playbill of 7 June 1762 advertised a performance at the ‘New Theatre’ for the 9th of the month, which was to be given ‘by desire of Peter Hancock, Esq’.¹¹¹ Dyde was a printer and bookseller who ‘obviously relied on the research of earlier historians’ for his data.¹¹² The nineteenth-century antiquarian, publisher and box-office manager, James Bennett, deemed the theatrical history of the town only worthy of passing references, mostly in the footnotes, of his 1830 *A History of Tewkesbury*.¹¹³ His interest was in architectural evidence and its value to the history of the town.¹¹⁴ Bennett was involved in the selling of tickets, doubtless because he was Tewkesbury’s printer, and playbills advertised that tickets could be ‘procured’ from his printing office. These playbills were also published by ‘Bennett, Printer, Tewkesbury’.¹¹⁵ In the main text of his *History of Tewkesbury* Bennett acknowledges the existence of the contemporary ‘elegant little theatre’ which hosted performances by

¹⁰⁹ William Dyde, *The History and Antiquities of Tewkesbury*, second edition, (Tewkesbury: W. Dyde, c. 1800), p. xv. The two subscribers referred were ‘George Shuter of Cheltenham’ and ‘Mr Watson of Theatre Royal, Cheltenham’ whose names were printed in the 1798 edition. A playbill that I discovered in the miscellaneous documents of the Tewkesbury Borough Museum on 23 June 2004 relates to a performance of Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian* scheduled for the evening of 20 November 1795 which was ‘for the benefit of Mr Shuter’.

¹¹⁰ Theodore Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire, The Cotswold County: some account of its development, from the earliest times till to-day* (London: Simpkin Marshall Ltd., 1928), p. 134.

¹¹¹ Playbill cited in Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, p. 134. Peter Hancock was the lord of the nearby manor of Twynning [James Bennett, *The Tewkesbury Yearly Register and Magazine*, 2 Volumes, I (Tewkesbury: James Bennett, 1850), p. 364].

¹¹² Alan Hannan, ‘Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester: Excavations at Holm Hill, 1974-5’, *TBGAS*, 115 (1977), 79-231 (p. 83).

¹¹³ James Bennett, *A History of Tewkesbury* (Tewkesbury: James Bennett, 1830).

¹¹⁴ Hannan, ‘Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester’, p. 83.

¹¹⁵ Playbill for ‘New Theatre Tewkesbury’, for *Henri Quatre or, Paris in the Olden Times*, Wednesday 24 September 1823, a play performed by amateurs, printed in Kathleen Ross, *The Book of Tewkesbury* (Buckingham: Barracuda Books Ltd., 1986), p. 100.

London stars and the Cheltenham companies.¹¹⁶ However, his footnote to this fact is much more informative, stating that the building, situated at the back of the Wheatsheaf Inn, 132 High Street, was ‘fitted up in its present style’ in 1823. Bennett admits that ‘for several years [the building] had been occasionally used for theatrical exhibitions’. A footnote to this information on the theatre at the Wheatsheaf is much more informative and relates to the earlier theatrical history of the town, when a barn was used as a temporary space, and even prior to that there were stages set up in surrounding fields, ‘just without the limits of the borough’ but he does not mention the use of the building by Shuter and Watson for dramatic performances as evidenced by the earlier playbills.¹¹⁷ Another footnote to page 285 of *A History of Tewkesbury* reads as a particularly moralistic comment upon early instances of communal festivity relating to Elizabethan church ales:

[they] had been a subject of complaint, long anterior to this period; and it is a matter of astonishment that they should have ever been tolerated, after the vices and immoralities attended upon them had become so notorious.¹¹⁸

One may surmise from this statement that Bennett, despite his role as ticket vendor for the Tewkesbury Theatre, was not a supporter of early modern communal gatherings, which may explain the relegation of much of the history of Tewkesbury theatre to the footnotes of his *History*. James Bennett has been described by Reverend Susan Nuttall, his great-granddaughter, as ‘something of a snob’ by modern standards due to his preoccupation with wealth and status, which may explain his derogatory tone in describing church ales and strolling players.¹¹⁹ He was, according to Kathleen Ross, a ‘staunch conservative and churchwarden’, perhaps disapproving of his predecessors’

¹¹⁶ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 176.

¹¹⁷ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, pp. 185-86, n. 13.

¹¹⁸ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 285, n. 4.

¹¹⁹ Reverend Susan Nuttall, ‘Foreword’ to Bennett, *Tewkesbury* (2002), xi-xv (p. xiv).

involvement in drama.¹²⁰ He was also ‘conscious of the difference in status between topographical studies like his own and history on a grander scale’ suggests Christopher Elrington and Bennett offered his apology for this in the preface.¹²¹

F. B. Bradley-Birt in his 1931 book, *Tewkesbury, the Story of Abbey, Town and Neighbourhood*, declared Bennett’s *History* as ‘admirable’ though is equally indifferent to the drama of the town. However, he did dedicate a short paragraph to two instances of playing, in 1578 and 1585, relating to the lease of the players’ garments by the Churchwardens.¹²² Bradley-Birt was also aware of the lack of extant historical material for Tewkesbury. He acknowledged that his work was ‘a popular history’ of a ‘romantic’ past but did declare that he had ‘striven to make it as complete and authoritative as possible’ whilst conceding that the few previous works differed radically in their views on Tewkesbury’s history.¹²³ Kathleen Ross in her 1986 *Book of Tewkesbury* devotes a short chapter, ‘On Pleasure Bent’, to the entertainments of Tewkesburians which opens with a paragraph on dramatic amusements. She cites the churchwardens’ accounts, the 1600 fundraising plays, the 1762 theatre and the ‘elegant’ theatre of 1823 but does not offer any analysis of the evidence. The majority of the section relates to the Georgian and Victorian diversions of the growing town.¹²⁴ In 1987 Anthea Jones published the most recent and complete history of the town, *Tewkesbury*, which was reissued in a second edition in 2003. This is a full study, examining the major events, buildings and personalities of Tewkesbury but without any survey of the history of entertainment prior to the twentieth century. Jones does acknowledge that there was a playhouse in Tewkesbury, ‘a building behind the fives

¹²⁰ Kathleen Ross, ‘So Kind a Friend and Benefactor’, *THSB*, 2 (1993), 65-69 (p. 65).

¹²¹ Chris Elrington, ‘Foreword’ to Bennett, *Tewkesbury* (2002), p. xvii.

¹²² F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Tewkesbury: The Story of Abbey, Town and Neighbourhood* (Worcester: Phillips & Probert Ltd., 1931), ‘Preface’; p. 181.

¹²³ Bradley-Birt, ‘Preface’ to *Tewkesbury*.

¹²⁴ Ross, *Book of Tewkesbury*, pp. 95-101.

court and the Wheatsheaf, formerly a theatre, was converted into a silk mill [...] in 1847' but does not comment on early modern performances, such as the 1600 fundraising plays.¹²⁵ Jones's book is chronological in format, and devotes a chapter to 'The Establishment of the Borough' detailing events from 1550-1700; she also acknowledges that the seventeenth-century records are not as complete as the Tudor accounts.¹²⁶ Equally frustrating is the lack of leads from the *VCH* study of Tewkesbury published in 1968:

The history of drama in Tewkesbury goes back to 1567 when the churchwardens kept and hired out 'players' gear', and in 1600 public plays were one method used to raise money for church repairs. The New Theatre mentioned in 1762 may have been the barn in the Oldbury that was used for plays.¹²⁷

It is a pity that the colourful theatrical culture of Gloucestershire's second town in Elizabethan times has been relegated to a single sentence.

There is also little extant economic data for the medieval or early modern period although records only appear to have been kept in some form of order from the mid-seventeenth century. The work of the Tewkesbury Historical Society, published in their annual *Bulletin* from 1991, has been useful especially regarding the history of the town's distinctive alleyways, which have been renamed over the centuries as the inhabitants of Tewkesbury's largest properties changed hands. The *Bulletin* contains full-length articles as well as notes of interest which, although not referenced as specifically as the articles, are valuable.

¹²⁵ Andrea Jones, *Tewkesbury*, second edition (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 2003), p. 183.

¹²⁶ Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 59.

¹²⁷ *VCH: The History of the County of Gloucester, VIII*, ed. by R. B. Pugh (London: Oxford University Press and University of London Institute of Historical Research, 1968), p. 123.

There are numerous studies of the history of the Bristol stage, although many of these also chose not to explore in any great detail the variety of entertainments on offer to Bristolians prior to the establishment of suburban playhouses in the early 1700s. The first dedicated study on the theatrical history of Bristol was undertaken by Richard Jenkins, published posthumously in 1826, although he was specific in his sphere of reference, stating that he was only concerned with drama subsequent to the opening of the Jacob's Wells theatre.¹²⁸ The permanent theatre at Jacob's Wells was opened in 1729 under the management of the Bath Company comedian John Hippesley, although he had rented a plot in Jacob's Wells since 1703, and therefore may have been operating a playhouse there for many years before Jenkins suggested in 1826.¹²⁹ Richard Smith, a 'celebrated' surgeon and one of the proprietors of the *Bristol Mirror* collated an enormous amount of information regarding Bristol theatre with the intention of publishing the information in the *Mirror* via a series of articles. Smith collected the material, playbills, plates of actors and actresses and even correspondence from the players, including Colley Cibber, during the first forty years of the nineteenth century. Smith was, according to John Latimer who organised the documents after Smith's death in 1843, a 'devoted admirer' of the city's theatrical history.¹³⁰ The volumes are principally formed from copies of playbills and advertisements for Bristol plays in the local press. Bristol Reference Library has collated these papers into five volumes. Volume I covers early theatre until 1764, Volume II, Parts I and II, feature eighteenth century playbills for the Theatre Royal on King Street, and Volume III, also in two parts, has playbills for performances in Bristol, and occasionally London theatres, from

¹²⁸ Richard Jenkins, *Memoirs of the Bristol Stage: from the period of the theatre at Jacobs Well down to the present time: with notices, biographical and critical, of some of the celebrated comedians who have appeared on its boards* (Bristol: W. H. Somerton, 1826).

¹²⁹ Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p. 3.

¹³⁰ John Latimer's letter of 1895 acts as a prologue to Volume I of Richard Smith, *Bristol Theatre: A Collection of Playbills. MSS., portraits etc [1672-1843]*, bound in 3 facsimile volumes in five parts, BRL 31457. Latimer also states that the original manuscript and additional loose papers were presented to the British Library Society by Smith before his death.

1801 to 1810. Therefore it is the first volume in which I am interested for the purpose of this project. Although Smith acknowledges that the theatre historians of Bristol are ‘greatly indebted’ to the Town Clerk who recorded the plays from 1532, he pays little attention to the Tudor or Stuart instances of playing.¹³¹ The majority of the information concentrates on the years between 1672 and 1843, but there is some data in the first volume relating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period he categorises as the ‘first era of the regular and legitimate drama’.¹³² Smith assumes his reader would already be familiar with this period, but that a ‘refresher’ in the early stages of the city’s theatrical history was necessary by way of a prologue but I have not found a book on the Bristol stage prior to Jenkins’s, which only deals with eighteenth-century theatre. He may have been referring to William Tyson’s *The Bristol Memorialist*, published in 1823, which offered a section on ‘The Bristol Stage’, but this also concentrates upon the drama in the city in the eighteenth century.¹³³ Tyson appears to have disregarded the Tudor and Stuart drama as the evidence was ‘inaccessible to the literary enquirer’, although like Smith is confident that a previous scholar has detailed these facts, ‘we are chiefly indebted to other publications’.¹³⁴ Like Smith, which is probably whence the direction came, Tyson has acknowledged the existence of performances noted in the Mayors’ Audits from 1532, but decides not to examine these in his volume without giving a valid reason: ‘we are hastily obliged to descend to a much later period, when narrow-minded fanaticism exerted itself to oppose the cultivation of the drama’. However he does hint at later surreptitious playing: ‘which in a comparatively barbarous age found a sanctuary in the cloisters of less hypocritical

¹³¹ Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 5.

¹³² Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 23. The ‘second era’ is categorised as the age of Betterton and starts in 1664 and continues ‘for sixty years’.

¹³³ William Tyson, *The Bristol Memorialist* (Bristol: William Tyson, 1823), pp. 49-55.

¹³⁴ Tyson, *Bristol Memorialist*, p. 49.

devotees' which perhaps occurred in Wine Street.¹³⁵ There are numerous letters on the topic of theatre in Smith's manuscript collection, such as a letter of 26 November 1825 where Tyson offers his advice to Smith on his personal notes, but also suggests the two should 'sit down' to discuss the subject.¹³⁶ To cite Smith, any previous works on Tudor and Stuart theatre have 'completely escaped my researches'.¹³⁷

For his refresher 'prologue', Smith stated clearly that: 'I shall go back no further than 1596 – at which time a licence from our James I was granted to the players'.¹³⁸ Despite this historical inaccuracy, Smith makes some interesting observations, although some of his theories are not substantiated by any other reference points, such as a note included in the first MS. volume which states that he believed there was a playhouse on Broad Street in 1614.¹³⁹ Smith does, however, echo the historians' lament upon the lack of early evidence relating to theatre history, believing that circumstances in London must have 'driven a multitude of players into the provinces – yet all our records are *silent* upon such an event'.¹⁴⁰ The manuscript volume includes payments from the 'Wine Street playhouse' to the Queen's Elizabeth Hospital in note form, but does not elaborate on the data. Perhaps he is confusing the theatre in 'Broad St 1614' with the death of Nicholas Woolfe of the Wine Street venture and the beginning of the payments to the hospital. Smith also notes the common 'fragments' of 6s 8d and 10s paid to the players in the Mayor's Audits, but again does not extrapolate any inference from the payments. He also notes that 'in the first years after Charles the First [the

¹³⁵ Tyson, *Bristol Memorialist*, p. 51.

¹³⁶ Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 78.

¹³⁷ Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 23.

¹³⁹ Note by Smith relating to the operating dates of Bristol's theatres on page 14 of the facsimile copy in Volume I.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 3.

drama] may be looked upon to have been in flourishing condition [...] but it fell under the ban of the Puritans'.¹⁴¹

A study of 1881, *Bristol: Past and Present*, a three-volume work compiled by J. F. Nicholls and John Taylor examines the theatrical history of the city during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.¹⁴² An entire section is dedicated to the 'Stage Plays' and charts the emergence of the practice of the mayors hosting corporate entertainments for public consumption, which:

were at this period performed at the cost of the magistrates; they had grown out the miracle plays of the clergy... [1530] is the first mention of theatrical representations in Bristol, other than the Passion and Mystery plays of the Friars. There being no theatre, the Guildhall was allowed for their use for many years.

However, this examination of Tudor playing by Latimer is marred by a discussion about the possibility of Shakespeare having played at the expense of the Bristol Corporation: 'it seems more than probable that he may have performed with his company at the Guildhall'.¹⁴³

The nineteenth-century historian to have most comprehensively noted the history of the Bristol theatre was John Latimer, in his *Annals of Bristol* series, published in 1887.¹⁴⁴ In the *Annals of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, Latimer describes the early pageantry and civic spectacles of the medieval city and is the first historian to connect the merchant class with corporate entertainment. He also charts the royal progresses

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 23.

¹⁴² J. F. Nicholls and John Taylor, *Bristol: Past and Present*, 3 Volumes, I, 'Civic History' (Bristol, J. W. Arrowsmith, 1881).

¹⁴³ Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol: Past and Present*, I, p. 234.

¹⁴⁴ John Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century* and *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century* (Bristol: the author, 1887; repr. Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970).

and attaches significance to the performative nature of the royal visits.¹⁴⁵ The volume on the seventeenth century examines corporate hospitality, the Wine Street playhouse, observes the decline in royal patronage of travelling players in Bristol, and catalogues instances of travelling players still visiting Bristol in the late 1600s; I will examine Latimer's accounts in further detail later in the thesis, although it must be taken into account that he was writing from a Nonconformist perspective.¹⁴⁶ Latimer also collated information on the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol.¹⁴⁷ However, this work has also been questioned due to his writing style:

Latimer hints rather vaguely at some sort of connection between the Society and the Guild Merchants of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, but he was too good a historian to commit himself in this matter, and his readers have to draw their own conclusions as they peer through the smoke-screen which he created.¹⁴⁸

A later work of 1889 by William Hunt, a study of Bristol as part of the *Historic Towns* series, unfortunately returns to the brief and romanticised past of the Bristol theatre scene. This volume mostly concentrates on the eighteenth-century playhouses, especially Jacob's Wells and the Theatre Royal, but the fleeting reference to early modern theatre relates once again to the myth surrounding the Chamberlains' Men, when among 'visits of several companies of players [...] it has been proved that Shakespeare and his company were here in 1597'.¹⁴⁹ Hunt, like his predecessors, does not attribute any source to this statement. Alfred Harvey, writing in the early years of

¹⁴⁵ John Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 5-10; p. 61; p. 114.

¹⁴⁶ Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 5, 114.

¹⁴⁷ John Latimer, *The History of the Society of the Merchant Venturers of Bristol, with some account of the anterior merchants' guilds* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1903).

¹⁴⁸ Patrick McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* (Bristol: The Society of Merchant Venturers in the City of Bristol, 1975), p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ William Hunt, *Historic Towns: Bristol*, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889), p. 124. The Chamberlain's Men did visit Bristol in September 1597 but one cannot say with any certainty that Shakespeare would have been amongst the strollers in this company.

the twentieth century makes a similar claim, although taking care to state that ‘it is quite possible’ that Shakespeare visited Bristol rather than making a clear comment.¹⁵⁰

Guy Tracey Watts compiled the first history of drama in the city, *Theatrical Bristol*, in 1915.¹⁵¹ This is a comprehensive study of the theatrical history of post-Reformation Bristol, although it makes no reference to any performances prior to the Civil War. G. Rennie-Powell, as mentioned above (page 21), suggested that Shakespeare and his men acted at Bristol in the 1580s but was aware of the arguments for and against the likelihood of this:

on more than one occasion within my memory, the debate turned on the possibility that William Shakespeare having been an actor in the city [...] the supposition mostly favoured was that [...] he found opportunity to associate himself with one of the more cultured bands of strolling players, such as were received with such marked favour upon visiting Bristol.

Yet despite his consciousness of such claims being questioned Rennie-Powell concludes that Shakespeare, after ‘making his initial excursion into the metropolis’ directly appeared ‘at the Globe Theatre, Southwark, A.D. 1586!’¹⁵² Rennie-Powell also does not appear to have referred to earlier works on the city, such as Latimer’s *Annals* as he claims that ‘the earliest mention of a theatre existing in Bristol refers to the ‘playhouse’ situated in Tucker Street’. In fact this reference to Tucker Street was *c.* 1704 and the Wine Street playhouse existed at least one hundred years prior to this incarnation of the Tucker Street venue. M. E. Board published her volume on *The Story of the Bristol Stage 1490-1925* in 1926 as a contribution to the early twentieth-century

¹⁵⁰ Alfred Harvey, *Bristol: A Historical and Topographical Account of the City* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1906), p. 247.

¹⁵¹ Guy Tracey Watts, *Theatrical Bristol* (Bristol: Holloway and Son Ltd., 1915).

¹⁵² Rennie-Powell, *Bristol Stage*, p. 11. The latter sentence is annotated in the copy stored in the Bristol Theatre Museum Collection with an astonished ‘|| ?’ which echoes my own thoughts on reading this passage.

interest in the history of drama in Bristol.¹⁵³ Like most other historians before her, she concentrates on the eighteenth century; however she does devote the first four, out of fifty-seven, pages to the early history of the city, and acknowledges Watts' 1915 study, *Theatrical Bristol*. Although Board declines to engage with Rennie-Powell in the text, a comment about a 'hope' that Shakespeare visited Bristol 'between 1587 and 1603' suggests that the topic remained active in the minds of this theatre historian.¹⁵⁴ She briefly mentions the creation of the Bristol company by patent to John Daniel in 1615, but offers no analysis of the Wine Street playhouse which was in operation at the same time.

It was a further forty years until the subject of Bristol theatre history was once again broached, although the publications of the 1960s centred upon the Theatre Royal in King Street, understandably considering that the oldest working provincial theatre in Britain was celebrating its bicentenary. Kathleen Barker published a history of the early decades of this playhouse in 1961, *Theatre Royal, Bristol: The First Seventy Years*; in collaboration with the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association; she also published a study in 1966 to mark the anniversary, *Theatre Royal Bristol: Decline and Rebirth 1834-1943*, and another study, *The Story of the Theatre Royal King Street opened 1766* in conjunction with the Trustees of the theatre.¹⁵⁵ A later study of 1974 encompassed the entire history of the playhouse, encapsulated in Barker's *Theatre Royal Bristol 1766-1966: Two Centuries of Stage History*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ M. E. Board, *The Story of the Bristol Stage 1490-1925* (London: The Fountain Press, 1926).

¹⁵⁴ Board, *Bristol Stage*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ Kathleen Barker, *The Theatre Royal, Bristol: The First Seventy Years* [pamphlet issued by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1969], *The Theatre Royal Bristol: Decline and Rebirth 1834-1943* [pamphlet issued by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1969], *The Story of the Theatre Royal King Street Bristol Opened 1766* [pamphlet issued by the Trustees of the Theatre Royal Bristol, 1966].

¹⁵⁶ Kathleen Barker, *The Theatre Royal Bristol 1766-1966: Two Centuries of Stage History* (London: The Society For Theatre Research, 1974).

Perhaps her larger study, *Bristol At Play*, was undertaken in the mid-1970s due to the interest in provincial theatre aroused by the REED project; she did not contribute to REED directly, but her research was recognised by the project team.¹⁵⁷ Barker states in the ‘Acknowledgements’ to *Bristol At Play* that she was asked to ‘choose a subject’ which would make the students ‘more aware of Bristol’s long and interesting theatrical history [and] stimulate interest in the multifaceted world of live entertainment in Bristol’.¹⁵⁸ It is obvious from her other works that Barker preferred to concentrate on the later theatre history of the city, as evidenced by her interest in the music hall genre of the late 1800s.¹⁵⁹ However, she covers the early theatre in the opening chapter of *Bristol At Play* which gives a brief overview of performances in Bristol from the mid-fifteenth century to the 1720s. The chapter numbers five pages, which is a short space in which to chart the 259 years of theatre history that the city could claim. Barker’s analysis of ‘Pageants and Players 1461-1729’ acknowledges early instances of playing and, like all theatre historians, regrets that there is ‘no evidence for religious Guild plays in Bristol such as York, Coventry or East Anglia could boast’.¹⁶⁰ There are two paragraphs relating to the instances of professional players visiting Bristol and although Barker offers no explanation for their arrival or analysis of their movements, she does refer to the rewards that they received for their ‘first performance before the Mayor and Aldermen in the Guildhall in Broad Street’ in that they increased as ‘the century wore on’.¹⁶¹ She also does not subscribe to the view that other hopeful theatre historians of the nineteenth century shared: ‘it is very unlikely that Shakespeare himself ever came

¹⁵⁷ ~~REEDN acknowledged the publication of Barker’s article on ‘An Early Seventeenth-Century Provincial Playhouse’ in *Theatre Notebook*, ‘Recent records and articles of special interest’, REEDN, 1976:2, p. 2.~~

¹⁵⁸ Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p. vi.

¹⁵⁹ Barker has published other pamphlet histories of performance from the Victorian era via the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association: *Entertainment in the Nineties*, [1973], *Early Music Hall in Bristol*, [1979], *Bristol’s Lost Empires: The Decline and Fall of Music Hall in Bristol* [1990] and an MS., *The Performing Arts in Five Provincial Towns, 1840-1870* [1982, 432 leaves], featuring information on Brighton, Bristol, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Nottingham and Sheffield.

¹⁶⁰ Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p.

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¹⁶¹ Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p.

2.

to Bristol'.¹⁶² Barker is similar to many of her predecessors, though, in not specifically citing sources for the statements made regarding the existence of John Daniels' Children of Her Majesties Royal Chamber of Bristol or the playhouse in Wine Street.¹⁶³ She is aware of previous historians also not quoting their sources in relation to examples of post-Restoration playing in the city: 'John Latimer in his *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century* has a number of references, not all of which can be verified'.¹⁶⁴

In addition to these individual general county and town studies, there are three specific studies, two published and one unpublished PhD thesis. The earliest of these three, *Drama in Gloucestershire (The Cotswold County): Some account of its development from the earliest times till to-day*, was written by an amateur Gloucester actor and solicitor Theodore Hannam-Clark published in 1928. A review of the book in the *Western Daily Press* of 27 July 1928, described the history of the stage in *Drama in Gloucestershire* as 'more considerate than some writers', probably a reference to the Gloucester antiquarians such as Fosbrooke.¹⁶⁵ Hannam-Clark is explicit in his introduction to *Drama in Gloucestershire* that his work is to encompass the theatrical history of Gloucestershire only, as that of Bristol 'is already fully covered by three books'.¹⁶⁶ This work, it seems, is a contribution to the dramatic history of the region, in dialogue with the three contemporary volumes on Bristol published by Guy Tracey

¹⁶² Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p. 2.

¹⁶³ Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p. 3. She acknowledges that the Bristol Children are mentioned in John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies 1558-1642* but neglects to specify that it is in Volume II, *Provincial Companies*. She also states that information relating to the operation of the Wine Street playhouse as a business may be found in 'a nineteenth-century transcript of Queen Elizabeth Hospital records which have not survived', but unfortunately does not cite the editor of these documents in order that they be traced by later students of the topic.

¹⁶⁴ Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ *Western Daily Press*, Friday 27 July 1928, in the Hannam-Clark papers at Gloucester Archives.

¹⁶⁶ Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, p. xii.

Watts in 1915, G. Rennie-Powell in 1919 and M. E. Board in 1925.¹⁶⁷ Like all scholars of the subject, Hannam-Clark acknowledges the dearth of evidence on drama in the county: ‘so much of the early history is so obscure’. He gives his motive for assembling the volume in the preface to *Drama in Gloucestershire*: ‘I compile this book only because no one else has done it’. Hannam-Clark also justifies his preference for concentrated his researches on the later dramatic performances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: ‘they will interest the public of to-day more, and I am directly familiar with them [...]’.¹⁶⁸ Although, like other theatre historians he often fails to cite his references and sources. This questionable authenticity is frustrating to the modern scholar as his work must also be categorised with the editions of the nineteenth century. Despite admitting in the Preface that he intended not to devote too much time to researching the pre-eighteenth-century drama of Gloucestershire, the first three chapters focused on early pre-Restoration performances; these are under the headings of ‘Religious Plays’ where he cited, although unfortunately offered no comment upon, the playing gear leased by the churchwardens of Tewkesbury Abbey. The chapter on ‘Elizabethan’ theatre noted the entries of patronised players into the Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts and listed the patrons represented by players in the city of Gloucester. A section on ‘Shakespeare’ examined the possibility of a visit to Gloucester by Shakespeare, and commented upon the relationship between Shakespeare and the county of Gloucester, with an index of late revivals of Shakespearean plays which took place on stage in Cheltenham and Gloucester in the early twentieth century. Hannam-Clark’s analysis of the theatrical history of Tewkesbury concentrated primarily upon the 1823 playhouse to the rear of the Wheatsheaf described by James Bennett in 1830, and catalogued the performances there during the 1830s before its conversion into a

¹⁶⁷ Watts, *Theatrical Bristol*, Rennie-Powell, *The Bristol Stage*, and Board, *The Story of the Bristol Stage*.

¹⁶⁸ Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, p. xii.

Sunday School in 1838.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the review of *Drama in Gloucestershire* in the *Western Daily Press* immediately after publication in 1928 asked questions of the evidence relating to Elizabethan and Stuart playing: ‘what personal responsibility [the] noblemen had in the scheme is left to conjecture’.¹⁷⁰

Anthony Denning also researched the dramatic history of the region in the later twentieth century, although he was more site specific in *Theatre of The Cotswolds: The Boles Watson Family and the Cirencester Theatre*, published posthumously in 1993 by Paul Ranger who also had an interest in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gloucestershire theatre.¹⁷¹ Denning’s research begins after Walpole’s Act against theatres in 1737 and charts the history of the Boles Watson family and their relationship with the stage personalities of the day such as Sarah Siddons, Roger Kemble and Edmund Kean who acted both in the provinces and on the London stage. Although this information is not within the time-frame of this thesis, the data contained within it is informative in acknowledging that travelling players remained throughout the south-west region, that the traditions founded in the days of the Elizabethan strolling company remained in Georgian England - ‘the stage would consist of little more than trestles and bales of hay at floor level would serve as box partitions. A gallery, if one were provided, would be improvised from a cart or wagon’ - and that legislation against itinerant performers continued.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, pp. 134-37.

¹⁷⁰ Hannam-Clark, ‘Noblemen’s Players’, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, pp. 40-46; Review article in *Western Daily Press*, 27 July 1928.

¹⁷¹ Anthony Denning, *Theatre in the Cotswolds: The Boles Watson Family and the Cirencester Theatre*, ed. by and extended by Paul Ranger (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1993); Paul Ranger, *Under Two Managers: The Everyday Life of the Thornton-Barnett Theatre Company 1785-1853* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2001). Henry Thornton ran a temporary theatre in Rails Meadow, Tewkesbury [Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 185, n. 13].

¹⁷² Denning, *Theatre In The Cotswolds*, p. 2.

The precursor to my thesis is the 1981 doctoral dissertation of Peter H. Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama in Gloucestershire'. This study, as with all others, opens with an examination of what evidence is lacking from the county, such as the dearth of Quarter Session and archidiaconal court records, a lack of motivation for keeping municipal records in smaller towns such as Tewkesbury and a regret that 'the records which do exist do not give a complete picture of the drama at any particular place and time'.¹⁷³ He also notes that the smaller provincial towns have not previously been worthy of detailed analysis: 'scholarship on the early history of English drama has concentrated almost entirely on the plays performed in a few major cities: London, York and Chester'.¹⁷⁴

Greenfield's thesis is the most detailed examination of the evidence for drama in Gloucestershire uncovered in the extant Gloucester Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts, churchwardens' accounts and household accounts where they exist. The Tewkesbury Abbey churchwardens' accounts are examined in a separate chapter, rather than being compared with the plays at nearby Gloucester. I agree that there must have been an affiliation or community bond between the players who hired the costumes and the Churchwardens, but contrary to Greenfield my reading is that the loans of the costumes were perhaps to professional, or semi-professional, actors who needed to supplement their wardrobe with specific items. In conclusion, Greenfield is encouraged that Gloucester 'still yields the most complete picture of the professional drama outside London' and encapsulates the growth of rural drama and its bond with municipal life:

the Gloucestershire records are especially valuable because they illuminate both the relationship between the players and a provincial city, and the performance conditions there, during the years when professional drama was growing and

¹⁷³ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', pp. 6-7; p. 57.

¹⁷⁴ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 2.

developing toward its greatest moment around the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁷⁵

Although it may appear that Greenfield's thesis is similar to my own, there are a number of differences; Greenfield details all instances of dramatic output which took place in the county in the medieval and Renaissance period, and concentrates on the performances of plays: 'I am concerned myself with who performed, what they performed, when and how they performed. Perhaps more importantly I have also tried to determine why they performed wherever possible'.¹⁷⁶ Conversely, I am concerned with the reaction of the urban authorities to the presence of stage players, whether amateur and professional, and the place in which these productions occurred. Greenfield has assumed that all the dramatic activity in Gloucestershire would be of a similar nature, due to economic and cultural associations; he stated that as 'a county represents a unique and distinct unit' the dramatic occurrences within would be 'naturally related'.¹⁷⁷ I understand why, methodologically, examining all the performances within a single county would allow one to 'present the complete pattern of entertainment in a particular place', but as this thesis will demonstrate, vicinal and economic relations are not always reflected in the cultural production of an area: Gloucester and Tewkesbury are neighbours, yet the insular city attitudes toward civic drama did not cascade to the smaller market town, who appeared to embrace all aspects of communal playing.

A recent general work on the topic by Siobhan Keenan, *Travelling Players in Shakespeare's England*, provides an excellent overview for the student of provincial drama. The apparent deterioration in occasions when perambulatory players called

¹⁷⁵ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 183.

¹⁷⁶ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 5.

upon the mayor during the 1620s and 1630s is a key theme in the book. The final chapter of *Travelling Players* examines the ‘Decline of Professional Touring Theatre’ on the basis that changes in the payments to players indicated deterioration in the frequency of visits. Keenan also suggests that the refusal of mayors to allow players to perform in cities, even though the itinerant companies were compensated when asked to leave, can be interpreted as evidence that the actors were no longer welcome.¹⁷⁸ Keenan appreciates that these patterns are open to question, as her hypothesis is based on a ‘representative sample’ of fifteen volumes of REED and that the familiarity of players in the provinces may not have warranted a reference in the civic records, but is confident that the major companies gave up touring into the 1620s and 1630s.¹⁷⁹ Although *Travelling Players* was published in 2002 - in the first year of my doctoral research - there is very little material which jeopardised the main emphasis of my project; rather the content was a useful tool in the opening stages of my investigation and the ‘decline’ argument serves my project well, as I am examining the reaction of civic authorities to players and the idea of a decline in welcoming players suggests a change in attitudes by the aldermanic bench. However, I am not certain that compensating players to leave does not necessarily indicate a totally hostile reception. Keenan does analyse the Wine Street and Barker playhouses, but principally as rare and ‘striking’ examples of provincial theatres which exist outside of London than as competitive provincial business ventures.¹⁸⁰ The antiquaries and theatre historians of Bristol and Gloucestershire appear to have only recognised staged productions as performances, which is perhaps why the previous studies are more comfortable with discussing the history of the later playhouses; conversely, Keenan considers all of the possible venues, stages and performance spaces available for public and private

¹⁷⁸ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, pp. 165-85.

¹⁷⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 165

¹⁸⁰ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 163.

performance in early modern England, and it is for this research that I am most grateful. *Travelling Players* assesses extant performances and reports of stage plays which took place in the town hall, church, country houses, inns, schools and universities, in addition to markets and game places. Although there is no evidence for performances in all of these types of space in Bristol and Gloucestershire, it is useful to compare nationwide performances and those which occurred in the southwest region.

The most current study on provincial drama is by J. R. Mulryne, in a 2007 article ‘Professional Players in the Guild Hall, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1568-1597’.¹⁸¹ This article is part of a collection in the sixtieth volume of the *Shakespeare Survey* on ‘Theatres for Shakespeare’, although Mulryne’s article is the only one relating to the regional stage in England.¹⁸² Principally, Mulryne’s investigation and this thesis wish to achieve parallel goals, to examine the performances by professional players in a municipal space, to determine why access to this space was refused at the end of the sixteenth century, how far the patron’s influence was felt in the provinces and whether the economic or cultural environment were factors in the frequency of visits by the strolling companies, although I am more concerned with the reception of the itinerant and local players. It is interesting to see that the small Warwickshire town of Stratford-upon-Avon shares similar cultural traits with neighbouring Gloucestershire during the same period, 1568-1597, in that Bristol and Gloucester also permitted players to perform in the principal civic space, that ordinances issued against players which would penalise mayors for continuing the tradition were largely ignored and that the Dudleys and local Midlands patrons were represented with a greater frequency than other troupes. Although there are few comparisons to be drawn between Stratford and

¹⁸¹ J. R. Mulryne, ‘Professional Players in the Guild Hall, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1568-1597’, *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007), 1-23.

¹⁸² There are contributions on theatre history discuss staging in the Rose Theatre, Philip Henslowe and Court theatre and Shakespeare in Japan, in addition to the textual studies.

Tewkesbury, the two towns shared common ground in that they were eclipsed by larger county centres in population and economy, but were close enough to the ‘main inter-urban roads’ to, at least for Stratford and probably Tewkesbury, ‘play host to professional touring theatre’.¹⁸³ Mulryne has concluded, although conceding the available ‘scraps of information’ cannot present the whole picture, that it was the importance of the patron which warranted the amount of rewards that a company received, that the economic and social ‘micro-history’ of the area was not reflected in the frequency of visits by the strolling companies and after the 1597 prohibitions on playing, both the Royal proclamation and a Stratford-issued statute, the players would have obeyed the orders and retreated into the town’s inns.¹⁸⁴ I shall examine the evidence specific to Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol to ascertain whether these three towns underwent similar cultural shifts in the same period.

METHODOLOGY

The principal question I am asking relates to the reaction to and reception of strolling players and other ambulatory entertainers in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol. As there are very few precise examples of whether the governments and clergy of these three towns were sympathetic towards the playing companies, and the majority of information in REED is drawn from the treasurers’ accounts of these towns, I shall use this economic data to determine the financial reaction of the mayors and churchwardens; in the crudest terms, the twenty-first century theatrical event is measured by box office receipts, thus an economic success is a popular play. I shall apply this economic model, such as it is, on to the early modern data. It is not within

¹⁸³ Mulryne, ‘Professional Players in Stratford’, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Mulryne, ‘Professional Players in Stratford’, p. 10; p. 2; p. 11.

the remit of this thesis to analyse every dramatic event which occurred in early modern south-west England, therefore I have chosen to present the data on visiting professionals and community stage players in sections to better compare and contrast the information. Hence, in order to answer the research question on reactions to players simply and effectively I have organised the data into three main chapters, Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol, and structured these case study sections along temporal lines, identifying four main periods of activity at twenty year intervals, therefore allowing the reader to follow the genesis of provincial theatre in Bristol, Gloucester and Tewkesbury and in the region. These crucial turning-points in the theatrical history of the west country are circa 1560, at the dawn of Elizabeth's reign, in the mid-1580s, which has been regarded as the 'flowering' period of national theatre, the close of Elizabeth's reign, and the latter years of Jacobean England. I have chosen these periods for two reasons – there are significant comparisons to be made between the three towns in these stages of history, and for the simple reason that there is much evidence for dramatic and economic activity at these times.

Peter Greenfield has identified the coronation of Elizabeth I in 1558 as the 'watershed' of early modern theatre, and distinguishes Gloucester as a town in which this phenomenon is most notable.¹⁸⁵ It is this period of theatrical history during which the practice of playing became a commercial enterprise and when earlier forms of theatrical expression, such as the antecedent medieval mysteries, municipal guild displays and the Corpus Christi cycle, were superseded by professional secular drama which appealed to a mass audience - the plays with which this thesis is principally concerned. Mark Pilkington also identified this era as conducive to the drama: 'viewing Elizabeth's reign from the vantage point of the twentieth century, one sees a period of

¹⁸⁵ Peter Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 137.

relative peace and prosperity which ultimately supports a renaissance of the arts'.¹⁸⁶ The 'watershed' was, nationally, the product of the royal Proclamations of 1559 which called for regulation of Elizabethan drama. In the first April of her reign, the Queen had 'found it necessary' to prohibit plays for an entire season. All previous orders against playing 'had culminated in a proclamation of May 16, 1599'.¹⁸⁷ This edict 'explicitly established a more definite system of licensing plays', whereby permission must be sought from 'the Mayor or other chiefe officers', namely two Justices of the Peace, to play in the country.¹⁸⁸ The statute meant that the civic authorities had total control over who attempted to play in their town. Elizabeth relied on her local governments to take responsibility for actors: 'the regulation of amusements [was] regarded as falling within the scope of municipal activity'.¹⁸⁹ Bristol had been welcoming players at the Guildhall since 1531, so this probably made little difference to the playing culture in the city. The statute of May 1559 was, noted Andrew Gurr, 'exploited to the full' by the travelling companies, as it gave the players 'access to the largest room in town' and enabled them to 'charge at the door of an enclosed hall much more efficiently than from a scaffold in the marketplace'.¹⁹⁰

Critics, states Paul Whitfield White, are 'fond' of referring to the late 1580s as the 'breakthrough years', marking the 'expansion' and 'flowering' of Elizabethan drama'.¹⁹¹ Robert Weimann regarded the decade as 'the basis of a modern national consciousness and of a newly found creative cultural potential that enriched and

¹⁸⁶ Mark C. Pilkington, 'The Antagonists of English Drama, 1370-1576', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bristol, 1974), p. 382.

¹⁸⁷ Gerald Eades Bentley, *Notes on the History of the Revels Office under the Tudors* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1986), p. 74.

¹⁸⁸ Virginia Crocheron Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1877 [repr. 1908], p. 14.

¹⁸⁹ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 Volumes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), I, p. 271.

¹⁹⁰ Gurr, 'Loss of records', p. 6.

¹⁹¹ White, 'Playing Companies and the Drama of the 1580s', p. 265.

transformed the sixteenth century theatre'.¹⁹² The construction of the Curtain and Theatre in London in the late 1570s may have promoted an interest in the metropolitan companies who were active in the provinces. The formation of the Queen's own personal company in 1583 gave legitimacy to the travelling companies: 'by their mere existence [they] demonstrated the dignity of their art'.¹⁹³

As the commercial aspect of theatre was prospering, suggests Richard Simpson, the stage began to take on a political role as a propaganda tool: 'the English stage was the most important instrument for making opinions heard'.¹⁹⁴ Joan Johnson describes the strolling companies of the south-west nobles as fortunate: 'the wealthiest had their own troupes of players who resided with them and often accompanied them on journeys and visits, but who were free and indeed expected to maintain themselves elsewhere when not needed by their patrons'.¹⁹⁵ Greenfield asserts that the identity of the company's patron was crucial in determining whether the players would actually be granted an audience. He feels that a reciprocal agreement was essential: 'if the patron's reputation helped to guarantee travelling players a welcome and large reward, at the same time the players' travels helped to spread and reaffirm their patron's reputation'. As 'emblems of social hierarchy', the actors enforced a sense of nationalism and majesty upon the provinces, especially those such as Bristol and Gloucestershire that valued their political independence.¹⁹⁶ The liveried actors were not merely spreading

¹⁹² Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. by Robert Schwartz (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 161.

¹⁹³ Muriel Bradbrook, 'The Status Seekers: Society and the Common Player in the Reign of Elizabeth I' in *The Seventeenth-Century Stage: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. by Gerald Eades Bentley (London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 55-118, p. 67.

¹⁹⁴ Richard Simpson, *The School of Shakspeare* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), p. xviii.

¹⁹⁵ Johnson, *Tudor Gloucestershire*, p. 142.

¹⁹⁶ Peter H. Greenfield, 'Touring', in *A New History of Early English Drama* ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 251-68 (pp. 256-57; p. 259).

entertainment to the peoples of the south-west; they were endorsing the power wielded by the gentry.

However, by the end of the century, Elizabeth began to limit the powers of the patrons to endorse itinerant companies, ruling that only barons and men of equal rank could be represented by players who had to have authorisation in writing, which may explain the reduction in recorded instances of travelling players being rewarded in the provinces at the turn of the seventeenth century.¹⁹⁷ The metropolitan companies fared little better; the London Guildhall issued a letter on 28 June 1597 requesting the suppression of stage plays and all playing places.¹⁹⁸ A Privy Council order followed which prohibited any plays for the summer of 1597 and demanded that the playhouses be ‘plucked down’, although the need for players to ‘rehearse’ their court plays ‘preserved the professional stage’ in London until 1603.¹⁹⁹ Chambers regards 1597 as the ‘critical moment at which complete stability was maintained’. By this, he means that the control of drama was centralised in London under royal warrant: ‘from 1597 it was definitely the Crown and not the local authorities’ which determined who played.²⁰⁰ In Bristol, however, the drama was anything but stable as private competition was on the increase, which makes for an exciting period in provincial theatre history.

At her death, all of Elizabeth’s Acts were nullified, and shortly after his succession James I officially rescinded all of the monopolies and grants awarded by his predecessor.²⁰¹ The 1559 proclamation on regional licensing was never formally

¹⁹⁷ 39 Elizabeth, cap 4 (1597-8), cited in Gildersleeve, *Government Regulations*, p. 12.

¹⁹⁸ Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare’s Theatre*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 3.

¹⁹⁹ Thomson, *Shakespeare’s Theatre*, p. 5.

²⁰⁰ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, p. 309.

²⁰¹ Gurr, ‘Loss of Records’, p. 2.

renewed and the Master of the Revels began to oversee all aspects of theatre in England; therefore the mayor was under no legal obligation to welcome travelling players into his town. Gurr suggests that these companies would have been defiant, that they would ‘ignore the corporations and play in their towns without first seeking their authorisation’, which was the ‘spiral leading straight down into departure from the civic records’ although the lack of evidence makes this impossible to quantify.²⁰² With the accession of James I, the attitude of his courtiers towards playing may also have altered. Elizabeth was in favour of acting and sponsored her own troupe. The culture of emulation dictated that any gentleman who sought favour at court, a royal office, or expected to be granted lands by the Queen ought to have a company of his own, which explains the proliferation of travelling players’ rewards in corporate accounts in the later sixteenth century. To be promoted under James, an aspiring courtier had to buy the king’s favour with gifts and rewards, and then he would be permitted to purchase a title. Between 1603 and 1605 the number of knighthoods ‘awarded’ tripled, and in 1611 James invented a new rank, the ‘Baronetcy’, which a gentleman could purchase for £1095.²⁰³ Thus, some patrons could not afford to support a travelling company and secure promotion under the king, whose interest in drama was minimal and then only court-based. By the 1620s, when the ‘decline’ started to be felt in the provinces, the ‘gold-rush’ culture of ennoblement was endemic in James’ court.²⁰⁴ His lavish lifestyle was draining the royal funds, and the nobles were further taxed to compensate, leaving some with little choice but to disband their entertainment retinue. It is unfortunate that there is no extant data to state that the phenomenon of travelling players continued, but the instances of companies attempting to play in the early seventeenth century,

²⁰² Gurr, ‘Loss of Records’, p. 5.

²⁰³ Thomas Munck, *Seventeenth-Century Europe: state, conflict and the social order in Europe, 1598-1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 156.

²⁰⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 187.

although few, suggest that the strollers still considered Bristol and Gloucester to be worthy of a visit.

It was not only the mayors who were ordered to prevent playing; the clergy were also forced to reevaluate their commitment to playing with the instigation of the Church Canons Order 88 of 1604 which forbade communal entertainments on church property, such as plays, church ales, drinkings, ‘or any other profane usage’.²⁰⁵ However, this edict was not fully adhered to by the Gloucestershire clergy, as four Visitation Articles were issued by the Diocese of Gloucester between 1607 and 1624 in an attempt to implement Canon 88 throughout the whole county. I would suggest that the drama remained in the towns where it had fostered a true community culture, such as Tewkesbury and Bristol, but was likely to have declined in Gloucester as the city was suspicious of outsiders and the influence of patrons. Chapters Two, Three and Four will examine the playing culture, as evidenced from the extant records, of Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol and analyse how these three towns reacted to players during these eventful periods in early modern history.

Chapter Two examines the dramatic history of Gloucester, from the early reception of the players of local landowners to the London companies. The city was politically insular, with a narrow-minded mercantile elite, and the discomfort in welcoming the noblemen’s players is palpable. As the 1560s progressed, the same troupes, such as Dudley’s Men and the Queen’s Players, began making regular journeys to Gloucester, identifying the city as one of the important stops on the south-western itinerary. The Corporation also began rewarding the players with extra bonus gifts in addition to the play fees, with drinks and meals in the ‘tavern’, then in the house of the incumbent Swordbearer. The Machen family, who served on the aldermanic

²⁰⁵ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 46.

bench, also appeared to be keen supporters of drama in the city. The 1580s were marked in Gloucestershire by the influence of patrons such as the Earl of Leicester and Lord Henry Berkeley, and the decade began and ended with legislation issued by the Gloucester Corporation which attempted to prevent audacious patrons and their players attempting to influence local affairs. The turbulent relationship between Berkeley and Leicester, I believe, was echoed in the presence of their players in the region. The Corporation grew suspicious of the motives of these patrons, especially Leicester, who twice attempted to manipulate county elections by proposing his own candidate, and ceased the extra municipal rewards for playing. Although the civic accounts are lost from 1597, the years leading up to the last entries reveal that Gloucester was rewarding players with extra gifts again, suggesting that the city had slightly recovered from the attempted coup by Leicester. It is unfortunate that there is no evidence to gauge how the insular city reacted to the new legislation of 1597 which allowed the mayor freedom to deny players an audience, but a refusal in 1624 of a legitimately licensed company suggests that the city was content to refuse players hospitality.

Conversely, Tewkesbury was, according to the available evidence, consistently in favour of drama and Chapter Three will analyse the positive responses to theatre in this north Gloucestershire town. The Abbey churchwardens actively encouraged drama by leasing their extra garments to locals and neighbouring parishes for what appear to have been generously discounted rates. Although there is no identifiable correlation between Elizabeth's coronation and the nascence of drama in Tewkesbury, the instances of playing, as in neighbouring Gloucester, increase in the 1570s and peak in the 1580s. The churchwardens were so receptive to the leasing of the players' garments and props that they ordered extra stock in 1577-8, either to cope with demand or as a special commission for a play. The 1580s were also an eventful decade in the dramatic history

of Tewkesbury; the playing gear was being rented to players from surrounding parishes, suggesting that the stock was in great demand. The payments into the churchwardens' accounts for costume rental cease in 1584-5, but it is also this year in which the town was host to its first recorded municipally-funded play. The Borough Council expended almost four pounds on an event which involved players performing in a town marketplace. I have compared the expenses for this event with a similar public gathering and found that the players, judging by the amount almost certainly spent on their fees, were probably professional travelling players, and probably representing Leicester, as 1584 was his second attempt at securing a political ally in the Gloucestershire government by securing his appointed MP. I also believe that the Whitsun plays of 1600 were performed by a nobleman's company as the expense account for the performances was notably extravagant. Interestingly, these plays were intended as a community fundraising event to repair the church roof, but the churchwardens spent half of the budget on the plays, which proposes that the festivities were intended more as a communal gathering than as an event raising money for a charitable cause. I have also challenged the assumption that these plays took place within the Abbey building in Tewkesbury, and have offered alternative suggestions, such as the privately-rented Abbey House or churchyard. 1600 is the last year in which we have a record of playing, but as the church had been so supportive of drama up until this point it is likely they continued, perhaps in the private residence of the churchwardens in nearby premises, as these incumbents had been incredibly sympathetic towards drama during Elizabeth's reign and may have wished to encourage the practice after the diocesan legislation of Canon 88 prohibited public playing on church property after 1604.

Chapter Four discusses the reception of players by Bristol Corporation and offers new perspectives on previous suppositions about the Wine Street playhouse. Although Bristol had been hosting plays in the Guildhall since at least 1531 and noting the fiscal week in which the performances took place, a change was felt in the city's entertainment calendar in 1560 when a recognisable pattern can be identified with neighbouring Gloucester. By the 1570s, the Corporation demonstrated their support of drama by entering the exact titles of the plays into the Mayor's Audits, perhaps in dialogue with the opening of the London playhouses. The excitement of visits by the metropolitan companies caused damage to the fabric of the Guildhall, but this did not appear to initially deter the mayor from welcoming players. However, there was a slump in the number of recorded performances in the records from 1581, the year when Nicholas Woolfe took out a lease on a property in Wine Street which would later become the city's first independent playhouse. Despite the lack of recorded visits by strolling companies to the Guildhall in the 1580s, the Corporation decided to issue ordinances against the practice; repeats of these orders were issued again in 1595-6. This certainly suggests that private, unrecorded performances were either taking place in the Guildhall, or somewhere else in the city. The frequency of municipally-endorsed playing increases again after 1597, which was either a consequence of the regulations against London theatres which drove more playing companies into the provinces, or just because the Wine Street playhouse was being renovated. The playhouse was in operation until at least ten years after Woolfe's death in 1614; I believe it relocated into nearby premises in 1626 under the temporary management of the Corporation, perhaps until Woolfe's son came of age. Another playhouse in Redcliffe Hill suburb, south of the Avon, was contemporaneously constructed as, it is thought, a rival to Woolfe's central city venture. The civic records for Bristol boast few entries for travelling players in the Stuart reign, doubtless due to competition from these two venues, but all

visits by itinerant companies were rewarded, whether the company played or not, proving that the city was still receptive to players. I shall analyse the players and playing places in early modern Bristol to identify the responses by the authorities and the motives behind opening independent playhouses, whether the owners of these private places were responding to a lack of venue for the number of companies who were visiting the city, or merely replacing traditional corporate hospitality with commercial premises.

Mary Blackstone stated in the early stages of the REED project in 1981 that although there is sufficient evidence to create general conclusions about playing, performances and itineraries, there is not enough evidence in the provincial municipal account books to determine whether the civic authorities had positive or negative responses to players: there is 'little detail concerning the reception of the performers' or their 'general behaviour'.²⁰⁶ However, I hope that the fusion of playing data for Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol, in addition to the economic and political history of the region in the Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns illuminates the vigour and success of the drama in the towns, as evidenced by the rewards to and reception of professional travelling players from the 1560s to the 1630s and demonstrates the evolution of provincial drama from public spaces to private playhouses. The final section of the thesis will compare and contrast the payment to the strolling companies and the recorded expenses of the plays, events and venues in Gloucester, Bristol and Tewkesbury to ascertain how the urban centres reacted to theatrical events in the region. The framework will be the same as the main body of the essay, in chronological order to examine the attitudes of the clergy and corporations throughout the period, and the final sub-section will conclude with how each town responded in general to local

²⁰⁶ Blackstone, 'Patron's calendar', p. 8.

and national legislation, changes in governmental personnel, to the patronage nexus and economic fluctuations.

CHAPTER TWO

***“Believe me, noble lord, I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire”*:¹ Early Modern Drama in the County Capital**

From the sparse and frustratingly ill-recorded evidence that remains we can deduce that Gloucester welcomed itinerant playing companies from the 1560s to the 1590s and paid them the going rate but, with the exception of a few years, did not feel it necessary to note any precise dates. The Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts are valuable in their recording of the noble patron whom the players represented and how much the companies were rewarded with the most interesting information noted in these accounts relates to the extraneous expenses bestowed upon the travelling players, such as food and drink in local hostelries. I believe that these payments to the strolling companies representing the Queen and her favourites are demonstrative of the importance that the mayor attached to these players in attaining political favour. Peter Greenfield has commented that nowhere more than in Gloucester is the watershed of Elizabethan civic playing most evident; I also hope to establish that the reception of the players by the mayor was an Elizabethan phenomenon and simply a means of courting the important patrons of the time, and that the reception of players may have been dictated by individual civic dignitaries. Gloucester was a town noted for its economic isolationism and insular politics, thus the response to outsiders by the Corporation is extremely interesting. As there is no evidence for corporate playing after 1597, I shall examine other economic, cultural and social data where it exists, and the effect of local and national theatrical patronage to determine whether playing may have continued into the seventeenth century.

¹ *Richard II*, II:iii, ll. 2-3.

In examining the financial rewards presented to playing companies, as recorded in the civic records, it appears that the players were well received in the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign. A number of companies were also entertained in local taverns and private premises at civic expense, as well as having their temporary stages constructed for the performances in the Boothall. The phenomenon of providing extra bonuses to the troupes dwindles towards the end of the 1570s, curiously as the Corporation begins to attribute precise dates to the performances. I shall examine why the records changed and whether it was a change in personnel in the mayor's office and the Boothall which occasioned the different attitude. Certain companies visit Gloucester frequently, some almost annually, and I shall enquire as to whether this was due to the influence of certain patrons. The Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts for the mid-1580s reveal an eventful cultural calendar, with visits by the major travelling companies. The Gloucester records for this decade are remarkable in that many of the performances are precisely dated, and the period begins and ends with legislation specifically directed at players; the Ordinance of 3 November 1580 aimed to curb dramatic performances aside from the mayor's play and a second edict of 20 August 1591 reinforced the points made in 1580 with the additional directive to prevent playing on a Sunday. The very fact that such measures were required raises the question of control in early modern Gloucester and is certainly suggestive of a vibrant, and perhaps private, dramatic culture prevalent in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Interestingly, the 1580s claim some quite remarkable attempts by Robert Dudley to gain land and political favour in Gloucestershire. Dudley made a claim for the Berkeley lands in the south of the county during the late 1570s and twice tried to influence the choice of the Gloucester MPs, in 1580 and 1584. I believe that the patronage phenomenon may have been embodied at Gloucester; it is possible that the players of the Earl of Leicester and his intimate circle may have played in the Boothall

in order to court the favour of the mayor and to make the city aware of Leicester's munificence. Certainly the ordinance of November 1580 was issued by the Gloucester Corporation to combat a potential threat of public disorder by the audience, but also to check the ambitions of the patrons whose players were representing them. The publication of the 1580 ordinance was also perhaps as a consequence of Leicester's first attempt at influencing their choice of MP in the same year, although it did not prevent Leicester from making a second challenge in securing his own MP for the city. Despite the lack of extant evidence for playing post-1597, it may be surmised that it continued in the city for at least the final years of Elizabeth's reign. However, a study of the use of the Boothall into the Jacobean reign reveals that the building was now dedicated to the exercising of justice and was employed as a court and house of correction. I intend to argue that once the enthusiasm for civic playing had waned under the rule of James I, Gloucester withdrew into herself again.

Venues

The principal venue for municipal entertainment and mayor's plays was the Boothall on Westgate Street which had acted as the Guild Hall and Market Hall for all of Gloucester's business since the Middle Ages. The building was known as 'the Bothal' or 'Gild Hall' in Canon Robert Cole's 1455 survey of Gloucester lands, but thereafter was the Boothall, noted as such when it was rebuilt in 1530 and beyond.² The Boothall not only served the business community but also housed a tavern within its walls. The main body of the Boothall Inn faced west towards old Castle Lane, and was adjacent to the Hall which stood behind. Both properties, the Boothall and the Inn, could be

² Barbara Drake, 'The Booth Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester, *Gloucestershire Historical Studies*, 13 (1982), 44-50 (p. 45); Robert Cole, *Rental of all the Houses in Gloucester AD. 1455 from a roll in the possession of the Corporation of Gloucester* ed. and trans. by W. H. Stevenson (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1890), p. 47. Cole was the Canon of Llanthony Priory, to the south of Gloucester city.

accessed from Westgate Street.³ The inn was once known as The Bear and lay next door to the Hall; it was incorporated into the entire structure during the refurbishment in 1530.⁴ By 1455 the Boothall inn was being leased by private individuals, the first recorded tenant being Philip Fleet.⁵ In 1552, by the time professional players were being rewarded in the neighbouring hall, James Webbe held the deeds.⁶ The eye-witness account, *Mount Tabor* by Willis in which he recalls a performance in the Boothall from his youth, reveals the staging possibilities for the playing space (see page 11). The first physical clue one receives from the extract in *Mount Tabor*, on the ‘play upon which I saw as a child’ is that there were benches provided for at least some of the audience, as Willis’ father watched the play whilst seated with the author standing between his legs. From this position, Willis could see and hear ‘very well’, suggesting that he was either close to the front or that there were sufficient vantage-points throughout the room.⁷ Peter Greenfield believed that ‘Willis’ father enjoyed no special status’ and therefore ‘the benches were not special seating for the privileged’.⁸ Conversely, Theodore Hannam-Clark believes that the father was ‘probably [...] Preb[end] Henry Willis, B. D., of Gloucester Cathedral’.⁹ From the text, it appears that the Boothall had two stage doors, one being ‘at the farthest end of the stage’, and that the stage itself was raised from the floor of the Boothall, as Willis describes the actors walking ‘in a soft pace about by the skirt of the Stage’. However, Greenfield believes

³ See Appendix, ‘Gloucester Boothall and Inn’.

⁴ *GBR* J1 / 1207; II/41 f. 56v, ‘Land in Westgate Street near the Bear Inn, upon which part of the Boothall is newly built’.

⁵ Cole’s *Rental*, p. 47.

⁶ Drake, ‘Boothall’, p. 45.

⁷ R. Willis, *Mount Tabor. or Exercises of a Penitent Sinner*, p. 98.

⁸ Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama in Gloucestershire’, p. 172.

⁹ Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, p. 36; There was a Henry Willis in the Gloucestershire clergy: he was a vicar at Toddington (S. Rudder, *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester*, p. 353). James Brooks, Bishop of Gloucester after Hooper’s dismissal, deprived this Henry Willis of his prebend in June 1554 on account of his marriage, *Notes on the Diocese of Gloucester by Chancellor Richard Parsons c.1700* ed. by John Fendley (The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeology Society Gloucestershire Record Series Volume 19, 2005), p. 435. However, if Willis had been deprived of his prebend, he would still not have been entitled to a special place.

that the skirt referred to the vertical side of the stage and that the presence of benches rules out the idea of an elevated stage.¹⁰

By the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, the publican Robert Ingram was leasing 'all that inn and great tenement'.¹¹ Perhaps it was the association of the Boothall Inn with Robert Ingram which occasioned the professional actors 'playing openly' in the Boothall in 1559-60. The Queen's Men were rewarded with ten shillings, and a further five shillings and seven pence were expended 'for a banquet the same day by the saide maire & aldermen at the taverne'.¹² Although there is no specific tavern mentioned in the records it is more than likely that the players would be entertained in the inn adjacent to the playing space. Ingram also owned a property west of the Boothall, now 101 Westgate Street, where Bishop Hooper had lodged prior to his execution in nearby St. Mary's Square; Robert's wife Agnes Ingram had been given money by Gloucestershire landowner Sir Anthony Kingston to provide wine for the 'event' in 1555.¹³ By 1561-2, Robert Ingram, innkeeper, was recorded as being personally involved in the theatrical life of the Boothall. He was paid three pence for a pound of candles to light the hall when the Queen's Men played and the company were rewarded with four shillings' worth of victuals at the tavern, which one again presumes was Ingram's premises within the building. This payment also indicates that Ingram may have been involved with a night performance, a practice which the Ordinance of 1580 sought to suppress. In providing the players with drinks after the show, Ingram could put the income towards the rent, so it was in his interest to gain money from the

¹⁰ See Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', pp. 172-76, for a full analysis of his theories on the staging of this play.

¹¹ Drake, 'Boothall', p. 45.

¹² *REED Glos.*, p. 298.

¹³ An extract from the accounts of the Chamberlain of the City of Gloucester, cited in Anthony Wherry, *Four Hundred Years of Gloucestershire Life* (Gloucester: The Historical Association [Cheltenham and Gloucester Branch], 1971), p. 40. Robert Ingram's house is 101 Westgate Street, now the Gloucester Folk Museum. A Gloucester Corporation blue plaque states that this house, which lies opposite the Church of St. Nicholas, was 'Bishop Hooper's Lodgings'.

enterprise. As the leaseholder of the inn, Ingram was expected to supply refreshments for civic occasions from his own purse, as the ‘tenant was to provide at his own cost a cake made with ½ bushel of wheat flour and to be distributed with wine and ale to mayor etc. on day of election of offices of the city at the [ex] “chequer” within the Boothall’.¹⁴ It would seem likely that the corporate award for entertaining the players would have compensated for some of these losses. Robert Ingram died in 1567 and his son, also Robert, took over the lease although he signed for the inn only; the judicial chambers were exempt from the rental contract. The wording of the indenture of the renewal depicts the layout of the building. Aside from the inn, the Boothall had three halls: one large room where the plays would conceivably be performed, a smaller one sometimes called the ‘shreeve hall’, and an election chamber at the top of the stairs.¹⁵ Even if Ingram did not necessarily instigate the surplus rewards to the professional players, he certainly would have benefited should they have dined and/or lodged in his premises. The Boothall underwent a refurbishment, perhaps to accommodate the players and better class of company which the city was welcoming: ‘by 1580 there seems to have been an extensive restoration and enlargement to the Boothall, with 4s additional rent on the rebuilding of the stables’.¹⁶ There were further alterations made in 1584-5, as there are accounts for ‘reparations don about the new yarn house at the Boothall’.¹⁷

¹⁴ *GBR* J3/ f. 114-115. The transfer of the Boothall to Robert Ingram, Jnr, was accepted by the Council, but ‘the great hall and little hall commonly called the Shire Court Hall and election chamber’ remained City property.

¹⁵ 26 August 1569: ‘An Indenture between the City and Robert Ingram’, in *REED Glos.*, endnote to p. 298, p. 423.

¹⁶ Drake, ‘Booth Hall’, p. 46.

¹⁷ Robert Abbott, ‘Excavations at the Shire Hall site, Gloucester, 1965’, *TGBAS*, 86 (1967), 95-101 (p. 97).

1560
The 'Watershed' of Professional Playing in Gloucester

Although there are only corporate records in existence for Gloucester from 1550, the first accounts of playing in the city between the beginning of the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts and 1560 demonstrates the pivotal turning-point in provincial playing to which Peter Greenfield refers, citing 1558 as 'the watershed year so far as Gloucester's patronage of professional drama was concerned'.¹⁸ Indeed, Greenfield identifies the city as having the most prominent transformation of all of the provincial towns in increasing the frequency of visits by strolling players: 'nowhere besides Gloucester does the beginning of this increase so closely correspond with Elizabeth's succession'.¹⁹ An examination of the Gloucester Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts contained in REED for the 1550s and 1560s demonstrates that the accession of Elizabeth did correspond with a change from local players acting before the mayor to an almost immediate identification of an itinerary between Bristol and Gloucester followed by the majority of the professional travelling players. The evidence for the 1550s and the 1560s provides a marked comparison between the mayor welcoming players representing local patrons and MPs before 1558 and the increase in the frequency of patronised noblemen's companies after 1559.

An examination of these performances and associated payments may reveal the changing attitudes of the mayor and aldermanic bench after the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558, and whether the seemingly positive responses to the travelling players of noblemen were affected by a love of drama or merely deference to the patron the itinerant companies represented:

¹⁸ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 136.

¹⁹ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 138.

FISCAL YEAR	COMPANY PERFORMING	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS
1550-1	Kingston's Abbot of Misrule Kingston's Men	10s 5s
1551-2	Kingston's Men	10s
1552-3	Kingston's Men King's Jester Arnold's Servants William Tell & Servants Morris Dancers	6s 8d 5s 20s 6s 8d 5s
1553-4	Players of the City	6s 8d
1554-5	Queen's Jester	3s 4d
1555-6	Queen's Men	6s 8d
1558-9	Chandos' Men	6s 8d
1559-60	Queen's Men Ambrose Dudley's Men	10s – playing openly [plus nails, scaffold & banquet] 6s 8d – playing openly

Table 1: Payments to performers in Gloucester, 1550 to 1560.

In the years 1550-1 to 1552-3 there only records of corporate-funded entertainment on traditional feast days, such as Christmas and May Day, in the Corporation Chamberlain Accounts. There are sporadic entries for other entertainers such as jesters and trumpeters, whose patrons were important in Gloucestershire. The performers representing Sir Anthony Kingston dominated the early years of the recorded Gloucester performances, which is no surprise as he was MP for the city between 1547 and 1553. Kingston was also a member of the Council of Wales, was the Provost Marshall under Henry VIII and chief steward of Tewkesbury, and his seat was at Painswick to the south of Gloucester.²⁰ Therefore allowing his men to perform in the city would have reflected well on the mayoralty. Greenfield does not believe that these men were professional strollers, as they 'have never been noticed anywhere else', but were more likely regular servants of Kingston, 'who put on amateur performances for their lord's entertainment on important feast days, and were allowed to take their play

²⁰ Joan Johnson, *Gloucestershire Gentry*, p. 107-8; 'Patrons and Companies', *REED Glos.*, p. 447.

into the city for the further amusement of the populace'.²¹ Thus the principal playing company performed exclusively for the people of Gloucester.

Nicholas Arnold, an MP along with Kingston, also retained a troupe of players who were recorded as appearing in Gloucester in the 1550s; these 'servants' received a sum of twenty shillings for May Day festivities in 1553.²² Arnold resided at Highnam Court, an estate on the outskirts of Gloucester, two miles north-west of the city towards the Royal Forest of Dean.²³ Greenfield states that Arnold's players 'must have been especially adept at some form of the May Game'. Equally, he feels that their appearance in Gloucester was a manifestation of the ruler asserting his power over the ruled: 'they borrowed the May Game from the common people to use it as an entertainment for their lord, who then returned it to the common people as a gesture of condescension'.²⁴ This reading of the May Day tradition suggests that members of the Gloucestershire gentry were co-opting a traditional festival in order to control the proceedings. This may well explain why travelling players were not recorded in the city before the reign of Elizabeth: the Corporation may not have been able to influence the troupe or guarantee the reception of the audience. Gloucester, as capital of the inshire, seems to have had no desire for any outside influence on its affairs, political, economic or cultural, and in the early 1550s chose only to reward the companies with which it had political affiliation.

1553-4 saw the first potential independent company to perform in Gloucester, but they were not professional players of a nobleman. They were recorded as 'pleyers of the Citie' and rewarded with 6s 8d. Unfortunately, nothing more is known of this

²¹ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 39.

²² *REED Glos.*, p. 297.

²³ *REED Glos.*, endnote to p. 297; [GBR F 4/3 f 30], p. 423.

²⁴ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', pp. 39-40.

independent group. Greenfield speculates that they may have been Kingston's Men under a different guise, and that they had lost their noble patronage, thus 'the players fell back on the city that had been their primary means of support'.²⁶ As the players are not recorded as playing in any other town, it may have been that Gloucester adopted Kingston's Men after they were made redundant, as they retained their influence in the city and were already familiar with the standards of procedure for civic performances. Gloucester retained its predisposition towards local players until the early 1560s; Edmund Brydges, the second Lord Chandos, was appointed Lord Lieutenant of the county in May 1559, and this fact may have influenced mayor Henry Machen to choose these players in honour of the new county official.²⁷ I would suggest that the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts began to record the names and payments to players and extra rewards to those who appeared after 1558 as a tangible record of dramatic support for patronised troupes, lest there were to be an audit of some kind to ascertain which towns were most supportive of strolling companies.

In the 1550s, the average payment to a company of players was 6s 8d. However, there are instances when companies receive a lower rate, such as a five shilling reward to Kingston's Men, or a higher one, when Nicholas Arnold's servants received twenty shillings. These fluctuations in payments demonstrates that there was no set rate for rewarding players and suggests that the mayor was exercising his discretion in paying the local companies. The three payments to Kingston's Men between 1550-1 and 1552-3, 5s, 10s, and 6s 8d respectively, certainly indicate that the company did not arrive at Gloucester expecting a set reward for performing. It is possible that the difference in the amount rewarded reflected the number of players,

²⁶ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 135.

²⁷ Anon. 'Lords Lieutenant of Gloucestershire' in 'Notes' *TBGAS*, 70 (1951), p. 154. Edmund Chandos was appointed on 10 May 1559 until his death in 1573, where the office lapsed until 1586, 'doubtless owing to threatened invasion by Spain'.

the quantity of performances or the personal preference of the mayor serving in that year, but without further evidence this is only speculation. The Queen's Men visited in 1555-6, representing Queen Mary, and were rewarded with the average reward of 6s 8d, the same as the companies playing on behalf of Lord Chandos and the city's own acting company. However, it is the entry into the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts after Elizabeth's succession which suggests that the Council were taking more of an interest in the drama itself, or at least deemed it appropriate to stress their support of patronised companies in the treasury account book. Although the dates of the performances were not noted in these records, it may be supposed that the performance by the Queen's Men in 1559-60 took place after the national legislation of 16 May 1559 was issued, directing the local authorities, by the approval of two Justices of the Peace, to licence individual playing companies (see page 51). The standard procedure appeared to have been that the mayor and aldermen would grant the licence on the proviso that these civic officials witnessed a production of the play before it was permitted to be played elsewhere in the city for the private profit of the itinerant companies. This first production has been referred to as the 'mayor's play'. It is not known whether members of the general public were always allowed to be present for this play. However, as emphasis was placed on the players of Queen Elizabeth and Ambrose Dudley 'by commaundement of mr mayre' performing 'openly in the bothall', it is presumed that the citizens of Gloucester were welcome at the production.

The two entries relating to corporate-sponsored entertainments after 1559 are, I suggest, indicative of a change in attitude to players, although it cannot be ascertained whether the munificent reception towards the Queen's Men and Ambrose Dudley's Men was forced or voluntary. Certainly, the purchase of hundred nails and a four-penny allowance for the creation of the scaffold in addition to a supplementary banquet in the

tavern at a cost of 5s 7d for the Queen's Men and/or audience may be interpreted as municipal generosity towards the players, and by proxy, their patron.²⁸

An examination of the payments to players by the Gloucester Corporation in the 1560s demonstrates that the practice of rewarding itinerant companies, and permitting extra bonuses, had become commonplace:

FISCAL YEAR	COMPANY PERFORMING	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS	EXTRA EXPENSES
1561-2	Queen's Men	10s	4s in the tavern To Robert Ingram for candles, 3d
	Warwick's Men	10s	Banquet & scaffold, 4s 2d
	Robert Dudley's Men	13s 4d	Tavern & scaffold, 4s 8d
1562-3	Duchess of Suffolk's Men	10s	20d in the tavern Scaffold & nails, 4s 8d
1563-4	Warwick's Men	10s	Wine in the tavern, 3s
	Lord Cobham's Men	5s	
1564-5	Queen's Men	16s 8d	Scaffold, 4d
	Strange's Men	10s	
1565-6	Lord Hunsdon's Men	12s 8d	Inclusive of scaffold and drinking Wine & Cherries at Mr Swordbearer's, 2s 4d
	Queen's Men	13s 4d	
1567-8	Worcester's Men	12s 6d	103 quarters of elm boards for a scaffold, 8s Inclusive of drink at Mr Swordbearer's Inclusive of drink
	Queen's Men	16s 2s	
1568-9	Sir Andrew Fortescue's Men	10s	2s 6d on drink
	Lord Mountjoy's Men	2s 4d	
	Worcester's Men	13s 4d	
1569-70	Queen's Men	13s 4d	2s 6d 'also spent on them'
	Leicester's Men	13s 4d	
	Sussex's Men	10s	

Table 2: Payments to Performers in Gloucester, 1560 -1570.

²⁸ REED *Glos.*, p. 298.

By the mid 1560s, Gloucester was welcoming players of quality and the Queen's Men made an almost annual visit to the city; in 1564-5 they were paid 16s 8d and had a scaffold erected and dismantled for them; and in 1565-6 they received 13s 4d. The players were also entertained at corporate expense, but in this instance not in 'the taverne'. For the first time, these strollers were received at another residence, although still paid for out of the 'gifts and necessary expenses' account. The property was the house of the Swordbearer, a civic office which had been filled since 1486. It was mostly a ceremonial position, as the incumbent was responsible for bearing the city sword before the mayor on civic occasions. The man who was elected to serve as Swordbearer from 1550-1 to 1570 was Abell Haryott, although unfortunately 'there is not an account of when he was elected or who he was'.²⁹ In examining the rental receipts of Gloucester Corporation, I have discovered that Haryott resided close to the Boothall, as he leased a 'cottage or stable in Key lane' from 1560.³⁰ Quay Lane [now Quay Street] lies parallel [south] to Westgate Street and runs eastwards from Castle Lane [Upper Quay Lane, now Upper Quay Street] bordering the Boothall, to the Quay of the River Severn.³¹ The Queen's Men were the first company to be welcomed at Haryott's house in 1565-6. In the year 1567-8, the players of the Earl of Worcester had their 'drinkyng' rewarded at 'Mr Swordberers'.³² The role was 'hardly lucrative' for Haryott, as he received an annual stipend of 26s 8d, but the mayor was also bound to 'find him meat and drink'. After Haryott's death in 1570, John Taylor, a vintner, was accepted into the office as it seemingly would have benefited the council to allow a man who had experience in the licensed trade to entertain their important guests. Taylor's annual wage also increased

²⁹ C. H. Dancey, 'The Maces, Swordbearer, and Swords of the City of Gloucester', *TBGAS*, 24 (1901), 308-329 (p. 313).

³⁰ *GBR J3*/ f. 118.

³¹ Quay Lane and Upper Quay Lane are marked as such on the 1780 map by R. Hall and T. Pinnell, shown in L. E. W. O Fullbrook-Leggatt, 'Medieval Gloucester', *TBGAS*, 66 (1945), 1-48 (facing p. 16); see Appendix, Map I.

³² *REED Glos.*, p. 300.

dramatically, to fifty-three pounds and four shillings, perhaps reflecting new duties or personal expenses incurred by the role, such as accommodating travelling players.³³

Two instances of corporate-funded amusement were recorded at ‘the swordberers’ in the 1570s; on 20 September 20 1571, the thirst of the Lieutenant of the Tower’s Men was quenched there, and the Queen’s Men also frequented the house in 1571-2.³⁴ John Taylor ‘lived at one time in the large mansion in the Westgate Street, at the east end of St. Nicholas’ Church’, a house which boasted a ‘fine Tudor mantel-piece’ and was rumoured to have been ‘where Elizabeth lodged on her progress of 1574’.³⁵ She is also thought to have held court there during her stay.³⁶ Thus the Queen was accommodated in the very house where the players were entertained, equating the players of royalty/nobility with the patrons themselves. This property was later known as St. Nicholas House, 100 Westgate Street, and is directly north-west of the Boothall site therefore in close proximity to the early modern performance space.³⁷ It is opposite 101 Westgate Street, which was Robert Ingram’s residence in the 1550s and is now a large public house called The Dick Whittington, as relatives of the eponymous mayor of Gloucester once resided there.³⁸ Fullbrook-Leggatt has suggested that entertaining the players at his house was a ‘duty of the mayor’s swordbearer’, but it is just as possible that the serving Swordbearers were happy to receive the noblemen’s players into their houses to gain personal prestige and be entertained at corporate expense in their own lodgings.³⁹

³³ Dancey, ‘Swords’, p. 314.

³⁴ *REED Glos.*, p. 302.

³⁵ Dancey, ‘Swords’, p. 314; ‘Some Old Gloucester Houses’, *Proceedings at Malmesbury and Sherston*, *TBGAS* 26 (1903), p. 53.

³⁶ Philip Moss, *Historic Gloucester*, p. 84.

³⁷ See Appendix, Plate I.

³⁸ See Appendix, Plate II.

³⁹ Fullbrook-Leggatt, ‘Medieval Gloucester’, p. 262.

It was also in the 1560s that the influence of the patron became an important factor in rewarding the itinerant playing companies. The players of Robert and Ambrose Dudley, Earls of Leicester and Warwick respectively, performed at Gloucester in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. Leicester's Men received 6s 8d in 1560-1 and 13s 4d in 1561-2; Warwick's Men earned 6s 8d in 1559-60, 10s in 1561-2 and 10s in 1563-4. In addition to this income, the players of the Dudleys were also entertained at the tavern on occasion and had scaffolds erected for them in the Boothall.⁴⁰ These two companies were perhaps welcomed handsomely in the city due to their political affiliations with the outlying county. Via an ancestral connection to the Lisle family through their father John, the Dudley brothers had laid claim to lands in Wotton-under-Edge and Symondshall in south Gloucestershire. In order to assert their firm hold on the county, Leicester and Warwick removed Wotton and ten other manors from the traditional 'hundred' area of Berkeley, a subdivision of Gloucestershire county. John Smyth commented that 'so great was Leicester's hold' on the politics of provincial England that the rightful heir to the estates, his employer Lord Berkeley, was unable to annul this act until the death of Elizabeth.⁴¹ The frequent presence of companies who represented patrons with whom Gloucester had political affiliations is indicative of an early insight by Gloucester Corporation that satisfying the needs of the professional strolling companies may have had other benefits for city and county politics. When the trumpeter of Henry Sidney, the Lord President of the Marches played in Gloucester in 1560-1 to

⁴⁰ *REED Glos.*, pp. 298-99. 4s 2d was spent on a banquet and a scaffold for Warwick's Men in 1561-2, Leicester's Men were rewarded with 3s 8d worth of wine and scaffold in the same year. In 1563-4, Warwick's Men also had 3s of wine provided for them.

⁴¹ John Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys from 1066 to 1618 [1628]*, 3 Volumes, ed. by John Maclean (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1883-1885), II, p. 372. A John Smyth also appears in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts in 1560-1, as he is noted as giving 4s in 'redye moneye' to the players of Sir Andrew Fortescue. The only John Smyth/Smith noted in the aldermanic records joined the bench in 1577, which suggests that John Smyth, the steward of Lord Henry Berkeley, was in attendance at this performance, perhaps with his employer. The identity of Andrew Fortescue has not been established. [*REED Glos.*, 'Patrons and Companies', p. 443]. Perhaps he was a kinsman of Lord Berkeley which may explain the presence of Smyth at the Boothall. Fortescue's Men played again in 1568-9 and were paid 10s for the performance with an additional 2s 4d for 'theire drincking' [*REED Glos.*, p. 301].

mark the arrival of Sidney, he was rewarded with two shillings. Understandably the city was more generous to his patron who received a gift of a hogshead of claret, which had a market value of 49s 8d. 1560-1 also saw the last payment for some years to entertainers representing a local magnate and Elizabethan favourite; the minstrels of 'Justyce Trogmerton' received two shillings.⁴² The Gloucestershire Throckmortons were closely affiliated to the Elizabeth and John Throckmorton, to whom the entry in the Corporation Chamberlain's Accounts refers, had attempted to rob the Exchequer in 1556 to fund a rebellion against Queen Mary.⁴³ Under Elizabeth, John Throckmorton acted as an emissary to France in 1559 and was the first diplomatic envoy of his time.⁴⁴ His seat was at Lypiatt, south of Stroud.⁴⁵

Although there are no specific references to the titles of the plays performed in Gloucester, there is an interesting entry in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts in 1563-4 which deserves a brief analysis. There is a single mention of a 'lord of misrule of highnam', which is likely to have been another reference to Nicholas Arnold whose seat was at Highnam. The payment does not refer to an actual performance, but perhaps a script for a production scheduled to take place in the Gloucester Boothall. It appears that there was a delivery of an item - 'golden sommes [to] parchment' - for which the 'one that brought' it received 12d. Unfortunately is not clear whether this 12d was for the dispatch of the parchment, for its contents, or both. Equally unfortunate is that Greenfield has not alluded to the entry in the endnotes to the Gloucestershire volume of REED although the fact that it is transcribed must suggest that he viewed the reference as significant to the dramatic history of the county; however, it is possible that the

⁴² REED *Glos.*, p. 298.

⁴³ REED *Glos.*, 'Patrons and Companies', p. 456; A. L. Rowse, *Raleigh and the Throckmortons* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 23.

⁴⁴ Rowse, *Throckmortons*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Rowse, *Throckmortons*, p. 190.

reference to the 'lord of misrule' as opposed to the parchment which may have warranted its inclusion by Greenfield in the REED volume for Gloucestershire. Nevertheless, there may have been a script for 'golden sommes' [sums/suns/sons, most likely summers] provided by Arnold to Gloucester Corporation. It is also interesting that the account for this receipt is logged in 'Payments' as opposed to the 'Gifts and necessary expenses' ledger which records of performances are recorded in. Greenfield has noted in his analysis of the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts that these entries for entertainment expenses noted in 'General Payments' were 'for constructing stages and other preparations for performances' as opposed to the other disbursements for the actual shows.⁴⁶ Therefore the parchment, or its delivery, may have been purchased as material for a performance. Arnold had been involved in a May Day celebration in 1553 and may have retained some interest in civic theatre in Gloucester. The players of Warwick and Lord Cobham were recorded as playing in the fiscal year 1563-4, but it is not clear whether 'golden sommes' was acted or spoken by either of these troupes.

There is little evidence for the economic structure of Gloucester in the 1560s, although from what is extant, the city appears not to have been very prosperous. An ecclesiastical census, conducted by the Bishop of Gloucester in 1563, noted that 749 houses were liable for tax and 279 exempt, although these numbers are likely to be 'inaccurately high'.⁴⁷ Gloucester's reputation as a market town was anciently established; the county markets had been founded before the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, whilst the Gloucester and Winchcombe markets had been active since before the Conquest.⁴⁸ The city maintained this role throughout the early modern period, acting as a trading post, rather than a centre of manufacture, but the lack of

⁴⁶ REED *Glos.*, 'The Documents', p. 264.

⁴⁷ Peter Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence for the Population of Gloucester 1562-1641', p. 201-2.

⁴⁸ Alan Everitt, 'The Market Towns', in *The Early Modern Town: A Reader*, 168-204 (p. 168).

industrial progress hindered her economic development. There had been trade companies active in the city from the mid-fifteenth century, which represented the Tailors, Hosiers, Tanners, Butchers, Cooks, Cordwainers, Weavers and Bakers.⁴⁹ These guilds were more than trade associations in Gloucester, since they acted ‘for the protection of the innocent and punishment of the guilty; for the maintenance of religion; the acquisition of commercial and civil privileges’, as well as ‘for the relief of the poor and distressed’.⁵⁰ The Weavers were a strong guild in this period, due to the success of the cloth trade, even though other centres, such as Bristol, Salisbury and Coventry, dominated the industry.⁵¹ Their position was strengthened by an ordinance of 1562 which attempted to preserve their privileges and to eliminate outside competition, reminiscent of the closed attitude of the Gloucester Council. Foreigners and strangers were forbidden to trade in the city, under a penalty of £10 per month, and apprentices were limited to two per master, serving an eight-year tenure, so long as they were Gloucester-born with English parentage.⁵²

Gloucester’s position at the head of the Severn meant that traders en route to Wales would have to come through the city, as would all north-south traffic. What is significant about Gloucester is that there were very few wealthy merchants evident in the town, which ‘reflected the fact that it was mainly dependent on Bristol for the trade it conducted with the continent’.⁵³ Gloucester is only thirty miles from Bristol, yet there is no data to suggest that the city took advantage of its neighbour’s Atlantic market. Its creation as a cathedral city and diocesan see on 3 September 1541 strengthened the town’s independence from outside influence, and it may have been the

⁴⁹ *VCH IV*, pp. 58-9.

⁵⁰ William Bazeley, ‘The Guilds of Gloucester’, *TBGAS*, 13 (1888-89), 260-70 (p. 260).

⁵¹ R. Perry, ‘The Gloucestershire Woollen Industry, 1100-1690’, *TBGAS*, 66 (1945), 49-137 (p. 59).

⁵² Perry, ‘Woollen Industry’, p. 75.

⁵³ *VCH IV*, p. 42.

insular attitude of the town's authorities which prevented the economy from growing further.⁵⁴ The Charter of 1483 had given Gloucester rights over the inshire, which was the city proper and the two 'hundred' divisions of King's Barton and Dudstone. The Charter also gave 'formal expression' to the oligarchic system of government which was prevalent in the city and 'laid the basis for the 'closed corporation' that ran Gloucester for the next three and a half centuries'.⁵⁵ It appears that Gloucester was comfortable to act as a rialto for river and road merchants; it does not seem to have been a destination town for any major industry. The largest trades were distributive, with mercers and drapers dominating the city, providing mostly imported cloth to regional markets.⁵⁶ This, in turn, created a growing hospitality industry in the city which boasted numerous alehouses and inns for the merchants to stay, and possibly be entertained, in whilst doing business in Gloucester. It is surprising that the economic situation of Gloucester is not reflected in the cultural entertainment calendar. Despite the city undergoing a slump in trade an industry, the Corporation was still willing to spend money on entertaining the public and the travelling players, which suggests that the city felt obliged to pay these companies for the sake of the patron and the populace, even if it could not afford to do so.

1580s Politics, Patronage and Playing

By the 1580s the mayor's play appears to have become an established feature of the civic calendar and 'Gloucester city was in the full tide of dramatic revival and expansion'.⁵⁷ We are fortunate enough to possess an eye-witness account of an

⁵⁴ T. A. Ryder, *Gloucestershire Through the Ages* (Worcester: Littlebury and Co./ The Worcester Press, 1950), p. 68.

⁵⁵ *VCH IV*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ *VCH IV*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ *The Stroud Journal*, 27 July 1928, in the Hannam-Clark papers at the Gloucestershire Archives.

Elizabethan mayor's play which took place in the usual venue, the Boothall on Westgate Street. In *Mount Tabor*, published in 1639, the author Willis recalled that a 'nobleman's servants' acted such a play, the title of which he remembers as *The Cradle of Security*. The 'mediation' entitled 'upon a play I saw as a child' is instructive in revealing the mechanics of the early modern mayor's play, in how the players were received and how the mayor responded to the itinerant companies' requests to play. I have examined the payments to players above, and suggested that the amount of reward given, and any special privileges in addition to that flat fee, was probably indicative of the reception of players by the Gloucester mayor. This mediation also states that the personal preference of the mayor was a major factor in his reaction to the travelling players.

Mary Blackstone has assumed, in reading Willis' recollection of 'the play I saw as a child', that 'performances were courteously received by civic authorities' so long as they 'behaved in the fashion described in Dudley's warrant' of 1574.⁵⁸ This patent was dated 10 May 1574, and was the first of its kind.⁵⁹ It granted Leicester's Men leave to play in any town throughout the realm, so long as they sought permission from the mayor. A further stipulation stated that only plays which have been licensed under the Master of the Revels are played and that performances did not take place during divine service or when London was infected with plague.⁶⁰ In this extract Willis also betrays his knowledge of contemporary provincial playing: 'In the City of Gloucester the manner is, (as I think it is in other like corporations)' which suggests that he was familiar with early modern dramatic culture.⁶¹ The detail that Willis gives is vital in

⁵⁸ Mary Blackstone, 'Notes towards a patron's calendar', p. 8.

⁵⁹ Gerald Eades Bentley, *History of the Revels Office*, p. 72.

⁶⁰ Leicester's Patent of 10 May 1574, cited in Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 30.

⁶¹ Willis, *Mount Tabor*, p. 110.

understanding the methods by which the mayor chose the players and rewarded them accordingly. The company had to solicit the council for a 'licence for their public playing' and announce their presence in the city. Interestingly, Willis believed that the mayor based his preferment of the players on either the patron whom they represented or on their own merit: 'if the Mayor like the Actors, or would show respect to their Lord and Master, he appoints them to play'. Therefore, a company of players who were representing a lord that the mayor did not necessarily approve of could still perform if they presented themselves in a favourable light. Willis's account makes the observation that, 'their first play [is] before [the mayor], and the Aldermen and common-Council of the City; and that is called the Mayor's play'.⁶² Greenfield suggests that:

the Mayor may have allowed companies to play publicly without seeing them himself, so that some companies that performed with official permission do not show up in the Chamberlains' Accounts, which recorded only the reward for the Mayor's play.⁶³

The players gave their principal performance to the corporation in the civic arena, yet the term 'first' suggests that they remained in the city to give subsequent shows, either in the boothall, innyard or in private premises. However, as Greenfield has suggested, some travelling companies may have gained permission to play without necessarily appearing physically on stage - for example, if they had performed the play at Gloucester previously and were performing by personal invite of the mayor or if the patron's favour or companies' merit preceded them. The rewards that were donated for the mayor's play were funded entirely from the public purse, and open to the general populace, at least by the 1570s: 'every one that will comes in without money'. This type of unrestricted show was perhaps a move by the council to demonstrate the popularity of the mayor with the Elizabethan aristocracy and to reaffirm his place as the crucial

⁶² Willis, *Mount Tabor*, p. 110.

⁶³ Greenfield, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama*, pp. 151-52.

participant in all governmental affairs. The payment to the strolling company was also discretionary: ‘the Mayor give[s] reward as he sees fit, to show respect unto them [the players]’.⁶⁴ Although one must be cautious in assessing this comment, as it was written fifty years after the event, Willis is suggesting that the ‘manner of corporations’ was to reward the players on their merit, in addition to, or indeed instead of, the reward being dictated by the patron whom they represented. However, it seems probable that the mayor was always conscious of a particular patron’s influence, which would in turn affect his decision.

The ‘manner’ of Gloucester Corporation in rewarding travelling players was designated in a statute against playing issued on 3 November 1580. The Ordinance was agreed by a majority vote, taken by the ‘holle company’ of the Council, to prevent public disorder during play-time but also to restrain the behaviour of the patronised companies who had been visiting Gloucester. The act was created to to ‘redress’ the problem of idleness caused by ‘servauntes, apprentices and jorneymen’ neglecting their work by spending their time watching plays. In 1579, Gloucester established its first house of correction and this edict may have been necessary to incarcerate certain disorderly or unwelcome members of society. The building was ‘essentially a punitive institution harassing the idle, prostitutes and the tramping destitute’.⁶⁵ However, it is the second function of the 1580 Ordinance which is most fascinating for the purposes of this project as the Corporation also wished to exercise ‘some restreinte [...] ageinst *commen* Players of Enterludes’ in the city.⁶⁶ These regulations were ‘made explicit’ by Gloucester Corporation, state Kathleen McLuskie and Felicity Dunsworth, ‘through their attempts to codify and regulate the terms in which respect for patrons was to be

⁶⁴ Willis, *Mount Tabor*, p. 110.

⁶⁵ *VCH IV*, p. 83.

⁶⁶ Corporation Common Council Minute Book, 3 November 1580, cited in *REED Glos.*, 306-7 (p. 306).

measured against their own need to be seen controlling public activities in their town'.⁶⁷ In order to regulate the activities of the itinerant companies, the Council decided upon a three-tier hierarchy of players, with each stratum having fixed regulations on the number of times they could perform whenever they visited Gloucester, which were decided: 'noe moore nor oftener'. It is this hierarchy, and how Gloucester's Corporation settled upon it, which is most interesting about the data. The Queen's Men were noted as the principal company, and therefore were granted special concessions; they would be allowed to perform a maximum of 'three interludes or playes within three days or under'. The 'players of any subjecte beinge a baron of the *parliamente* or of higher callinge or degree' were allowed two plays in two days or less, and any other nobleman's itinerant company who were licensed could play only once. The proclamation also stated that no troupe, no matter who they represented, was permitted to play in the evening unless specific permission had been sought from the mayor: 'none of the players [...] be they her *majestes* players or others be suffered or allowed to playe in the nighte season nor at any unfeet time without Warrante or Licence from Mr Major of this Citie'. A remarkable note closes the directive, which suggests that playing had occurred in private residences up until the ordinance was issued: 'noe Burges of this Citie shall at any tyme hereafter *permit* or suffer any players to be played in his howse'.⁶⁸ These latter two statements reveal that Gloucester citizens had previously been able to access performances after dark and outside of the Boothall. It is probable that the strollers were gleaning as much revenue out of one town as was feasible by playing in inns or private residences both by daylight and in the evenings. This decree did not make any attempt to suppress plays.⁶⁹ It indicates

⁶⁷ Kathleen McLuskie and Felicity Dunsworth, 'Patronage and the Economics of Theatre' in Cox and Kastan, *New History of Early English Drama*, 423-40 (p. 429).

⁶⁸ Corporation Common Council Minute Book, 3 November 1580, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 307.

⁶⁹ Rudge, *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester*, p. 73; Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 152.

that the council was willing to sanction performances when the correct protocols were observed, and also ensuring that the mayor was in total control of all activities within city walls.

This stipulation of the 1580 Ordinance against playing in private houses suggests that individuals were offering private hospitality to the travelling players. It may have been during the 1580 refurbishment of the Boothall that players were entertained in private houses, which occasioned the edict that year. Although there is not enough evidence to establish a patronage network amongst the civic officials, one family who may have been receptive to players were the Machens. Thomas Machen's name was entered in the rewards ledger; he was the only mayor whose name is specifically attached to stage plays in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts: 'Geven the xxviith of (blank) 1579/ unto my lord Barkleys Players by Mr Thomas Machen Maior xiiij s. iij d'.⁷⁰ I believe that Thomas Machen may have instigated the correct noting of dates for the plays to achieve a transparent account book should there be any queries regarding playing or spending. It appears from the data that Thomas, and his father Henry, were keen supporters of public spectacles.⁷¹ Henry Machen served as one of two sheriffs in 1550 when the extant Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts begin, and again in 1555 when Bishop Hooper was executed on 9 February in St. Mary's Square. The city was happy to entertain local magnates on this day of

⁷⁰ REED *Glos.*, p. 306. Greenfield has not specified whether this entry belongs in the 'gifts and rewards' ledger or the 'Fees and Wages' from which the previous account has been cited. This is probably an oversight and I am confident that this payment would have been included with the disbursement for 'gifts'.

⁷¹ H. A. Machen, 'The Machen Family, Gloucestershire', *TBGAS*, 64 (1943), 96-112 (p. 98), 'It appears probable that they were cousins'. Henry Machen died in 1567, whilst Thomas died in 1614, therefore a generation apart. N. M. Herbert, 'List of Aldermen', in *VCH IV*, p. 376. Yet in the unpublished copy held in the Gloucester Record Office, revised in January 1954 [*GRO* R.O.L. N3/M]: the assertion that they were cousins has been crossed out in blue ballpoint pen. There are no annotations to suggest who made the amendment, but it serves to prove that the supposition was incorrect. J. K. Gruenfelder also believed Henry and Thomas Machen to be father and son, 'Gloucester's Parliamentary Elections, 1604-1640', *TBGAS*, 96 (1978), 53-59 (p. 54).

macabre public spectacle, when 43s 8d was pledged 'for a dyner made and gevyn to the Lord Chandos and other gentlemen at Maister Maires howse the day that Maister Hooper was brent'.⁷² Both men served as sheriff in 1555 and they were both likely to have been present at this dinner with Lord Chandos. Henry Machen also served as mayor in 1558, just prior the accession of Elizabeth I.⁷³ H. A. Machen, a twentieth-century relation of the Gloucester sheriff and mayor, who wrote a family history for the *TBGAS*, believed that this Henry was Henry Machyn, a London tailor.⁷⁴ However, the family biographer may have been confusing Henry Machen, Mayor of Gloucester, with Henry Machyn, 'citizen and Merchant Taylor of London', who has been identified by William Ingram as 'a purveyor of funeral trappings'.⁷⁵ The diary of the London merchant Machyn is extant from 1550 to 1563, but unfortunately does not allude to Gloucester, Bristol or to any examples of provincial playgoing.⁷⁶ H. A. Machen finds that 'there is every reason to believe' that the Gloucester branch of the family was 'connected [...] although no actual proof can be produced'.⁷⁷ Perhaps H. A. Machen had read Machyn's diary extracts about the setting up of scaffolds inside metropolitan halls in 1560 and 1562 and confused this reference to the corporate payments for the construction of scaffolds in Gloucester Boothall, recorded in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts from 1559 to 1575.⁷⁸

⁷² Anon., 'The Ancient Archives of Gloucester' *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries*, 9 (1902), p. 122. This 1891 report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission was contributed to the *Birmingham Daily Post*.

⁷³ Moss, *Historic Gloucester*, p. 3; Rudge, *The History of the Antiquities of Gloucester*, p. 72. The Gloucester bench served from Michaelmas to Michaelmas, therefore Henry Machen was sheriff for the execution of Hooper in February 1555 but he had left his office as mayor on September 29 1558, and was therefore not serving at the coronation of Elizabeth I on 17 November 1558.

⁷⁴ H. A. Machen, 'The Machen Family, Gloucestershire', p. 97.

⁷⁵ William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of Adult Professional Theatre in Elizabethan London* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 92.

⁷⁶ *The Diary of Henry Machyn, Citizen and Merchant Taylor of London, from AD 1550 to AD 1563*, ed. by John Gough Nichols, Camden Old Series, Volume XLII (London: Camden Society, 1848).

⁷⁷ H. A. Machen, 'The Machen Family', p. 97.

⁷⁸ T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1958), p. 11, *REED Glos.*, pp. 298-305.

The civic rule of Henry Machen coincided with the development of early theatrical performances in 1550s Gloucester, and I suspect that he may have been involved with the fostering of drama in the city; his son Thomas, also perhaps continued this support later into the reign of Elizabeth. Thomas Machen served as a sheriff in 1576, and three times as mayor in 1579, 1588 and 1601.⁷⁹ Peter Clark has speculated that Thomas would have been 'a tycoon by Gloucester standards'.⁸⁰ He was also the governor of the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalene in the south of the city.⁸¹ By his death in 1614, Machen had amassed a personal estate of £5000 - £6000 in sheep, land and money and left £100 for the Hospital, therefore he may have deployed some of the family's wealth in encouraging drama.⁸² The family's residence lay north-east of Gloucester on the road to Oxford, just within the city walls.⁸³ Perhaps the Machens had persuaded the players to perform on their way in or out of the city, or both. The rewards for the mayor's play suggests Kathleen McLuskie and Felicity Dunsworth, 'were not for a service or a commodity, but were part of the extended network of social relations involving players, local authorities, and patrons who were influential in the area'.⁸⁴ It appears that in Gloucester this network also included the mayors who, like the Machens, expressed personal preferences for players.

There may have been another very urgent need to limit and control the frequency of noblemen's players visiting the city - that of protecting the city and inshire from the potential threat of political enemies from outside of the inner circle, namely the Earl of Leicester, who began his own political campaign in Gloucester in 1580. The city

⁷⁹ Rudge, *History and Antiquities of Gloucester*, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁰ Peter Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 79.

⁸¹ *VCH IV*, p. 353.

⁸² Peter Clark, 'The Civic Leaders of Gloucester' in *Transformation of English Provincial Towns*, 311-45 (p. 318); *VCH IV*, p. 353.

⁸³ 1624 Map of Gloucester, depicting the hundreds of Dudston and Kings Barton incorporated with the city by charter of Richard III [1483] showing the Aldermen's houses, in Blakeway, *The City of Gloucester*, facing frontispiece.

⁸⁴ McLuskie and Dunsworth, 'Patronage and the Economics of Theatre', p. 428.

had been particularly insular about its political representatives, choosing to elect local landowners such as Nicholas Arnold and Anthony Kingston as MPs from the ‘great’ number of the electorate, which has been estimated as ‘four or five hundred’.⁸⁵ Gloucester had realised in Mary’s reign that the influence of courtiers and the influx of interlopers might be a threat to the precious political independence of the county. The Gloucester Common Council had passed an Act in 1555 to protect their electoral autonomy, stating that ‘no person [is] to be nominated MP for the city who is not a burgess, or freeman, or recorder [of Gloucester]’.⁸⁶ Leicester’s 1580 request to be involved with the election of a parliamentary candidate was met with anger by the Gloucester aldermen; he was instructed to complete the relevant documentation, but to leave a blank space for the nominee in order for the city to have the final decision on the candidate.⁸⁷ His suit was eventually refused.⁸⁸ There is no evidence available to suggest that any MP was appointed in 1580, although Lord Burleigh was nominated as High Steward of the City of Gloucester on 2 December.⁸⁹

The Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts of the 1560s and 1570s noted frequent and various payments to travelling players in private houses and local hostelries, however by the 1580s, this practice had diminished, although it became commonplace in this decade to record the precise dates of performance. It seems that the reception of players in the 1580s was dictated by personal preference of the serving Council, rather than the patron whom the company represented, as Gloucester grew more suspicious of the noblemen’s motives in sending their retinue to the city. The same itinerant troupes began to visit Gloucester seasonally, suggesting a trend which may have made the city

⁸⁵ Gruenfelder, ‘Gloucester’s Parliamentary Elections’, p. 53.

⁸⁶ *GRO B2/1 56-7*

⁸⁷ Johnson, *Tudor Gloucestershire*, p. 102.

⁸⁸ William Bradford Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government*, p. 32.

⁸⁹ Blakeway, *The City of Gloucester*, p. 48.

uneasy about the constant incursion of the Boothall by other magnates. Municipally-endorsed performances by patronised companies in first half of the 1580s demonstrate the dominance of certain troupes:

FISCAL YEAR	DATE	COMPANY PERFORMING	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS
1579-80	28/?/79 20/06/80	Derby's Men Berkeley's Men Sheffield's Men Berkeley's Men	5s 13s 4d 6s 8d 6s 8d
1580-81	03/11/80	Council Ordinance Strange's Men	14s 4d
1581-82	28/07/82	Berkeley's Men Morley's Men Stafford's Men Lord [Blank's] Men Hunsdon's Men	13s 4d 6s 8d 6s 8d 6s 8d 13s 4d
1582-83	07/11/82 30/11/82 26/05/83	Chandos' Men Berkeley's Men Stafford's Men Oxford's Men Queen's Men	20s 13s 4d 10s 16s 8d 30s
1583-84	22/12/83 06/01/84 02/05/84	Master of the Revel's Men Worcester's Men Chandos' Men Oxford's Men Stafford's Men	13s 4d 6s 8d 10s 6s 8d 6s 8d
1584-85	05/10/84	Essex's Men Berkeley's Men Lord [Blank's] Men Essex's Men Stafford's Men Oxford's Men Sussex's Men Leicester's Men	6s 8d 6s 8d 13s 4d 6s 8d 6s 8d 10s 13s 4d 20s

Table 3: Payments to Performers in Gloucester, 1579-80 to 1584-85.

In the succeeding few years after the statute against playing in 1580, the players of the Gloucester magnate Lord Henry Berkeley dominated the civic performance calendar in the Boothall. Even a transgression by Berkeley's Men in London had not affected their popularity in their home county. Arthur Kyngge, Thomas Goodale and other players of

the Berkeley Company got into trouble in the capital by quarrelling with some law students of Gray's Inn.⁹⁰ Henry Berkeley solicited the Lord Mayor of London in a letter, persuading him to release his men for whom he would take personal responsibility.⁹¹ The players had contravened an order that prohibited Sunday performances, although it was 'unlikely' that this was the offence which instigated the trouble. The 'strong testimonial' of Lord Berkeley on behalf of his players revealed his interest in the activities of his men and the theatrical practices of the capital.⁹² The 'matter' which caused the problem was unknown to Berkeley, yet he implored a fair hearing from the Lord Mayor, pleaded for their release and promised to remove them from London: 'So I ame to desire your Lordship to sett them at libertie, whoe are upon going into the Countrie to avoide querrell or other inconvenience that mought follow'.⁹³ The stigma of metropolitan trouble did not dissuade the Gloucester Council from rewarding the company with 13s 4d in 1581-2 and again on 30 November 1582, confirming that the status of the patron transcended the behaviour or reputation of the actors themselves.⁹⁴ The Berkeley Company was absent from the Gloucester Boothall during 1583-4, although they can be traced twice in Bath in this fiscal year, in Bridgewater, Somerset and in St. Mary's Guildhall, Coventry so they were active in the west.⁹⁵ Theodore Hannam-Clark cites evidence that the Berkeley players were 'frequently mentioned in the provinces until 1610' and that they acted in Abingdon, Ipswich, Exeter, Dover, Barnstable, Ludlow, Faversham, Leicester, Canterbury and Norwich.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 123.

⁹¹ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 124.

⁹² Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 168-69.

⁹³ Letter from Henry Berkeley to the Lord Mayor of London, July 1581, cited in Gurr, *Playing Companies*, p. 169.

⁹⁴ *REED Glos.*, p. 308.

⁹⁵ *REED Bath*, p. 13; 53; *REED Coventry*, p. 302.

⁹⁶ Hannam-Clark, *Drama in Gloucestershire*, pp. 49-50

However, it may also be possible that Henry Berkeley decided to shun Gloucester in the later 1580s as a result of the influence of the players of his great rival, Leicester, appearing in the city. The two lords had been feuding for years over the Berkeley lands, which Leicester believed to be his by birthright. The claim had been neglected by previous branches of the family 'but with the accession of Elizabeth I the picture altered'.⁹⁷ Leicester already considered Berkeley Castle to be part of his rightful estate; in 1574, Elizabeth paid a 'surprise visit' to Berkeley whilst Henry Berkeley was away, and Leicester joined her on a hunt. The party killed twenty-seven of Berkeley's prize stags.⁹⁸ Berkeley was so furious upon his return that he 'disparked' the Castle grounds, and all rights to hunt on the property were revoked, even for royalty. Elizabeth was furious at this decision and remarked that Henry should take care, indicating that the outcome of the dispute over the Berkeley estate depended upon her favour alone. This act, suggests Chambers, was a 'deliberate scheme by Leicester to bring Berkeley into disfavour and secure the Castle for himself'.⁹⁹ The plan appeared to be successful:

A trial was [held] by jury at the Exchequer bar, whereat the Earl of Leicester was present in person as the promoter and follower of that suit [...] bringing with him divers other courtiers of eminency to counter the cause, he at this time having a private promise in writing under the Queen's hand and signet to have this land.¹⁰⁰

The jury, it was suggested, was corrupt and had been selected and coached by two of Leicester's Gloucestershire allies, Nicholas Poyntz and Thomas Throckmorton.¹⁰¹ In order to secure the Berkeley estate, Leicester resorted to 'gros means'.¹⁰² In 1570, he had invited Henry Berkeley to Kenilworth and whilst the castle was without its lord, Leicester had bribed a herald to steal 'the most material evidence' regarding ownership

⁹⁷ H. P. R. Findberg 'The Berkeleys of Berkeley', in *Gloucestershire Studies*, ed. by H. P. R. Findberg (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1957), 145-59 (p. 154).

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth and Leicester* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1961), p. 193.

⁹⁹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, II, p. 290

¹⁰¹ R. Perry, *Wotton under Edge: Times Past, Time Present* (Wotton-under-Edge: R. Perry, 1986), p. 40.

¹⁰² Robert Atkins, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire*, (1712) 2nd edn, ed. by Brian Smith, 2 Volumes (Gloucester: E. P. Publishing, 1974), I, p. 268.

of the lands.¹⁰³ It has been noted that Leicester's Men were 'not a typical playing company' and that their status as representing the Queen's favourite 'may have meant more opportunities for them than would have otherwise been the case'.¹⁰⁴ Out of the companies who were rewarded on the provincial circuit between 1558 and 1642, Leicester's Men recorded 81 appearances, lying second only to the Queen's Men who played a total of 154 times.¹⁰⁵

November 1584 saw another attempt by Leicester to appoint his choice of MP to represent Gloucester. The city was defiant in its retention of electoral independence, freedom from patronage and the election of 'foreigners'. The second endeavour of the 'avid place-seeker' was perceived by the Gloucester Corporation as 'more haughty' than the first: his 1580 challenge had caused great 'variance and offence' among the burgesses that they chose not to inform the Common Council of the second endeavour.¹⁰⁶ However the Council discovered the scheme, and declared once again that only Gloucester men may stand or influence local government:

The number of burgesses will not be entreated to grant a burgess-room to any man not sworn to the franchises of this city [...] besides, the sheriffs of Gloucester make some conscience in respect of their oaths to deliver any return not warranted by the writ of the summons and the statutes.¹⁰⁷

Leicester perhaps solicited his potential constituents to rally support for his choice of MP, and for this purpose he perhaps chose to campaign in Gloucester with the help of his players. However, Leicester's gamble did not work, and the city took the experience on board, as afterwards 'no other peer apparently even attempted to

¹⁰³ E. S. Lindley, 'A John Smyth Bibliography', *TBGAS*, 80 (1961), 121-31 (p. 122).

¹⁰⁴ William Ingram, 'Players and Playing' in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660* ed. by Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry and William Ingram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 153-286 (p. 204).

¹⁰⁵ Alan Somerset, 'Visits of Shakespeare's Company of Actors', p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Gruenfelder, 'Gloucester's Parliamentary Elections', p. 53.

¹⁰⁷ Gloucester Common Council records, cited in Willcox, *Local Government*, p. 32.

influence the city's choice of candidate'.¹⁰⁸ This attempt and rebuttal 'perhaps better than anything else illustrates the major theme in Gloucester's electoral history: its sturdy independence'.¹⁰⁹

As I have suggested, the motivation for Leicester's Men to play in Gloucester in 1584-5 was possibly political, but it is also possible that patrons, especially those seeking favour from Elizabeth, played in Gloucester to gain some economic benefits from showing deference to the city and its mayor. Elizabeth had bestowed much rich, fertile Gloucestershire land upon her favourites as reward for good service, and as many of her intimate circle were county landlords it seems that courting Gloucester may have been a shrewd move for personal advancement. Perhaps it was the patrons' interest in Gloucester which occasioned the slow, but noticeable period of prosperity in the city. It was certainly the influence of Robert Cecil, Lord Burleigh, who persuaded Elizabeth to grant the city port status on 20 June 1580.¹¹⁰ This event appeared to strengthen the economic confidence of the city, which was physically represented in new buildings, such as the renovation of the Boothall and the building of a customs house.¹¹¹ The city could now charge the shipping industry for docking and other tolls, contributing to its economy. Better access to the river improved Gloucester's role as a distribution centre, the 'essential pillar' of the marketing aspect of the city, and 'the most flourishing aspect' of the economy in the Elizabethan reign.¹¹² Gloucester had become 'the principal grain port on the Severn', with markets in Wales, south-west England and Ireland, but the city abandoned direct traffic with

¹⁰⁸ Gruenfelder, 'Gloucester's Parliamentary Elections', p. 53.

¹⁰⁹ Gruenfelder, 'Gloucester's Parliamentary Elections,' p. 59.

¹¹⁰ Blakeway, *Gloucester*, p. 51; Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 88.

¹¹¹ Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence', p. 199.

¹¹² Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 78.

the Continent in preference of the coastal market.¹¹³ Perhaps the elevated social status of Gloucester was a reason behind the increasing number of patronised companies who visited the city. The shipping merchants of Bristol were understandably aggrieved at losing their monopoly over Severn tolls and lodged an official complaint, but Burleigh's endorsement of Gloucester appeared to have held firm. Burleigh had to intercede in 1588 to quell a growing conflict between the Corporation and Gloucestershire landowners over control of the inshire, where again the aldermen were victorious.

Unfortunately, by the 1580s the main trade, cloth, was suffering a slump which would have affected the Gloucester merchants. The city had a tradition of manufacturing caps, but as London tastes began to dictate national fashions the demand lessened, thus this staple item of Gloucester trade went into decline.¹¹⁴ Charitable donations supported clothiers in 1581, but by 1582 the Corporation noted in the Chamberlains' Accounts that the trade 'was much decayed in Gloucester' and that the deterioration had been noticeable 'within twenty or thirty years past'.¹¹⁵ Any economic progress made in the decade was hampered by unfortunate short-term problems, such as disease; the city had been visited by plague in 1578, 1579 and 1580.¹¹⁶ Bad weather also contributed to the decline of Gloucester's fortunes; the bad harvest of 1586 resulted in social unrest and, coupled with a small recession caused by a temporary slump in the already fragile cloth trade, caused food riots.¹¹⁷ It is possibly these reasons, in addition to Leicester's temerity in his attempt to dupe the electorate, which occasioned the uncharacteristically frugal 5s payments to Essex and Sussex's

¹¹³ Peter Clark, 'Introduction: English Country Towns 1500-1800', in *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England* ed. by Peter Clark (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), 2-43 (p. 8)

¹¹⁴ Clark, 'Introduction: English Country Towns', p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 75.

¹¹⁶ Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 43.

¹¹⁷ Ryder *Gloucestershire Through the Ages*, p. 73; Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 82.

Men in 1585-6. I suggest that a decrease in payments and extra gifts to the players in the 1580s was indicative of the mayor's cautionary approach to the patrons whose motives were viewed with increased suspicion after Leicester's behaviour. Even though Gloucester was financially stronger in the 1580s, the city could not justify payments for banquet and scaffolds – suggesting that the players no longer gained such a positive reception by the Gloucester Corporation.

1600 The End of An Era?

Even though the frequency of professional players visiting Gloucester increased and there is no evidence to suggest that there were any serious incidents surrounding the plays or players, the Corporation felt the need to reissue the directive of 3 November 1580 at the close of a period of popularity, on 20 August 1591.¹¹⁸ The repetition of the request to curb playing may indicate that the first proclamation was not being sufficiently enforced, or as a deliberate warning to patrons and players about taking advantage of the city's hospitality. Greenfield comments upon the 'vague' phrasing of the 1591 ordinance, where it specified that Gloucester would not permit performances 'without good occasion'. He suggests that this reserved edict 'sets no criteria for refusing or granting permission to play', and considers that although the council members may have remained in support of playing, they 'did not want to commit it to paper'.¹¹⁹ This reading would surmise that Gloucester was keen to be seen taking action, but had no intention of enforcing the edict, suggesting that some members of the Council were still privately receptive to playing. This may have been the case, and the Common Council felt more secure after the defeat of the Spanish and the death of Leicester and his ambitions; the entertainment schedule could proceed as normal,

¹¹⁸ Corporation Common Council Minute Book, 20 August 1591, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 311.

¹¹⁹ Greenfield, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama*, p. 156.

without worrying about the motives of the nobles concerned, but I believe that the Gloucester Corporation had learned valuable lessons from the attempts by Leicester to undermine their political independence. Greenfield is 'certain' that the council used the 1591 ordinance to reassert their power over that of the nobility, and that they firmly had the authority 'to deny permission to play to any company regardless of the identity of its patron'.¹²⁰ During the 1590s, Gloucester welcomed a large number of companies. By 1591-2, the Queen's Men were earning 40s per visit although the city did not appear to be so enthusiastic to welcome their patron, rather paying Lord Chandos £6 13s 4d from the public purse to entertain her at Sudeley Castle in 1592.¹²¹ Repairs to the Boothall in 1593-4 concentrated on 'the new hall', which suggests that the larger spaces were worthy of regular maintenance, but no mention is made of the benefit being for public entertainments.¹²² That year 'Anthony Cooke and his companie' were rewarded with 2s' worth of wine and sugar and Thomas Bubbe was paid 10s 'for a wagon in the pageant for the Turke'.¹²³

The missing Gloucester Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts from 1597 to 1635 are a frustrating loss to the dramatic history of this west-country city. A brief examination of the accounts from 1590 to 1596 demonstrate that there were a significant number of strolling companies visiting the city, that extra rewards were once again being paid to certain troupes, and the majority of companies were earning the 10s per play rate, with the likes of the Admiral's Men and the players of the Earl of Derby earning similar rewards to the Queen's Men, whose reward increased to 40s in 1593-4:

¹²⁰ Greenfield, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama*, p. 156.

¹²¹ *REED Glos.*, p. 312.

¹²² Abbott, 'Excavations at the Shire Hall site', p. 97.

¹²³ *REED Glos.*, p. 313.

FISCAL YEAR	COMPANY PERFORMING	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS	EXTRA EXPENSES
1590-1	Worcester's Men Beacham's Men Queen's Men Queen's & Sussex's Men St. Paul's Children Admiral's Men	10s 13s 4d 30s 30s 20s 30s	
1591-2	Worcester's Men Queen's Men Strange's Men	13s 4d 30s 10s	Breakfast at Mrs. Powell's, 9s 5d
1592-3	Lord Morley's Men	11s 8d	1 bottle of wine and sugar
1593-4	Lord Ogle's Men Queen's Men	8s 4d 40s	
1594-5	Anthony Cooke & Co. Pageant for the Turke Queen's Men Ogle's Men	3s 10s 30s 5s	Gallon of wine and sugar
1595-6	Stafford's Men Chandos' Men Queen's Men Derby's Men Ogle's Men Admiral's Men	6s 8d ? 30s 30s 3s 4d 20s	Wine & sugar, 3s 2d

Table 4: Payment to Players in Gloucester, 1590-1596.

New troupes also make an appearance in the city, suggesting that the popularity of the city as a destination has not waned after the reiteration of the edict against players in summer 1591, and that the mayors were responding positively to the arrival of strollers, even after the second edict, again suggesting that the personal preference of the mayor had superseded deference to the companies' patron as a motive in permitting them to play before him.

Despite the dearth of municipal evidence for playing in Gloucester after 1597, there is a record in the Gloucester Diocese Consistory Court Deposition Books which

suggests that some form of entertainment was still to be found in the city at the beginning of the seventeenth century. An entry in these court records on 22 October 1602 is certainly indicative of the Boothall still being used as a performance space after the lapse in extant evidence for stage playing.¹²⁴ The article states ‘that twelve monethes now past or there aboutes [a] deponent was at a stage play in the Botholl in the Cytty of Gloucester’.¹²⁵ The offence was committed by ‘mr John Wylmott’ who had boasted of being able to play better than the performers and who had attempted to storm the stage in an attempt to play one of the actors’ instruments. The defendant was ‘overtaken with drink’ at the time of the incident, which appears to be his defence, although considering that Wylmot was the rector of Tortworth parish this fact is not likely to have had him acquitted.¹²⁶ Nevertheless Wylmot’s drunken behaviour has allowed a rare insight into the activities of the Boothall after 1597, that it remained open to the public for spectacles; and that stage players were still visiting in the autumn of 1601, when once again Thomas Machen was serving as mayor.

As there are no extant Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts for the late Elizabethan and Stuart reigns I shall substitute other topographical, genealogical, political and economic evidence to determine the cultural environment in Gloucester after 1597. I have examined the history of the Boothall in the early seventeenth century in order to suppose whether it continued to be used as a performance space after the last incident in the autumn of 1601 was recorded. By 1606, the Ingram family had relinquished the ownership of the Boothall and the lease belonged to Lawrence Wilshire who served as mayor in the same year.¹²⁷ The Boothall was rebuilt again in 1606, and

¹²⁴ Robert Finnegan, ‘Gloucestershire and Bristol’, *REEDN*, p. 9.

¹²⁵ Gloucester Diocese Consistory Court Deposition Books, 22 October 1602, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 314.

¹²⁶ *REED Glos.*, endnote to pp. 314-15, p. 427.

¹²⁷ Barbara Drake, ‘The Boothall, Gloucester’, p. 46; Rudge *History and Antiquities of Gloucester*, p.

'was made more spacious and convenient for the Justices of Assizes and J.P's'. Two new assize courts were constructed and during the reign of James I the building was used as a prison 'for offending Burgesses'. On the death of Wilshire in 1612, the lease was taken by Jesse Whittingham, who had no affiliation to local politics whatsoever, thus the property was taken into entirely private hands.¹²⁸ The Boothall was again renovated, 'newly built', in 1613, but the purpose of this is not stated although probably for its use as a place of justice.¹²⁹ However there is evidence in the will of David Wright, a labourer who died in 1618, to state that the Boothall Inn was still in business well into the Jacobean reign. Wright 'left a small cash gift to the tapster at the Booth Hall and two other friends'.¹³⁰ The references to the men 'being all fellows at the house', which 'had the flavour of conviviality about it', certainly suggests that the Inn was flourishing, but sadly there is no further data to indicate whether plays were performed or if players were rewarded in this tavern.

Peter Clark has identified Thomas Machen, with his son-in-law Thomas Rich, as the leader of a political group from 'the late 1580s'. Perhaps the Council had been in favour of allowing plays to be performed in the Boothall, as I have demonstrated some connections between the endorsement of playing in Elizabethan Gloucester and the Machen family. The rival faction in the Gloucester Corporation was led by Luke Garnons and the diocesan registrar John Jones. Clark believes that Garnon's 'populist party' would have appealed to 'the freemen and discontented inhabitants of the inshire'. These two groups had clashed on many issues; in 1587 over the appointment of a new

75. Wilshire had served as sheriff under Thomas Machen in 1601 when the incident took place with John Wilmot on the Boothall stage, and he may have used the dual advantage of being mayor and owning the Boothall to put an end to playing in the Hall.

¹²⁸ Drake, 'Boothall', p. 46.

¹²⁹ *VCH IV*, p. 248.

¹³⁰ Will of David Wright, (21/1618) cited in Peter Ripley, 'Trade and Social Structure in Gloucester, 1600-1640', *TBGAS*, 94 (1976), 117-23 (p. 123).

Recorder; in the mid-1590s over corn stock, and over the elections held in 1588, 1598 and 1604.¹³¹ Thomas Rich served as mayor in 1603, and it is said that he used his position to conduct a vendetta devoting, according to the official documentation, a significant portion of his time ‘revenged’ upon ‘enemies not of his faction, to weaken, charge and defame them’.¹³² It was the election of 1604 which may have changed the political and cultural landscape of Gloucester for years to come. The Corporation, namely mayor Thomas Rich, had decided in December 1603 that Machen, and the gentleman Nicholas Overbury, were to represent Gloucester at Parliament. However, Jones offered himself as another candidate, and began a smear campaign against Machen and Overbury, whose eligibility to represent Gloucester was called into question. Machen was so outraged at Jones’ behaviour that he wrote to Star Chamber complaining of his conduct. On election day, Jones plied the electorate, which according to Machen’s complaint had been swelled by two hundred ‘strangers and others such as had no voices’, with alcohol and managed a ‘notable triumph’ alongside Overbury.¹³³ Machen’s defeat was what J. K. Gruenfelder observed, to be ‘the last straw in what may have been a festering personal quarrel’ between him and Jones.¹³⁴ However, the Charter of 1605 named Machen, along with Jones and Garnons, as lifelong aldermen.¹³⁵ Machen’s ‘hopes of parliamentary service were probably realised’ in 1614, as he served at Westminster.¹³⁶ He did not serve as mayor or sheriff again, but his benevolence to Gloucester was rewarded with a monument in the north aisle of the Cathedral. He is portrayed in his scarlet mayor’s robe, kneeling with his wife and children. The family appear again in the records relating to entertainment later in the

¹³¹ Clark, ‘Civic Leaders of Gloucester’, p. 321.

¹³² Rudge, *History and Antiquities of Gloucester* p. 75; Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester’, *VCH IV*, p. 86.

¹³³ Gruenfelder, ‘Gloucester’s Parliamentary Elections’, p. 54.

¹³⁴ Gruenfelder, ‘Gloucester’s Parliamentary Elections’, p. 55.

¹³⁵ GBR II/33, cited in Stevenson, *Calendar of Gloucester Records*, p. 37.

¹³⁶ Gruenfelder, ‘Gloucester’s Parliamentary Elections’, p. 56.

century, on the eve of the Civil War. The Gloucester Cathedral Treasurer's Accounts records a payment of five shillings 'To Mr Machins man for bringing the Sagbutt [trombone] which was his Masteres his gift to ye churche'.¹³⁷ It may have been the absence of such supporters of drama, and a change in the personnel of Gloucester Corporation, which could have altered the attitude of the mayor and aldermen to travelling players, denying the travelling players a supportive voice in the Corporation. Such political factionalism which may have been a feature in playing companies not choosing to play in particular towns, and perhaps this occurred at Gloucester at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Peter Clark has also argued that it was the behaviour of the Gloucester government which was responsible for the slow economic growth evident in the early modern city. The aldermanic bench was composed of local merchants, as opposed to county gentry, which suggests that the Corporation had retained its insular and oligarchic outlook, as opposed to welcoming new investment into the area. The dominance of representatives of the service sector on the bench, 'merciers and the like' testified to the importance of Gloucester as a marketing centre, rather than manufacturing base, and was as such 'a comment upon the dwindling significance of Gloucester's industrial sector.'¹³⁸ Gloucester's reputation as the service centre of the region grew, yet there appears to have been no private investment into leisure facilities such as a playhouse, as in Bristol. The city was awarded with a new Charter by James I after his only visit in 1605, which further established Gloucester as a market centre, with two fairs commemorating James I's accession on 25-27 March and Elizabeth I's Coronation Day 17-19 November.¹³⁹ Although there is more information on the Stuart

¹³⁷ Cathedral Treasurer's Accounts, 1640-1, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 328.

¹³⁸ Clark, 'The Civic Leaders of Gloucester', p. 316.

¹³⁹ GBR li/33, cited in Stevenson, *Calendar of Gloucester Records*, pp. 36-40. The November fair was

economy of Gloucester, we do not have a definite idea of the business of the city as much of the merchant community ‘retreated into private premises’, and is therefore not recorded. Many transactions took place inside the city’s inns, and therefore one can only offer an estimate of the wealth of the city’s merchants, although the ‘energetic development of the riverside near the quay’ suggests that river trade was plentiful.¹⁴⁰ In 1617, the Common Council denounced the use of inns as places of exchange and attempted to improve the civic amenities on offer, but ‘the trend was inexorable’.¹⁴¹ Due to its central position as a regional entrepôt for consumer goods, and probably the availability of private business, Gloucester was ‘invaded’ by craftsmen and tradesmen from all over the country.¹⁴² By this period, one quarter of Gloucester’s 5000 population were migrants.¹⁴³ This suggests an economic upturn, but it may also have helped to create the political problems which began in the first years of the seventeenth century, such as the factionalism between the Corporation personnel. Peter Clark has attributed the stagnancy of Gloucester’s economy to the political turbulence of the early modern city. The ‘ruling caucus’ of Gloucester was ‘home grown’ and nepotistic; it was dominated by mercers and other men of middling rank who could boast no significant wealth.¹⁴⁴ The cliquish nature of the Corporation was off-putting for the local gentry who may have wished to join, and therefore invest their capital in the Gloucester economy. The town magnates, with their ‘narrow and conservative’ attitudes, were ‘unable to provide strong or imaginative economic leadership’, which stagnated the city’s financial progress.¹⁴⁵ Even the representative to Parliament was usually a local merchant; between 1559 and 1640 only four gentlemen served as MPs for

to celebrate the Coronation Day of Elizabeth I.

¹⁴⁰ Ripley, ‘Trade and Social Structure’, p. 120.

¹⁴¹ Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester’, p. 78.

¹⁴² Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester’, p. 74.

¹⁴³ Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester’, p. 73.

¹⁴⁴ Clark, ‘The Civic Leaders of Gloucester’, p. 320.

¹⁴⁵ Clark, ‘Introduction: English Country Towns’, p. 9.

Gloucester.¹⁴⁶ The internal tensions, borne out by such petty rivalries as demonstrated by Machen and Jones, cannot have aided Gloucester's cause in attracting investment to the area. Clark also believes that the Corporation's growing support of Puritanism further prevented any of the wealthy elites serving, further withdrawing county money from the city. He concludes that if the 'locally recruited, clannish and rather elderly elite' of Gloucester had been more county-oriented it could have shared in the 'wider affluence of the region', certainly the riches from the Atlantic trade which was improving the fortunes of neighbouring Bristol.¹⁴⁷

In addition to economic concerns in the early Stuart reign, Gloucester was beset by more visitations of the plague. Between 1578 and 1638 Gloucester was infected nine times at the human cost of 1259 souls, although given the under-registration of deaths in poorer parishes this figure may have been much higher.¹⁴⁸ The highest recorded figures were in 1604-05, where 363 people are reported to have died, but whilst six of the city's eleven parishes were in a 'lamentable state' without incumbents in 1603, it is likely that the death toll was greater than that recorded.¹⁴⁹ It has been noted that the city 'escaped the ravages experienced in larger provincial towns', but even at the recorded figure, Gloucester lost one twelfth of its citizens in the epidemic.¹⁵⁰ Gloucester's 1604-05 epidemics 'almost certainly spread from Bristol where there was a major outbreak', giving the surviving Corporation good reason to prevent playing in the city in the early seventeenth century.¹⁵¹ However, as there is no data for strollers visiting Bristol in this period, one cannot establish a definite pattern; even data for playing in Bath is absent

¹⁴⁶ Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 88.

¹⁴⁷ Clark, 'The Civic Leaders of Gloucester', p. 336; p. 328.

¹⁴⁸ Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence', p. 204.

¹⁴⁹ Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence', p. 204; Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 90.

¹⁵⁰ Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence', p. 205.

¹⁵¹ Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 74.

for the plague years 1604-05, thus a comparison cannot be made with this neighbouring town.¹⁵²

1620s Playing in Stuart Gloucester

It has been argued that drama in the English provinces underwent a decline in the Stuart reign, a trend which seems to have been repeated throughout almost every province and parish in the 1620s and 1630s. Peter Greenfield has put forward a convincing case for the decline of cases of strolling companies calling upon Gloucester: that the lack of further legislation against playing in the seventeenth century suggests that the 1591 ordinance reasserted the rights of the mayor over the patrons, prior to the 1597 proclamation denying mayoral rights to license players.¹⁵³ Peter Clark has suggested that the increase in Puritan values in the 1610s and 1620s 'served to buttress the Magistrates' authority and encourage a sense of solidarity amongst the respectable citizenry'.¹⁵⁴ Thus, a unified government would have decided one way or the other what was to be done about playing in the city, and given that Puritans were not overly in favour of festivity, it was probably decided to send the itinerant companies away.

One entry into the Corporation Clerks' Memoranda Book on 25 October 1624 relates to a troupe of licensed strollers attempting to play in Gloucester. The itinerants were operating under 'a *commicon* under *Sir* Henry Harberts hand'.¹⁵⁵ Henry Herbert was Master of the Revels from 1623 to 1673, and exercised control and censorship over all plays and players in England, including the provinces. The three players, Henry

¹⁵² REED *Bath*, p. 19. There are no payments made to entertainers from October 1603 to December 1605.

¹⁵³ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', pp. 156-66.

¹⁵⁴ Clark, 'Civic Leaders in Gloucester', p. 322.

¹⁵⁵ Corporation Clerks' Minute Book, 25 October 1624, cited in REED *Glos.*, p. 319.

Sandes, Alexander Baker, Robert Smedley, and their minstrel Jarvis Gennatt, were legally entitled to request an audience before the mayor of Gloucester, such as had been required for the previous sixty-five years, asking permission of ‘mr mayor to let them play according to their commicon’.¹⁵⁶ The players had legitimate cause to present themselves to the mayor as they were carrying a valid licence; the document had been signed by the Revels’ Office on 28 September 1624 and they had applied for a performance in late October. There is no information about the identities of these players in the Gloucester records, so they were probably not local. Considering that their licence had been recently granted, a month prior to their visit, it is possible that these men were strollers from London, but they do not appear to have been affiliated to any of the main metropolitan companies. The Corporation Clerks’ Memoranda Book was a register for recording ‘arrests and punishments for vagabondage’.¹⁵⁷ This assumes that the players were treated as vagrant criminals on their arrival in Gloucester, despite having adhered to the protocols which were in place in early modern England. Therefore, by the end of the reign of James I, Gloucester was refusing even legitimate strollers, suggesting that the city was not interested in welcoming travelling players. I do not, however, believe that this one isolated instance should be used as an example of the customary reaction to strolling players in the 1620s, but in the absence of further evidence it is difficult to gauge general reception of companies of players in Stuart Gloucester.

Perhaps the conclusion that the city did not support players into the 1620s and 1630s has been arrived at from a reading of the economic data for Jacobean Gloucester. The aldermen were aware of the instability of the city in the early seventeenth century: ‘the great fall of trade generally in this city by reason of the late great and yet

¹⁵⁶ Corporation Clerks’ Minute Book, 25 October 1624, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 320.

¹⁵⁷ Greenfield, ‘The Documents’, in *REED Glos.*, p. 263.

continuing plague, the excessive number of poor, chiefly occasioned by the decay in clothing'.¹⁵⁸ Peter Ripley suggests that 'the disquiet' expressed by the government was 'certainly genuine'.¹⁵⁹ Most properties in central Gloucester were used as warehouses for the port, and owners were encouraged to do the same by the council.¹⁶⁰ There seemed therefore little incentive to establish a private playing venue in the city centre, and the premises would be better served as merchant properties. Many industries which had boomed in Gloucester during the sixteenth century were experiencing financial uncertainty; the city did not expand into international trade, rather maintaining its reputation as an inland port dealing in local produce. By 1624, the city was slowly progressing out of the east gate and into Barton Street where the later theatres were established, thus any private playhouses would probably have been established in this southern suburb. Therefore the potential audience for any Boothall productions had migrated out of the city proper, into the liberties, or may have left the town completely.¹⁶¹

There has been speculation that the New Inn, a large hostelry on Northgate Street, was a theatrical venue although limited available evidence means that a firm conclusion cannot currently be drawn.¹⁶² The inn was almost certainly a lodging-place for the strollers, and may have been where Sandes and his men stayed whilst attempting to play in Gloucester. This impressive inn was built before 1455 by Abbot John Twining for the housing of pilgrims who flocked to the grave of Edward II.¹⁶³ The

¹⁵⁸ *VCH IV*, p. 75, *GBR H2/2*, p. 67.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence', p. 199.

¹⁶⁰ Peter Ripley, 'The Trade and Social Structure of Gloucester', p. 120.

¹⁶¹ Ripley, 'Parish Register Evidence', p. 201.

¹⁶² Alan Somerset, Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario, editor of the Shropshire volume of *REED* and director of the 'Western' research team for the *REED Patrons and Performances* project [<http://link.library.utoronto.ca/reed/>] told me on 29 July 2004 that he has researched the history of the New Inn and that there is no evidence to suggest that players performed there. Conversely, much of the tourist literature of Gloucester says that Shakespeare played at the New Inn.

¹⁶³ See Appendix, Plate IV.

current building stands ‘on the site of an older and probably smaller structure,’ the Pilgrim’s Inn.¹⁶⁴ The innyard certainly bears the hallmarks of an early modern playing space, but there is little evidence to suggest that it was. The galleried courtyard is reminiscent of sketches of similar spaces in Elizabethan London, and its photograph is used in much literature to illustrate an example of a medieval/early modern inn.

By the 1620s, when the ‘decline’ of travelling players was being felt in the provinces, the New Inn had its own tennis courts, and a visitor in the 1630s remarked that the inn was ‘much frequented by gallants, the hostess there being as handsome and gallant as any other’.¹⁶⁵ It is possible that players may have acted here but as the evidence for such occurrences has not survived, this theory is merely conjectural. The inn was most certainly used as an exchange for merchant business, which explains why the New Inn was called upon as a venue for corporate entertainment by the largest trade fraternity in Gloucester. The tanning trade was a prosperous one in Gloucester, despite the financial misfortunes of other sister industries, as one in eight men surveyed in 1608 were involved in the leather trade.¹⁶⁶ The Master of the Tanner’s Company was contracted to serve dinner to all members on St. Clement’s Day, and the fraternity chose the New Inn four times for this honour there between 1612-3 and 1621-2, although this may have been due to the lease on their hall in Hare Lane expiring in 1601.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Anon., *Historical Mementoes of the New Inn Hotel, Gloucester (sic), circa 1450-1709 AD* (Gloucester: John Jennings, n.d, probably early 20th Century); *GRO D4304/4*.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester’, p. 79.

¹⁶⁶ *VCH IV*, p. 76, citing Smyth, *Men and Armour*, pp. 2-10.

¹⁶⁷ The lease of the property from the city was drawn up in 1540 for tenure of 61 years, by the ‘Master, Wardens and Fraternity of Tanners to the Corporation of Tanner’s Hall, Hare Lane [abuttals], *GBR J3*, f.20. Tanner’s Hall, Worcester Street, lies on the south side of the outer ring road around Gloucester, Gouda Lane, opposite the Gloucestershire Archives. It is now derelict, designated ‘at risk’ and unlisted, but a Scheduled Ancient Monument (ref. 28814); Bazeley, ‘Guilds of Gloucester’, p. 267; *REED Glos.*, pp. 317-19.

The economic downturn that the city experienced in the late Jacobean period may have denied the city sufficient funds for major corporate entertainments. The textile industry had almost collapsed in the face of Stroudwater's competition and the dispersal of apprentices to Bristol ensured that their surviving trades were weakened. The identification of Gloucester as a trading post rather than a manufacturing hub had driven out the potential men who could have strengthened the economy. Also the variety of trades in Gloucester, rather than a main dominant industry, undermined the principal guilds. These traditional associations suffered from corporate interference in the early 1600s, meaning they lost their status as religious and social community groups and became purely economic agencies to serve the remaining members.

The economic outlook for Gloucester in the 1620s was bleak and a 'decade of crisis *par excellence*' for the Weavers.¹⁶⁸ Guild restrictions and the insular attitude of the 'closed corporation' had driven many cloth merchants out of the city to Stroudwater, leaving the already weak economy exposed. A general crisis in the textile industry had a detrimental effect on the city's remaining mercers and drapers, and followed the general trade depression of the 1620s.¹⁶⁹ The city, despite having a potential market with enough disposable income to warrant shops 'on the London model', was 'not a social magnet'.¹⁷⁰ The poor of the county were so desperate, that in 1622 they 'went in groups to houses of the rich, demanding money and seizing provisions'.¹⁷¹ 1624, the year in which Sandes attempted to play with his legal licence, saw a major conflict between the city and the county gentry over control of the inshire and inclusion in the decision

¹⁶⁸ W. B. Stephens, *Sources for English Local History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), p. 152.

¹⁶⁹ Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester', p. 82.

¹⁷⁰ Ryder, *Gloucestershire Through the Ages*, p. 13.

¹⁷¹ Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 21.

making of the city government.¹⁷² As no members of the gentry were represented in the Corporation, the government had no supporting voice at Court. James I sold off much of the Crown land in Gloucestershire which further enraged the city governors. Charles I issued a Charter to Gloucester in 1627, which probably infuriated the insular council with accusations of royal intervention in county matters.¹⁷³ However, the city was granted permission to levy tolls on all vessels travelling northwards on the Severn, receiving 4d for every boat laden with timber, board or lath and 2d for ships carrying firewood.¹⁷⁴ Increasing Crown interference in local government matters also set the Corporation against Parliament, and coupled with the Gloucester elites' Puritan views and traditional resistance to authority, it is easy to see why the city was so fiercely Parliamentary in the Civil War. Caroline Gloucester was economically stable, but not prosperous. It 'retained its important traditional functions as a distribution hub and purveyor of professional service' but without, it appears, any cultural diversions for the 'flourishing farming region'.¹⁷⁵ However, a caveat in the Charter made a strict provision to protect Gloucester's electoral independence once more, 'to remove doubt, Burgesses shall elect two Burgesses to Parliament who shall also be Knights of the Shire for the County and the same city'.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Clark, 'Civic Leaders of Gloucester', p. 322.

¹⁷³ *GBR JI/35*, cited in Stevenson, *Calendar of Gloucester Records*, pp. 40-45.

¹⁷⁴ *GBR JI/31*, cited in Stevenson, *Calendar of Gloucester Records*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁵ Clark, 'Civic Leaders of Gloucester', p. 313.

¹⁷⁶ *GBR JI/31*, cited in Stevenson, *Calendar of Gloucester Records*, p. 45.

CHAPTER THREE

“They do hold their course toward Tewksbury”:¹ Community Recreation in a North Gloucestershire Town

Where Gloucester is a case study for municipal playing, evidenced by the eye-witness account of the mayor’s play and the performances of these plays in the civic Boothall, Tewkesbury personifies the idea of community drama, performed by the townsfolk and visiting actors in their communal spaces. The principal source of evidence for instances of acting in early modern Tewkesbury are contained within the detailed churchwardens’ accounts, which are extant from 1563 to 1703. These records itemise receipts into the church accounts for monies gained from the lease of playing gear from 1567-8 to 1584-5. It has been assumed that because the church received these payments, the plays performed using these costumes must therefore have been religious in nature; this theory is supported by the use of the Tewkesbury Abbey churchyard as a playing space in the Elizabethan town. However, I intend to offer an alternative hypothesis and suggest that at least some, if not all of these performances may have been secular in character. I shall use other receipts from the churchwardens’ accounts and comparative data from other contemporary churchwardens’ accounts in England to propose that Tewkesbury’s playing spaces, exclusive of the Abbey, were privately occupied and therefore potential independent playing spaces outside of the control of the parish. As there is limited evidence for professional playing in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tewkesbury, I shall employ evidence relating to the neighbouring county and city of Worcester to draw vicinal comparisons of dramatic consumption. In addition, I have found that analysing genealogical data for early modern Tewkesbury has yielded many interesting leads, and I also wish to suggest that a community kinship network may have been responsible for encouraging dramatic output in the Tewkesbury, in a similar way

¹ *Henry VI, Part III*, V:iii, ll. 18-19.

to the Machen family of Gloucester. In identifying key personalities in the town, and their residences, I have located potential alternative venues for private dramatic performances in Tewkesbury outside of the Abbey precinct than previously proposed.

Although there are only twenty one, mostly sporadic, entries in the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts relating to playing over a relatively short period of thirty years, these records are exceptional in characterising a small community and its relationship with amateur and/or professional dramatic entertainment. The Tewkesbury churchwardens profited, if only marginally, from loaning out their players' wardrobe and even deemed it appropriate to extend the number of items available to the community by employing local tradesmen to create extra materials for the collection. These informative church records begin in 1567-8 and continue until 1584-5. There were nine fiscal years in which playing gear was loaned out by the Abbey, and there were two periods of consecutive activity, from 1575-6 to 1578-9 and 1582-3 to 1584-5. I shall examine these intermittent but remarkable items in order to assess how the Tewkesbury church and community may have reacted to instances of playing in the town. In the absence of further data relating to these charges in Tewkesbury, I shall draw upon other Elizabethan churchwardens' accounts, catalogued in 1913 by J. Charles Cox in his book *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*. This work principally concentrates upon parishes in south-east England, especially Essex, but is illuminating in offering a contemporary economic comparison with the churchwardens' accounts of Tewkesbury.²

The period 1584-5 was one of church and civic playing in the town. There was a municipally-sponsored play performed in the market square in November 1584, for the

² J. Charles Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1913).

first time the Abbey playing wardrobe was loaned out to neighbouring communities and the churchwardens' accounts list an inventory of items belonging to the parish. The loan of the acting wardrobe to other parishes is significant in that it either demonstrates that the knowledge of Tewkesbury's available costumes was spreading to neighbouring villages, there was sufficient material in the wardrobe to allow multiple loans at any one time or that travelling players were active in the region. However, it is the entry in the Borough Minute Book regarding the market play which I believe is of most interest. The play took place in November, when Leicester was courting Gloucestershire justices to be his candidate for Parliament. I shall examine the details of this market performance for indications that this performance was acted by Leicester's men in an attempt ingratiate their patron in the north of the county in addition to establishing his dominance of the county capital. The itineraries of travelling players known to have been active in the region will be assessed to determine whether Tewkesbury may have been a stop on their route in 1584.

Perhaps the most crucial piece of evidence in the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts is the extremely detailed balance sheet which itemised all revenue and expenditure for a fundraising event in May 1600. The Abbey's wooden battlement had been weather-damaged and the churchwardens sought to raise the required repair funds by staging a three-day Whitsun festival. There were to be three plays performed in the Abbey precinct to attract, it has been argued, customers to buy grain and cereal that the townsfolk had donated. The Tewkesbury churchwardens, Peter Greenfield has proposed, were 'spacing the plays' over three days thus allowing the audience 'to develop an interest in the grain sale'.³ I believe that the plays were the focus of the event and that the company of players were, unlike has been previously supposed, a

³ Peter Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama in Gloucestershire', p. 84.

professional strolling band and the itineraries of troupes playing in the region will be studied in an attempt to ascertain the identity of the strollers who may have performed the three Whitsun plays in 1600. I shall examine the financial accounts paid out ‘about the plays’ and argue that such generous expenditure, for example on meat, drink, and servants, was worthy of players of quality, rather than an amateur troupe of Tewkesbury townfolk.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that there was a ‘decline’ in playing in 1620s Tewkesbury as there is no data for entertainments in the town after 1600, I shall examine the possibility of playing in the town in the reign of James I and where such performances may have taken place. That Tewkesbury had demonstrated her approval of playing in the sixteenth century it is probable that the tradition was maintained, perhaps in a private residence and again I shall use genealogical evidence to propose possible venues. Two properties close to the Abbey, which later became houses of religious nonconformity, shall be investigated as potential playing places, as well as local hostelryes.

Venues

There is unfortunately no evidence in the extant Tewkesbury records to suggest that players performed in any municipal hall in the town, but the references in the extant records certainly suggest that they would have been received in the open areas of the town when on their arrival. However, there are only two references in the churchwardens’ accounts which relate to a playing place. The first was noted in 1575-6,

Paid for mending ye newe seate being brokene Downe at Aplaye	ii d
Paide for naylles to Doo ye same	i d. ⁴

Regrettable it is not apparent whether the Abbey seat was damaged watching a play for which the playing gear was rented or if there was another production of which we have no knowledge. It is supposed that this statement refers to a piece of furniture situated inside the Abbey, but in the absence of any other evidence this remains conjectural. There is a comparative record in the Mayor's Audits in Bristol for damage to seating during a public performance of a stage play by Lord Strange's Men in April 1581. The performance well attended, the strength of the crowd was such that two 'fowrnes' were destroyed. Pilkington states that these were 'objects on which the audience sat and/or the players performed'.⁵ It is likely that they were pews or benches, as they had been 'by the disorder of the people broken'.⁶ Replacements were bought at the cost of 2s 5d from St. George's Chapel, the civic record repository adjacent to the Guildhall, and apparently had to be substituted before the play began.⁷ Thus it is possible that 'ye newe seat' belonging to the Abbey may have been lent to another playing place. 1575 was the year in which Tewkesbury was incorporated as a borough, so maybe there was a special performance to celebrate the town's independence in a municipal venue. The second reference to a venue in the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts relates to the 1600 Whitsun plays which were to be 'within the abbey'; the Borough Minute Book also states that these plays should be 'shewed in the abby'.⁸ However, I feel that the associated evidence in the expense accounts for the Whitsun plays may call into question the Abbey itself as a venue. I shall examine the evidence for playing in the

⁴ *REED Glos.*, p. 336.

⁵ Mark Pilkington, 'Playing in the Guildhall, Bristol' *REEDN*, 14:2 (1989), 14-19 (p. 18).

⁶ *REED Bristol*, p. 122.

⁷ Pilkington, 'Playing in the Guildhall', p. 18. St. George's Chapel ceased to be a place of worship in the reign of Henry VIII and was converted into a store room for municipal records, N. Dermott-Harding, 'The Archives of the Corporation of Bristol', p. 231. I include this fact in order that the reader does not assume that a local church was profiting from civic playing or as a consequence of public disorder in Bristol.

⁸ *REED Glos.*, p. 340.

Abbey and also other, privately-leased, spaces within the precinct which may have hosted the three Whitsun productions.

Siobhan Keenan has examined the idea of ‘Church as Theatre’ in *Travelling Players in Shakespeare’s England*. She states that the church building was often used as a temporary venue by strolling companies, principally because the Protestant Church approved of drama as a didactic tool for in the instruction of parishioners.⁹ The church building was an ‘obvious venue’ as it served as a convenient and central space for recreational use within the community and may have been the only option when ‘sizeable public venues were scarce’. The clergy, Keenan suggests, would often assist the players in sourcing playing gear and properties, which was an added incentive for players to choose the church.¹⁰ The churchwardens’ accounts of Chelmsford, analysed by Cox, prove that professional travelling players who visited the city had utilised the local church wardrobe as a resource; the Earl of Sussex’s men had paid 26s 8d for garment hire as early as 1570.¹¹ John Wasson has investigated the church as theatrical space and found that in most English parishes, ‘accommodating local audiences in the nave was the rule’.¹² Tewkesbury’s Benedictine Abbey is of Norman design and was built on a cruciform plan; the nave, where the plays would most likely have taken place, has two aisles, north and south, under the central tower.¹³ In the instance of travelling players visiting such towns, Wasson states, ‘they were most likely to play in the church’.¹⁴ He argues that the church was ‘the most suitable acting space’ available to most parishes, as it had been designed to be large enough to hold all of the inhabitants

⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players in Shakespeare’s England*, p. 46.

¹⁰ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 50.

¹¹ Cox, *Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. 278.

¹² John M. Wasson, ‘The English Church as Theatrical Space’, in Cox and Kastan, *A New History of Early English Drama*, 25-37 (p. 26).

¹³ Alan Hannan, ‘Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester’, p. 87.

¹⁴ Wasson, ‘English Church’, p. 36.

a curious one' and questioned whether 'place' referred to a stage 'constructed inside the abbey'.²⁰ By 1996, he was convinced that this place to play in 'must refer to the construction of a stage, since it seems unlikely that the parish would charge itself for the use of the church or any other space 'within the abbey''.²¹ I wish to argue the case for two other possible venues for the 1600 Whitsun plays within the precinct of Tewkesbury Abbey, the Abbey House and the churchyard, both of which were privately rented from the churchwardens and therefore private spaces. It may have been to the tenant of the church house or the churchyard who received the 13s 4d fee for the 'place to playe in' in 1600.²²

Keenan has identified the church house as another potential venue and it appears to have been a popular choice with Elizabethan travelling players as there is 'plentiful' evidence for many uses of this type of venue in the provincial records. These productions, like the mayor's play before the aldermanic bench in municipal venues such as Gloucester Boothall, 'are likely to have been public, and the audiences therefore socially mixed [...] people from neighbouring communities and parishes may have attended well-publicised performances'.²³ These halls were 'sometimes conversions' and many had been specifically rebuilt or renovated for the purpose of public entertainment during the sixteenth century. They at 'most contained at least one room capable of accommodating a sizeable parish gathering. Often this room was on an upper floor, while the lower might be rented out annually'.²⁴ The upper floor may also have been leased by travelling players, which 'probably imitated the standard practice when

²⁰ *REED Glos.*, p. 429, endnote to pp. 340-42.

²¹ Peter Greenfield, 'Parish Drama in Four Counties bordering the Thames Watershed', p. 109.

²² See Appendix, Plate V.

²³ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 61.

²⁴ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 53.

they would hire an inn'.²⁵ J. Charles Cox believes that indoor venues were the usual venues for charitable events within the community:

at the church house were held Bride-ales, to celebrate the wedding of those too poor to provide their own wedding feast; Clerk-ales, to find the stipend of the parish clerk; or Bid-ales, to help some poor man in trouble [the building was] erected or bought for the purpose of becoming the focus of the social life of the parish.²⁶

A church house in Sherbourne, Dorset, was definitely a sixteenth-century playing space, thus it is possible that the Tewkesbury venue may also have hosted the Whitsun plays in 1600. The lower floor of the St. Mary's church house in Sherborne was divided into shops, whilst the upper floor was a theatre.²⁷ The Queen's Men played in the venue in 1597-8 and 1598-9.²⁸ The company had rented it out at 2s per performance.²⁹ The fee for the 'place to play in' for the three Whitsun plays at Tewkesbury was 13s 4d, rather more than the equivalent 6s for three days' play in Dorset which the Queen's Men would have expected to pay. The churchwardens' accounts of Great Marlow, Buckinghamshire, record a rental of 2s 4d in 1595 for 'playinge in the church lofte', which may have been the upper floor of the church house.³⁰ Again, the small amount cannot be compared to the 13s 4d for the three-day lease at Tewkesbury, unless lighting or some other additional cost had been factored into the price. The Abbey House was the building most likely to have served as the church house in Elizabethan Tewkesbury. It is substantial two-storey property which lies to the south-west of the Abbey, and adjoins the churchyard to the west.³¹ The churchwardens' accounts record the rentals and any extra revenues collected from the property. It seems from the accounts received

²⁵ Gurr, 'Loss of records', *REEDN*, p. 7.

²⁶ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 287.

²⁷ Rosalind Conklin Hays, 'Dorset Church Houses and the Drama', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 31 (1992), 13-23 (pp. 14-15), cited in Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 53.

²⁸ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 53.

²⁹ *REED: Dorset/Cornwall*, p. 272.

³⁰ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 281.

³¹ See Appendix, Plate V.

that the Abbey House was indeed divided into two chargeable premises one for private rent and one for communal gatherings, such as fair days. In 1567-8, two entries are made in the accounts which detail the churchwardens receiving payment for market standings. It is not clarified, but these standings were probably in the upper storey of the house, if the lower level was rented by the parishioners, as evidenced in Keenan's research. The first entry in the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts for the 'standings' in 1567-8 does not have a fee attached, but the second of the same fiscal year notes an extra payment: 'for the standings in the church house at the two faire days, 6s 5d'.³² It is not specified whether there were two instances of two fair days, but this was probably the case, as the following year 4s was collected for 'standings in the church howse' followed by an entry relating to a receipt for 16d gathered from Humphrey Richards for his standing for 'too faire days'.³³ By 1570-1, these fairs were specified as those of St. Bartholomew [24 August] and St. Matthew [21 September]. Perhaps travelling players were welcomed at these events, which instigated the regular practice of renting the playing gear from the churchwardens in Tewkesbury from 1572-4 to 1584-5.

Keenan states that there may have been sufficient equipment in sixteenth-century church houses for brewing, which may have supplemented the churchwardens' income further: 'as spaces intended for parish recreations, including parish ales, provision was sometimes made for baking or brewing on-site'.³⁴ A midsummer 'King-ale' took place on Sunday 29 June 1600 in Wootton, Hampshire. This event involved the use of the church house for fundraising, but the Wootton churchwardens' accounts reveal that the use of the property earned revenue for the church, rather than costing it as in Tewkesbury. There were two entries referring to the building:

³² Caroline Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 15.

³³ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 16.

³⁴ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 53.

Rec. out of the Churchowse for drink thear [...]	xij d
Rec. more out of the Churchowse	vij d.

Thus the Wootton churchwardens gained 20d for the ale brewed in the church house. The Tewkesbury accounts for May 1600 denote that a portion of 40s was *spent* on brewing the malt which had been donated.³⁵ Wootton parish benefited from using the church house for preparing the ale; Tewkesbury Abbey paid for the brewing, suggesting that the process was carried out elsewhere, perhaps the in the privately rented level portion of the Abbey House. The churchwardens of Wootton also organised a theatrical performance as part of the June festivities, and 2s was given ‘to Whitburn for his play’. There are certain similarities with the victuals purchased for the event, as the Hampshire parish bought ‘three calves, five lambs, three sheep, and a couple of chickens’ plus ‘fish, eggs, butter, fruit and spice’, but these were not, as in Tewkesbury, ‘laide about the playes’.³⁶

Although it is likely that the tenant of the Tewkesbury Abbey House was in receipt of the 13s 4d for the three plays in 1600, due to its convenience and proximity to the church building, it is possible that the churchyard may also have served as the venue for the staging of the Whitsun festivities, or for the previous plays for which the gear was rented. Siobhan Keenan has stated that travelling players would have preferred to use the church house over the churchyard, as the indoor space offered extra benefits, such as walls for backdrops and of course, a space in all weathers.³⁷ John Wasson believes that the main building would have been used, as although ‘it may seem surprising’, there were on average ten times more plays performed in the church than in

³⁵ ‘Item for [i]i butte[s] [& halfe] of beare and brewing our malte, xls’ in expenditure list for the Whitsun Plays.

³⁶ Cox, *Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. 281.

³⁷ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 45.

the churchyard.³⁸ There were also benefits to the churchyard as a playing space. Both the church and the churchyard were traditional centres of culture in medieval England, so it is highly likely that the space was used for communal events, if not the plays.³⁹ The standard size for a churchyard was a ‘God’s acre’, which allowed scope for a larger audience than could be contained within the nave.⁴⁰ Tewkesbury Abbey churchyard measures one and a quarter acres for the people of the town to ‘have, hold and enjoy’.⁴¹ An example from Bungay in Suffolk, shows that in 1561 the combined price for ‘the scaffold for the interlude in the churchyarde, meat and wages’ was five shillings.⁴² Although the Tewkesbury play was forty years after the Bungay production, it is unlikely that 13s 4d was paid for a churchyard scaffold to show the 1600 Whitsun plays. However, in the absence of definite data, the Tewkesbury Abbey churchyard remains a strong candidate for the playing place. Keenan cannot offer any comment upon churchyard performances which were mounted on stages, as this ‘is not usually mentioned in early modern records’.⁴³

Richard Stone was the first to lease the Tewkesbury Abbey churchyard, at 4s 10d for one year in 1570-1. The tenure for this land, as with the church house, was reviewed annually.⁴⁴ From 1571-2 until 1583, it appears from the churchwardens’ receipts that a gentleman named John Plumber leased the churchyard. In 1584-5, the last year in which the playing gear was loaned out by the Tewkesbury churchwardens, the rental contract had been undertaken by Edith Plomer [Plumber] and Laurence Moone, who was serving

³⁸ Wasson, ‘English Church’, p. 26.

³⁹ Peter Borsay, ‘All the town’s a stage: urban ritual and ceremony, 1660-1800’, in *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns*, 229-53 (p. 250).

⁴⁰ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 54.

⁴¹ ‘Grant of the Abbey Church to the Parishioners’, cited in Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 323.

⁴² Cox, *Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. 275.

⁴³ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. 23.

as a churchwarden at the time.⁴⁵ It may be a coincidence that the Plumbers relinquishing their interest in the churchyard corresponded with the cessation of rentals of the playing gear, but something certainly changed in the dramatic culture of the town in 1584-5.

Churchyard playing did occur in the county, although not with any great frequency. A summer performance by the Queen's men took place in 1590 in the Gloucester 'Colledge Churche yarde'.⁴⁶ The Gloucester accounts do not mention a scaffold set up in the churchyard, so therefore there can be no comparison drawn in price. Keenan states that this public performance took place in the upper churchyard of St. Peter's Cathedral, the area of the cemetery reserved for the lay citizens, which was also known as College Green.⁴⁷ This area lies parallel with Westgate Street, behind St. Nicholas' Church. Keenan proposes that the Cathedral precinct was chosen as it would have been walled, therefore allowing limited access through St. Mary's Gate to the west [the lower churchyard] or King Edward's Gate to the south [the upper churchyard], where the porters or gatekeepers could have collected the entry fees.⁴⁸ The Gloucester churchyard was also a convenient and spacious area for playing in clement weather, states Keenan, as it would offer a 'commodious theatrical arena'.⁴⁹ She states that this incident in Gloucester is the 'only clear record' of churchyard playing by a patronised

⁴⁵ Litzenger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 54. Edith Plomer and Lawrence Moone rented the churchyard for six months from 24 May to 29 September 1584. Moone served as a Churchwarden in 1584-5, p. xxiii.

⁴⁶ *REED Glos.*, p. 311. There is no date attached to this performance, however the two entries which flank this record are dated. This event took place after Lord Chandos' puppet players were rewarded on 30 June and before the Lord Admiral's players appeared on 17 September 1590. The appearance of the Queen's Men in Bristol between 2 and 8 August suggests that they visited Gloucester at a similar time [*REED Bristol*, p. 135-6]; see Appendix, Plate III.

⁴⁷ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 54. The thoroughfare was known as Abbey Lane in the sixteenth century [map in *VCH IV*, p. 68].

⁴⁸ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 55.

⁴⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 61.

troupe between 1559 and 1625.⁵⁰ It is likely that the entry ‘college churchyard’ refers to the precinct of Gloucester Cathedral, as Speed’s 1610 map denotes the ‘College’ to the west of the Cathedral. It was not unusual for players to perform outdoors, as the Queen’s Men themselves had ‘tumbled’ at St. Bartholomew’s Free School in early August 1590.⁵¹ Perhaps the company had chosen that year’s itinerary to play in public places, as the Queen’s tumblers had also given a performance on a scaffold in Shrewsbury’s corn market on 24 July 1590.⁵² If the Gloucester Corporation had charged the general public to enter the Cathedral grounds to watch the Queen’s Men it is certainly not mentioned in the records.

1567-1585
Evidence for playing in the Churchwardens’ Accounts.

The first entry in the Tewkesbury churchwardens’ accounts relating to the ‘hier of the players gere’ was noted in 1567-8, when the church received eighteen pence in exchange for the costumes.⁵³ The next entry was worded differently: the ‘Lone off ther players aperall’, as was the fee received, which this time was 3s 4d. In fact, there was no identifiable tariff for the loan of the parish wardrobe, although 3s 4d was charged four times:

DATE	DETAILS OF TRANSACTION IN LEASE ACCOUNT	COST
1567-8	Hire of playing gear	18d
1572-4	Loan of the players apparel	3s 4d
1576-7	Hire of the players gear	3s 8d
	Thomas Wheler hires gear	4s
	Thomas & John Wheler hire gear on credit at Midsummer	4s

⁵⁰ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 45.

⁵¹ REED *Bristol*, pp. 135-36.

⁵² REED *Shropshire*, I, p. 247.

⁵³ REED *Glos.*, p. 335.

1577-8	Richard Donne hires players apparel	3s 4d
1578-80	Hire of the players apparel Roger Wiette hires the players apparel	6s 8d 3s
1582-3	Luke Hurst hires the players apparel Players' beards hired out Players' capes/caps hired out	2s 7d 6d 3s 4d
1583-4	Willilam Salisbury & Richard Matthews hire the rament Loan of the apparel at Christmas Richard Wood & John Farley of Mathon hire gear	3s 4d 8s 2d 5s
1584-5	Certain men of Mathon use the players' apparel Person/Parson of Hillchurche for hire of apparel at Christmas last	5s 3s 6d

Table 5: Rental receipts in the Tewkesbury Abbey Churchwardens' Accounts, 1567-1585.

It appears that the charges for the hire of the players' wardrobe was discretionary, in a similar manner to the payments made to travelling players by the mayor of Gloucester in the 1550s and 1560s. What is clear is that the same rate was charged to individuals who hired the outfits more than once. The men of Mathon, probably Richard Wood and John Farley, on both occasions, were charged five shillings for the costumes; Thomas Wheler paid four shillings for each rental. What is unfortunately not obvious is the length of the rental contract, whether these charges were a cumulative figure for any number of items borrowed or for what purpose the clothing was hired for. Immediately, it is apparent that Tewkesbury Abbey was either uninterested in profit or was charging well under the market value for costume rental:

From various entries of the years 1563-76 it appears that the churchwardens of Chelmsford received a considerable addition to their income from letting out the players' garments for the use of other parishes. Thus in 1563 they received from the men of Colchester [...] 53s 4d on two different occasions.⁵⁴

We are fortunate to have the inventory of the Chelmsford wardrobe in 1562, which lists a stock of over fifty items of clothing, plus beards, wigs and props.⁵⁵ This may explain the high value of the rental receipts. Braintree in Essex must also have found the

⁵⁴ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 278.

⁵⁵ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 277.

practice to have been lucrative, as they received a payment of 8s 7d for one receipt for hiring the gear; the whole stock was eventually sold for 50s.⁵⁶ Sutterton in Lincolnshire received comparable monies to Tewkesbury - in 1561 the parish gained 6d for the rental of 'serten stuff' to a neighbouring village.⁵⁷ I would suggest that the relatively small and sporadic collection of rental monies by the Tewkesbury churchwardens is indicative of a support for drama in the town. The church may have been charging token amounts to cover costs for wear and tear of the 'certain stuff'. It is possible that the playing gear was not hired out to earn any particular income, but just as a convenience for local players or visiting strollers who happened to need to supplement their wardrobe with costumes and props that the Abbey possessed.

John C. Coldewey has put forward a proposal as to why the clergy came to be in possession of playing gear in the first place. He suggests that the Vestiarian Controversy, when Catholic vestments were seen to have forsaken their sacrosanct significance, was responsible for the increase of local religious drama in the 1560s and its disappearance two decades later.⁵⁸ When the Protestant exiles returned to England after Elizabeth's accession, they complained of the 'popish wardrobe' of the clergy, and as the vestments were not sacred to Protestants, the 'cast-off clerical garb' was donated to the parish for fund-raising purposes, then rented out to playing companies.⁵⁹ A reference in 1577 in the Elizabethan churchwardens' accounts of Bungay, Suffolk, suggests that this did indeed take place: 'all the game players gownes and coats that were made of certayne peces of olld copes'. Yet there are also numerous references outside of Essex to churchwardens leasing or lending player's wardrobes before the

⁵⁶ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 274.

⁵⁷ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 277.

⁵⁸ John Coldewey, 'Early Essex Drama: A History of Its Rise and Fall and a Theory Concerning the Digby Plays', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, 1972), pp. 255-57, cited in Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 73.

⁵⁹ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 74.

Reformation, which suggests it was commonplace for parishes to rent out property.⁶⁰ The practice was occurring as early as 1460 when the churchwardens of St. Margaret's in Southwark paid 14d 'for hyring of the Germentes'.⁶¹ In 1474, the churchwardens' accounts of St. John in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, paid the men of nearby Deeping 16d for the hire of 'iiii garments'.⁶² In 1491-2, the fund of Ashburton, Devon, received a shilling 'from Widelambe for players' clothing' and appeared to have amassed a substantial wardrobe by 1519-20 as 2s 8d was spent, either on storage or maintenance, for 'keeping the players clothes'.⁶³ In Bassingbourn Cambridgeshire there was, by 1512, a local impresario in action: 'First paid to the garnement man for garnementes and propertes and play books'.⁶⁴ Worcester Cathedral listed 'players gere' in 1576, 'A Ierkyn of greene [...] A gowne of silk [...] 2 Cappes and the devils apparel,' - the contents that are strikingly similar to those of Tewkesbury Abbey. The Worcester Cathedral inventory even included a 'woman's gown' although this may have been donated to the wardrobe.⁶⁵ The fifty or so garments belonging to Chelmsford churchwardens included similar outfits, such as velvet gowns and jerkins.⁶⁶ These may also have been donations by supporters of drama. As the entries into the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts only mention the 'gear' after 1567 it is not possible to assess whether the Abbey possessed this 'gear' as a consequence of the Vestiarian Controversy, but the lack of revenue gained from the costumes suggests that there was little value attached to the items.

⁶⁰ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 275.

⁶¹ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 268.

⁶² Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 276.

⁶³ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 269.

⁶⁴ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 272.

⁶⁵ REED Worcs., 'Cathedral Inventory', p. 447.

⁶⁶ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 277.

In 1576-7, a new direction may be felt in the dramatic culture of Tewkesbury, when the first personality in the theatrical history of the town is alluded to:

Item received of Thomas Wheler for hier of the players geare iiiij s.

Thomas Wheler, it seems, did not confine his cultural production to Tewkesbury and may have been a resident of another town, merely visiting Tewkesbury to collect the costumes. He, along with John Wheler, loaned out another four shillings' worth of clothing for a midsummer performance later in the year.⁶⁷ The men had arranged credit with Tewkesbury Abbey by a written statement, confirming that the clothes would be delivered back and that the charge for them was to be forwarded to the following year's accounts. That these players were astute enough to arrange a contract on paper suggests that these men were likely to have been educated, and were perhaps the company managers, maybe even merchants. One would imagine that if credit of four shillings were to be tendered by the Church, the two interested parties would be familiar to one another. The Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts of Gloucester record two payments to a Thomas Wheler in 1573-4. He was rewarded with 8d 'for the hawlinge of one lode of birch and one lode of bordes into the meadowe' and was paid a further 12d for taking back the timber 'from the meadowe into the Town' in preparation for the Queen's visit in early August 1574.⁶⁸ An entry in a Chamber Order Book may also place Thomas Wheler in Worcester in 1585. He was invited, as a musician, to join the waits of the city from the feast of St. Michael until the 'ffeast day of the purificacion of the blessed virgin Marye' from 29 September to 8 December.⁶⁹ Evidence in the Gloucestershire wills from the period shows that the men may have died soon after the credit agreement with the Abbey in 1576-7. A John Wheler, husbandman, probated his will in 1578, and

⁶⁷ *REED Glos.*, p. 336.

⁶⁸ *REED Glos.*, pp. 304-5.

⁶⁹ Chamber Order Book 1, 17 December, 1585-6, cited in *REED Worcs.*, p. 448.

a Thomas Wheler, also a husbandman, died in 1586. They were both buried in Frampton-on-Severn. No Wheelers are recorded in the Tewkesbury area until the 1700s so it appears that if these men were from Gloucestershire, they were buried in the south of the county. Thomas Wheler's name disappeared from the Worcester Records in 1585, so it may well have been that the waits player was a Frampton man, and moved to Worcester after his theatrical experiences in Gloucester and Tewkesbury. His warm reception in Tewkesbury may have encouraged him to seek out employment elsewhere, or he may have even been recommended to other towns for his talents. In 1577-8 another individual, Richard Donne, hired the 'players Apparell' for the small sum of 3s 4d.⁷⁰ This fee may have been reduced as Richard may have been a relation to Thomas Donne, who was one of Tewkesbury's churchwardens between 1578 and 1580.⁷¹

A second piece of evidence showing a change in the theatrical culture of Tewkesbury, and is possibly proof that players were favoured and well received in the parish, took place between 3 September 1577 and 3 May 1578. The churchwardens chose to increase the number of items in the parish wardrobe, commissioning local tradesmen to create these goods:

More that is by us/ paide unto those whose names are underwritt for ye players geare as followeth:

Item to Roberte Collens for payntinge ⁷²	iiii s vi d
Item to Roger Mylwarde for making of garmentes	iiii s viii d
Item to Richard Westone for makinge A Jerkine	xiii d
Item for vi sheepe skyns for Christes garmentes	iii s
Item to William ffyelde for buckeram for capes	viii d
Item to two kippe skins for ye thunder heads	xvi d.

⁷⁰ REED *Glos.*, p. 337.

⁷¹ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. xxiii.

⁷² 'Paintinge' refers to the embellishment or dying of the cloth, as opposed to any decorative work on scenery. Cox lists three examples from St. Margaret's parish in Southwark which detail the 'painting' of playing gear, in 1528-29, 1534-35 and 1556-57, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 269.

Thus, a total of 13s 3d was expended in 1577-78 to improve the stock of gear held by Tewkesbury Abbey. Fortunately, the accounts for 1576-77 noted the inventory of the parish playing gear:

Item one riche Coape/ five players gownes/ iiii jackets/ iiii beardes/ two heades.⁷³

It seems from the accounts detailing the labour costs for the new items that the Abbey had requests for specific props such as ‘thunderheads’ (ominous clouds) and ‘Christ’s garments’. However, I am most interested in the detail in the churchwardens’ accounts for 1577-78 listing the artisan’s names. As I have noted above, due to the lack of tangible evidence for playing in Tewkesbury I have had to rely on some conjectural data through kinship associations, and these tradesmen may have been related to other burgesses who may have benefited from playing in the town.

The churchwardens in 1577-8 were John Bubbe and Richard Field.⁷⁴ It may not have been a coincidence that Field was the first private individual to lease the Abbey House at ten shillings for a ‘halfe yeare’ in 1565-6 and that the following year playing gear began to be hired out to profit the Abbey.⁷⁵ Field may have been offsetting some of his rent by allowing players to perform in his property, the church house. William Field, who may have been a relative of Richard Field, was chosen to make ‘capes’ for the wardrobe in the expansion of 1577-78.⁷⁶ All the men involved had been admitted as freemen, with the possible exception of Roger Mylwarde. He received 4s 8d for ‘making of garments’.⁷⁷ The apprentice records for 1587 list a ‘Thomas Myllard, son of

⁷³ REED *Glos.*, p. 337.

⁷⁴ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. xxiii.

⁷⁵ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens’ Accounts*, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁶ Most probably this reference is to the making of caps, as buckram is a course stiffened linen used in bookbinding and would be more suited to a hat as opposed to a cloak or overcoat.

⁷⁷ REED *Glos.*, ‘Churchwardens’ Accounts’, p. 337.

Thomas decd' who was in the service of 'Roger Wyatt alias Myllard, tailor'.⁷⁸ A Roger Wyett, tailor, was admitted as a freeman in 1574 so it is likely that these two men are one and the same.⁷⁹ Between 1566 and 1569, a 'Mr Wyatt' had taken over the rental contract of the Abbey House for 20s per annum.⁸⁰ He was identified as William Wyatt from an entry into the Abbey receipts of 1568-9, and may have been related to Roger Mylwarde [Wyatt] who was employed to 'make garments' for the Tewkesbury parish wardrobe in 1577-78.⁸¹ William Wyett served as bailiff of Tewkesbury in 1567-68, also happened to be the tenant of the Abbey House from 1575 to 1577 while he was serving as one of the twelve principal burgesses who were granted the Charter in 1575.⁸² When Roger Wiette, a Tewkesbury parishioner, rented items of the playing gear in 1578-80 he was only charged 3s.⁸³ This is perhaps the same Roger Wyett that produced the 'garmentes' in 1577-8 and therefore had a discount on the clothes that he had crafted. Greenfield proposes that Roger Wiette may have rented the costumes from the churchwardens to clothe professional actors. He questions whether Wiette was a member of a local group who may have played 'at an inn for their own profit' or may have been a middle man for a visiting professional company.⁸⁴ This is because if Wiette were putting on a play for the benefit of the parish, he would not have had to lease the item which then 'stands as proof of activity in the town unconnected with the church'.⁸⁵ If this play *was* a secular entertainment, it is unlikely that it would feature a great number of religious characters, and so the 3s rental fee related to only a few, maybe one

⁷⁸ Norah Day, *They Used To Live In Tewkesbury*, p. 164.

⁷⁹ Day, *Tewkesbury*, p. 244.

⁸⁰ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 9; p. 16.

⁸¹ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 16.

⁸² Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 35; Frederick Boas, 'Tuesday's Productions at Tewkesbury: An Old Practice', *The Observer*; Anthea Jones, 'The Ordinances of Tewkesbury Borough Council in 1575', *THSB*, 3 (1994), 20-23 (p. 20).

⁸³ *REED Glos.*, p. 338. Greenfield states that Roger Wiette is 'the only one of those who rented the 'players apparell' who can definitely identified as a parishioner' due to an entry into the Abbey accounts 'regarding seat money', endnote to p. 338, p. 428.

⁸⁴ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 79.

⁸⁵ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 80.

or two costumes from the collection; perhaps only adornments. It may also have been Wiette who leased some accessories, as beards and capes [capes/caps?] were leased from the churchwardens in the period 1582-3 at 6d per set.⁸⁶ This may suggest that the tailor was an early Tewkesburian impresario or at least a factor for professional troupes who were prepared to play. The beards may have been hired to a boy company. If Roger Wyett/Wiette was in business with William Wyatt, then the pair would have access to both a venue and a wardrobe for any itinerants who called upon Tewkesbury. Peter Thomson has investigated actors' apparel and stated that 'leading actors [...] would have dressed themselves. Only hired men and boys would expect to be costumed out of stock'.⁸⁷ Jeanette Dillon finds that the decision to hire costumes was financial, as wigs, masks and 'conspicuously rich or grotesque costumes', such as 'gods, angels and devils' were expensive, thus stage outfits 'generally resemble the spectators' clothes'.⁸⁸ This may explain why only incidental costumes were rented from the Abbey stock. There are two probate inventories in the Worcester records to suggest that private individuals were involved in playing as a commercial exercise. William Specheley, who died in 1555-56, owned a wardrobe of players garments, 'And all other Tyrement belonging to the same' with a stock value of thirty pounds. Specheley was a draper and may have retailed the gear alongside his other textiles.⁸⁹ A second inventory, dated twenty years later, notes that Harry Smythe was in possession of forty shillings' worth of 'players geare'.⁹⁰ An interesting bequest in Smythe's will suggests that he was a patron of the performing arts, 'also I geve unto my boyes all my Instruments bothe

⁸⁶ *REED Glos.*, p. 338.

⁸⁷ Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ Janette Dillon, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre* ed. by Janette Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-212 (p. 99).

⁸⁹ Probate Inventory of William Specheley, 26 February 1555[6], *REED Worcs.*, p. 422.

⁹⁰ Probate Inventory of Harry Smythe, 1575; *REED Worcs.*, p. 444.

vyalls and recorders and theyr boks'.⁹¹ There is no indication of Smythe's profession, but he certainly had an interest in music and theatre.

Another supposition relates to the identity of the actors who hired out the costumes from Tewkesbury Abbey, perhaps through Roger Wyatt. They may have been one of the strolling companies that visited Gloucester, which could explain the inflated price of 6s 8d in 1578-80; perhaps it is no coincidence that this amount equals usual the payment made to travelling entertainers in neighbouring Gloucester in the mid-Elizabethan period. The players of Henry Berkeley performed in Gloucester in 1578, 1579 and 1580, thus they may have called upon Tewkesbury when travelling south from their lord's estate at Caludon.⁹² The expansion of the wardrobe in 1577-78 may have been at the instigation of a professional travelling company, maybe at the request to the churchwardens by Roger Wyatt.⁹³ In 1582-3, the garments were rented from Tewkesbury Abbey by 'Richard Mathewes and salsburie' at 3s 4d. The duo repeated their loan in 1583-4 when they paid the same price.⁹⁴ A Richard Matthews was admitted as a freeman of Tewkesbury in 1601 and was identified as a chapman, a pedlar of various wares, living in Barton Street by 1608.⁹⁵ William Salyburye was another tailor who had been admitted as a freeman in 1581.⁹⁶ Thus, it is possible that a number of the drapers and mercers of Tewkesbury could potentially profit from a sideline in acting as middlemen for local or itinerant actors seeking costumes whilst in Tewkesbury.

⁹¹ Will of Harry Smythe, 1575, *REED Worcs.*, p. 445.

⁹² *REED Glos.*, pp. 306-8. Berkeley's Men received 6s 8d for each of these performances.

⁹³ Thomas Machen was elected mayor of Gloucester in 1579. I would like to suggest that this is relevant, but sadly this is pure conjecture.

⁹⁴ *REED Glos.*, p. 338.

⁹⁵ Day, *Tewkesbury*, p. 221.

⁹⁶ Day, *Tewkesbury*, p. 234.

The churchwardens' accounts for 1583-5 suggest that Tewkesbury Abbey's reputation for costume hire had spread countywide and beyond. In 1583-4 Richard Wood and John Farley of Mathon, a Worcestershire town eleven miles north-west of Tewkesbury, rented the costumes for 5s. The 'men of Mathon' [probably Wood and Farley again] had the 'use of the pleyers apparrell' again the following year and were also charged the same amount. In 1584 the Tewkesbury churchwardens received 3s 6d for the use of the players' wardrobe from 'the person of hyllichurche' at Christmas.⁹⁷ Greenfield does not attribute a specific location for this record, since 'many villages in the Tewkesbury area have *hill* as an element in their names'.⁹⁸ Frederick Boas suggested that the place referred to Hill Croome, around seven miles north-west of Tewkesbury, as there was a Christmas show recorded there in 1584-5 which was 'apparently on a smaller scale' than that at Tewkesbury.⁹⁹ Alternatively, the players may have hailed from Hill Court, the residence of the Wetherstones, a prominent family in the area, whose property lay in the Longdon parish of Worcestershire. However the 'person' in question may also have travelled from Hill in South Gloucestershire, near Thornbury. The manor of Hill was granted by Robert Fitzharding to his son Nicholas sometime in the late twelfth century and apparently remained as part of the Berkeley estate in the lands of Kingswood Abbey for some time.¹⁰⁰ Hill traded in pottery along the Severn, and perhaps the merchants of the town had encountered the players when operating in Tewkesbury.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ REED *Glos.*, pp. 338-39.

⁹⁸ REED *Glos.*, footnote to l. 12 of p. 339.

⁹⁹ Frederick S. Boas, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Times*, 16 March 1933: Hannam-Clark Papers.

¹⁰⁰ *A Catalogue of the Medieval Muniments of Berkeley Castle, Volume I*, ed. by Bridget Wells-Furby, Gloucestershire Record Series, Volume 18 (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2004), p. 854. Greenfield, in 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 79 that 'it seems unlikely that this would be the village of Hill, near Berkeley'. I disagree and still maintain that the village may be a candidate.

¹⁰¹ J. R. L. Allen, 'A Post-Roman Pottery Assemblage from Hills Flats, South Gloucestershire: Trade and Communication by Water in the Severn Estuary', *TBGAS* 121 (2003), 201-12 (p. 209).

What is unfortunate about these accounts which list other parishes borrowing the gear is that they do not specify whether the wardrobe was leased and removed to the neighbouring parishes or if these representatives from Mathon or 'Hillchurche' were local bands of strolling players who had come to Tewkesbury with a view to entertaining the townsfolk. This information on leasing garments to other parishes is, though, indicative of the level of stock St. Mary's Abbey possessed. If they could hire out apparel to another town and yet have enough for their own festivities, especially at Christmas, then they must have had an ample wardrobe. Greenfield suggests that the stock was available to the parish for their own performances, and although it is not specified in the churchwardens' accounts, it may be possible that unrecorded plays were given by or on behalf of the incumbents, although this will probably never be known.¹⁰² However if, as I suppose, the Abbey playing gear was a supplementary stock for specialist plays then these items may have only been used for certain roles, rather than for general performances in the town. Therefore the wardrobe would have been in demand at Christmas, when nativity plays would have been popular. The fact the certain props were specifically hired - beards and capes in 1582-83 - suggests that one could have chosen items from the wardrobe and disregarded other elements of the stock.

The last sixteenth-century record into the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts in 1584-5 catalogues a number of items relating to theatrical performances, which suggests that the new incumbents intended to continue the practice and that the clergy remained in favour of playing in the town. However, this was the final entry into the Abbey account books relating to the playing gear owned by the parish:

Players Apparell	Item viii gownes and clokes
	Item vii Jirkins

¹⁰² Greenfield, 'Parish Drama in Four Counties', p. 108.

Item iiii capes of green sylke
 Item viii heades of heare for the apostles and
 .x. beardes
 Item a face or vysor for the devyll.

There is no fee attached to these items, only a comment that the pieces were ‘delivered to [the] new churchwardens’.¹⁰³ Greenfield believes that this list was a record of assets, and that the Abbey retained the stock:

[they did] not appear to have disposed of the wardrobe immediately, for in the 1589 accounts they declare that they still possessed all the items mentioned in the 1585 inventory [...] neither do the accounts record that the wardrobe was sold [...] [it may have] simply deteriorated in storage to the point where it was unusable.¹⁰⁴

Again, it does seem unusual that such a large collection of clothing would just be stored away, considering the popularity, though not profitability, of the rental market over the last twenty years.

It has been supposed, due to the associations of the Abbey with the instances of early playing in Tewkesbury and because these references appear in the churchwardens’ accounts that these plays were religious in nature. It is true that the reference in the accounts to the ‘newe seat’ being damaged ‘at Aplaye’ is suggestive of a correlation between the actors and the clergy, but as I have noted, the Abbey had been purchased by the citizens to serve as their parish church and, given its size, a community centre. Keenan and others have identified the Abbey as the obvious choice for players as it was large enough to hold the congregation. I concede that the Abbey may have been used as a venue but as it was essentially public property after the town’s purchase of the building in 1540 this does not automatically signify that performances within it were religious. Nor does it confirm that every instance of playing alluded to in these financial

¹⁰³ REED *Glos.*, ‘Churchwardens’ Accounts’, p. 339.

¹⁰⁴ Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 81.

transactions occurred within the Abbey. For instance there are no religious associations attached to beards, wigs or jerkins. James Bennett, in another observation in the footnotes of *The History of Tewkesbury*, noted that ‘mysteries or religious plays’ had been ‘anciently performed in our church; of which proof is wanting’.¹⁰⁵ It is the wanting of proof which has aroused my interest and allowed me to query this data and interpret it as a reading of the town’s attitude to drama. I believe that the town and clergy were receptive to playing, but the small amount of ‘proof’ that we possess should not automatically be categorised as ‘religious drama’. There are requests for ‘Christ’s garments’ and ‘heades of heare for the apostles’, which states that some plays would have been based upon liturgical matter, but not necessarily every play. These may have just been specially-commissioned items which the churchwardens felt deserved a mention in the accounts. This would certainly explain the sporadic and relatively cheap rental receipts of the parish wardrobe. It is possible that a Tewkesbury citizen, such as Roger Wyatt, held a stock of secular costumes for interludes and stage plays and that the church merely leased the specialist props and costumes where the plot necessitated such items. Peter Greenfield is insistent that the plays for which the parish wardrobe were leased had religious associations because of the description of the content of the inventory, believing that these lists of properties indicated ‘biblical matter’ and that the gear was ‘clearly intended for plays on New Testament subjects, as it included garments for Christ [...], a mask for the devil and wigs and beards for the apostles’.¹⁰⁶ I wish to leave room for conjecture.

As the county’s second town, it is not peculiar to make an assumption that Tewkesbury would have been economically able to support private drama outside of the

¹⁰⁵ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 285, n. 3. In the footnote he stated that ‘there is not, at present, any book in the possession of the church-wardens, containing such memoranda’ [on the 1585 inventory which contains the Apostle’s wigs and Devil’s visor].

¹⁰⁶ Greenfield, ‘Parish Drama in Four Counties’, p. 109; ‘Drama Outside London after 1540’, p. 182.

communal spaces, such as the Abbey, Abbey House or the churchyard. The growth of Tewkesbury was bound by the five rivers which intersect around the city, notably the Severn and the Avon, the Abbey precinct to the south east and the restrictions imposed by the flood plain. Although the town had always been geographically confined there was significant improvement in its finances during the reign of Elizabeth. The economic advancement of the town, Alan Hannan has argued, can be traced along the three 'tri-axial' thoroughfares, which have never exceeded their confines, but which improved to the maximum limit in the early modern period. The main road leads northwards from Gloucester along Church Street past the Abbey, veering right at the High Cross intersection along Barton Street eastwards to Winchcombe. High Street, bordering the Avon and Severn Quay runs northwards again from the High Cross towards Worcester.¹⁰⁷ This thoroughfare appeared to Hannan to be 'artificial in character' and was 'perhaps designed with the idea that a river-side frontage would enhance the commercial position of Tewkesbury'.¹⁰⁸ He argues that these three streets served well enough as early marketplaces not to warrant further expansion, and the location of these places of exchange evolved into retail outlets which 'colonised' Tewkesbury; in addition he claims that the fertility of the saturated land would have been a financial boon to the town.¹⁰⁹ The main trades in Tewkesbury were the cloth and leather industries, but the town was supporting 'a dozen craft guilds'.¹¹⁰ The granting of the Borough Charter in 1575 illustrates the economic function of the north Gloucestershire town. The text of the charter itself reveals that, in 1575, the town was 'great and very populous'.¹¹¹ Tewkesbury became independent of her neighbour Gloucester as a trading centre, and was allocated five annual fairs of her own where plays may have taken

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix, Map II.

¹⁰⁸ Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', p. 89; p. 92.

¹⁰⁹ Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', p. 224.

¹¹⁰ C. R. Elrington, 'Records of the Cordwainer's Society of Tewkesbury 1562-1941', *TBGAS*, 85 (1966), 164-72 (p. 165).

¹¹¹ 'Abstract of the Charter of 17 Elizabeth', 4 April, 1574, cited in Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, 347-49 (p. 347).

place, in March, April, May, September and October.¹¹² Each trade was allocated a standing in Tewkesbury; the town was also granted specific market areas, such as High Street for cattle and Church Street for sheep.¹¹³ The Charter confirmed the existence of the town's twice weekly markets on Wednesdays and Saturdays and dictated that a pie poudre court should be held to regulate the business transactions of local merchants and outside traders.¹¹⁴ Tolls were to be levied on merchants such as hatters, cappers, drapers, coopers, tanners, ironmongers and ropers who traded at these markets and fairs, demonstrating that unlike her neighbour on the Severn, Tewkesbury was an Elizabethan centre of manufacture, rather than marketing.¹¹⁵

1584

Tewkesbury's Only Recorded Civic Performance

In November 1584 the Tewkesbury records give rare specific details about dramatic performance or performances in the town. A production, or perhaps even productions, took place in the town market place, sponsored by Tewkesbury Council and duly noted in the Borough Minute Book. £3 15s 8d was allocated for a company of players and the associated fees for public performance. The list of expenditures may reveal the popularity of independent playing in Tewkesbury in the mid-1580s.¹¹⁶ Peter Greenfield believes that these players 'could have been professional, but it is also possible that the town gave a gratuity to a group of local amateurs who performed with the aid of the parish wardrobe [or even that the players were musicians]'.¹¹⁷ It is also a possibility that the professional company may have been the travelling players of Leicester, as these market players appeared in November 1584, the same month that the Earl made his

¹¹² Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', p. 180.

¹¹³ Anthea Jones, 'The Ordinances of Tewkesbury Borough Council', p. 22.

¹¹⁴ 'Abstract of the Charter of 17 Elizabeth', Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 348.

¹¹⁵ Jones, 'The Ordinances of Tewkesbury Borough Council', p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Borough Minute Book, 3 November 1584, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 339.

¹¹⁷ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 87.

second ‘haughty’ attempt at influencing Gloucestershire’s electoral candidate. Leicester would have been aware of his reputation amongst the Gloucester Corporation so he may have thought it better to try and influence Tewkesbury instead.¹¹⁸

I have argued above that the rental of the ‘players gear’ by the churchwardens does not automatically presume plays of religious content. In fact, the coincidence of the instances of playing gear hired out to actors increasing in the early 1570s and the interest in the town of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in the same period led to a further investigation into Leicester’s patronage network in Gloucestershire outside of the county capital. After his quarrels with Henry Berkeley over the lands of Wotton-under-Edge and Symondshall in south Gloucestershire, Leicester may have decided to obtain grace and favour in the north of the county, and had probably considered Tewkesbury as potential support. His attempt at flattering Tewkesbury had begun in 1573, most likely after his duping of Henry Berkeley over the property documents relating to Berkeley Castle. The Tewkesbury residents showed their gratitude to the influential courtier in favouring their town in some way, presenting him with a silver cup valued at £16, ‘evidently in the hope of favours to come’.¹¹⁹ The following year, on 4 April, he successfully interceded on behalf of the town with Elizabeth to solicit for a charter of incorporation to the Borough. On obtaining the Borough Charter in 1575, the joyous townspeople of Tewkesbury presented Leicester with a fat ox ‘of unusual size’ at his seat at Kenilworth near Warwick, the value at which was fourteen pounds, and for which the townsfolk were levied.¹²⁰ It was ‘several hands high and in length from head to tail twenty six hands and nine inches’.¹²¹ They also awarded Leicester with the honour of High Steward of Tewkesbury in 1575, it is assumed during Leicester’s

¹¹⁸ Williams, *Parliamentary History of Gloucester*, p. 45.

¹¹⁹ Bradley-Birt, *Tewkesbury*, p. 179.

¹²⁰ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 30.

¹²¹ Bradley-Birt, *Tewkesbury*, p. 179.

entertainments of Elizabeth at Kenilworth.¹²² The historians of Tewkesbury have speculated as to why Leicester was interested in the town, but could not find an answer; Bradley-Birt registered the courtier's benevolence towards Tewkesbury 'though the reason that prompted his interest is not clear' and James Bennett enquired 'why this nobleman should have interested himself so much in favour of Tewkesbury' admitting that 'we have not been able to learn' Leicester's motives.¹²³ I believe that Leicester was aware of the closed corporation in operation in Gloucester and viewed Tewkesbury, with its status as the next largest town, as a base to concentrate his Gloucestershire patronage network, from which he could achieve his provincial ambitions, which included challenging Henry Berkeley's dominance in the region. After the incorporation, Leicester would have expected Tewkesbury to be categorised as a parliamentary borough also, but this did not occur until 1610, perhaps to prevent any political engineering. If his players were the actors who appeared in the Tewkesbury market in November 1584, then this would be a precise instance of a patron using his players to affect directly the political position of an entire community.

An analysis of the charges entered into the Borough Minute Book for 3 November 1584 reveals that Tewkesbury Borough Council had allocated almost half of the period's budget on this one civic entertainment, funding the players, their pitch, its associated expenses as well as the refreshments for the guests of honour:

iii novembris 1584 [...] the abovesaid bailiffes and Thomas Crump accomptinge [...] having received in to their handes vi li. xiiis iiiii d they accompted laid out by them unto players, in wyne to the Justices, rent for their market standing, to the clarck of the market and tenshall money – iii li. xv s viii d.¹²⁴

¹²² Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 29.

¹²³ Bradley-Birt, *Tewkesbury*, p. 179; Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 29.

¹²⁴ Borough Minute Book, 3 November 1584, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 339.

Unfortunately 1584 was only ‘one of the very few years for which the bailiffs’ expenses were itemised in any fashion’, thus one cannot determine whether they were exceptional circumstances, such as a visit by a professional travelling company, which had warranted the high cost.¹²⁵ Therefore the administrative costs of this production have been compared with charges for similar events in Gloucester in an attempt to ascertain how much of the £3 15s 8d, which amounts to a skilled artisan’s yearly wage, was spent on the players.¹²⁶ Thomas Crumpe had been involved in local government since the Borough was incorporated - as junior bailiff in 1576 and as a senior bailiff in 1582.¹²⁷ Perhaps he attended the plays furnished by the parish wardrobe in the 1560s and 1570s. As accountant in 1584, Crumpe received £6 13s 4d of public funds, and seemingly spent nearly half of this sum on this one entertainment event. Whether the town bailiffs, William Willis and William Hill, or the accountant Crumpe, instigated the recording of the play is not specified, but the timing with the 1584 election which Leicester had again attempted to manipulate is happily convenient.¹²⁸

The Clerk of the Market was ‘a king’s officer who controlled the price of food’ but in the case of Tewkesbury, the 1575 Charter had declared that ‘the said bailiffs should be clerks of the market’.¹²⁹ Therefore the individual who received some of this money would have been either William Hill or William Willis, senior and junior bailiffs of Tewkesbury in 1584.¹³⁰ In addition to supervising the markets, the bailiffs also

¹²⁵ Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 87.

¹²⁶ E. A. J. Honigman and Susan Brock, *Playhouse Wills 1558-1642*, p. 8. In 1588, the average London pewterer, glover or drayman earned £3 6s 8d per year.

¹²⁷ Day, *Tewkesbury*, p. 251; Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 381.

¹²⁸ William Hill had shared bailiff duties with William Wyatt in 1567-68 when Wyatt was renting the churchyard and the first record of the ‘players gear’ appeared in the Churchwardens’ Accounts, Boas, ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

¹²⁹ Blakeway, *The City of Gloucester*, p. 47; ‘Charter of 17 Elizabeth, 1575’, cited in Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 348.

¹³⁰ ‘Bailiffs of Tewkesbury’, Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 381.

managed the shipment of goods at the quay.¹³¹ The ‘tenshall money’ may have been one of two possible expenses. The REED editors believe that the term ‘probably refers to the fee charged a *tenser*’, and cite the *OED*: ‘an inhabitant of a city or borough who was not a citizen or a freeman, but paid a rate for permission to reside or trade’.¹³² However James Bennett, a nineteenth-century historian of Tewkesbury, believed that the reference may refer to a different charge - ‘seneschal’ money, ‘i.e. the steward’s fee in holding courts leet’.¹³³ The seneschals ‘were appointed to keep the common treasure of the town’, and were therefore the financial directors.¹³⁴ These two officers would have overseen the donations to the players and required payment for their duties. If the REED definition is correct, then fees were perhaps paid for the actors who did not reside in Tewkesbury, but were trading their talent, an indication that the players were strollers from outside the town. If Bennett is correct, then the players performed to coincide with one of the bi-annual courts leet; these meetings allowed the lords of the manor to exercise jurisdictional powers over their land. The lord of the manor in Tewkesbury since 1574, when Elizabeth granted him the charter of incorporation to the Borough, was the Earl of Leicester. As a civic leader in the 1570s, it was Thomas Crumpe who had overseen the gift of a barrel of sack and two sugar loaves, at a value of £3, 15s 4d, to Leicester whilst he was staying at nearby Twyning in the middle years of the decade.¹³⁵ William Willcox has suggested that the town council favoured entertainments, as ‘Tewkesbury officialdom had its lighter side. A favourite occupation was dining. The bailiffs also gave dinners of their own on special occasions’.¹³⁶ Therefore Leicester, or his representative, would have probably been in the town in

¹³¹ Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government*, p. 211.

¹³² *REED Glos.*, endnote to p. 339, p. 429.

¹³³ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 33, n. 6.

¹³⁴ N. Dermott Harding, ‘The Archives of the Corporation of Bristol’, p. 229.

¹³⁵ Bradley-Birt, *Tewkesbury*, pp. 179-80.

¹³⁶ Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government*, p. 213.

1584 to discuss matters regarding the hundred. Perhaps this occasion warranted more than a meal.

In order to derive a likely figure for the costs of the 1584 market play(s), I have compared the accounts with those for a rare meeting of the Gloucester assize court in Tewkesbury on 4 July 1580:

the [Gloucester] bailiffs, in their account with the [Tewkesbury] chamberlain, charged thirty shillings [30s] for erecting scaffolding for the court, eleven shillings [11s] for wine given at the assizes, and thirteen shillings and four-pence [13s 4d] for seneschal money.¹³⁷

The court was relocated to Tewkesbury because ‘in 1580-1 there seems to have been an extensive restoration’ of the Guildhall.¹³⁸ That Gloucester chose to relocate the assize court to Tewkesbury in the absence of a municipal venue was indicative of Tewkesbury’s political importance in the county. If the 1580 evidence was average, then £1 4s 4d would have been spent on wine and seneschal money, leaving a balance of £2 11s 4d for the remaining three charges for the rent of the ‘market standing, to the clarck of the market’ and the cost of the players. Payments for standings in Tewkesbury’s Abbey House may not be analogous, as they were all grouped together in the Tewkesbury churchwardens’ accounts, but the most rent gained from the standings was 7s 3d from the St. Bartholomew fair of 24 August in 1574-5.¹³⁹ Even if this was the going rate, then the money available from the £3 15s 4d budget would still be £2 4s 1d. The ‘market standing’ that the players chose would probably have been at the High Cross, located on the junction between High Street, Barton Street and Church Street, thus a central location where all the burgesses of Tewkesbury could gather to watch. It is not clear whether the reference ‘rent for their market standing, to the clarck of the

¹³⁷ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 33, n.6.

¹³⁸ Abbott, ‘Excavations at the Shire Hall site’, p. 97.

¹³⁹ Litzemberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. 26.

market' is for one single expense, detailing that the rent was paid to the clerk, or whether these were two separate charges.

Expenses in 1584	Cost 1580
Players	
Wine to the Justices	11s
Rent for their Market Standing To the Clerk of the Market	7s 3d
Tenshall [Seneschal] Money	13s 4
Total	£1 11s 7d
Balance from £3 15s 8d	£2 4s 1d

Table 6: A Comparison of the Expenses for the 1584 Tewkesbury Market Play with Relative Figures from an Assize Session in Tewkesbury in 1580.

Even if the expenses paid to the clerk of the market were paid out of the balance, there was still 44s 1d to be spent on the clerk and players, which is a considerable sum. It is possible that a large portion of this money was spent on players of quality. Twenty shillings was a common sum paid to professional travelling companies in Bristol and Gloucester; therefore this may have been awarded to a similar troupe by Tewkesbury for the market performance(s).¹⁴⁰ A comparable reward in Bristol was made to Essex's Men between 20 August and 6 September 1584.¹⁴¹ In 1584-5, out of the eleven troupes recorded as playing in Gloucester Boothall, only one troupe commanded a fee as high as 20s, and that privilege lay with Leicester's men.¹⁴² Gloucester was already aware of Leicester's persuasive manner. Therefore it seems likely that it was his acting company who performed for the inhabitants, and may help explain why Thomas Crumpe was willing to spend a significant portion of taxpayers' money on players.

¹⁴⁰ From the cumulative evidence for Bristol and Gloucester performances from 1580-1 to 1589-90 show that Bristol paid 20s five times out of 17 recorded performances, and Gloucester rewarded 10 out of the 40 professional companies with 20s.

¹⁴¹ REED *Bristol*, p. 127.

¹⁴² REED *Glos.*, p. 309.

I have listed in Chapter Two the playing companies which visited Gloucester in 1584 and I wish to here briefly examine other possibilities than Leicester's Men.¹⁴³ The players of Lord Berkeley were travelling in the south west in 1584, and can be placed in Bridgwater on 9 December, only a month after the Tewkesbury market play.¹⁴⁴ The Earl of Oxford's Men were also on tour in the region in 1584, as were the Earl of Stafford's. Another troupe active in the provinces in 1584 represented the Earl of Essex, step-son of Leicester. These players appeared in Gloucester, Bristol, Bath, Ludlow and Coventry in 1584 and had appeared in another rare marketplace production in the Apple Market in Shrewsbury on 17 July.¹⁴⁵

It is possible that the catalogue of available garments recorded in the churchwardens' accounts in 1584-85 was composed as a list of goods put aside for the 1584 market performance. It may have been that this was a list of stock which was 'delivered to [the] new churchwardens' after the play in November 1584. So long as the playing gear had not been sold, for which there is no evidence, or thrown away, the list of 1584-85 should in some way reflect the previous records relating to the wardrobe. As the 1584-85 catalogues only lists a limited number of garments, it is likely that the list was compiled in relation to the 1584 market play.

I have acknowledged in the previous chapter that the 1580s was a significant decade in the political history of Gloucester as Burghley had interceded on the city's behalf to achieve coveted port status and Leicester had attempted to coerce the

¹⁴³ See Chapter Two, Table 3; also *REED Glos.*, p. 309. Chambers has not identified any players performing at Court in his exhaustive study of early modern productions at Whitehall, E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 100.

¹⁴⁴ *REED Bath*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁵ The western itinerary for Essex's Men can be identified in 1584: they headed south from Shrewsbury on July 17 then Ludlow probably later in the month [*REED Shropshire*, p. 238, p. 87] to Bath in Aug-Sep [*REED Bath*, p. 13], then headed north to Bristol by 20-6 Sep [*REED Bristol*, p. 126] then to Gloucester [*REED Glos.*, p. 309].

Corporation by recommending his own Parliamentary candidate in 1580 and 1584. Interestingly these two years, and possibly the decade as a whole, were just as momentous in Tewkesbury's political, economic and, for the latter year, theatrical history. Although Leicester's petition to the Queen for borough status was heard in 1575, the ruling was 'not duly enrolled until 1579'. This five year period between the solicitation of the Incorporation by Leicester in 1574 and the implementation of privileges in 1579, was marked by disputes between the Crown and the borough regarding rights over Tewkesbury markets, demonstrating the importance of the north Gloucestershire town as a regional distribution point. This conflict between regional government and court-appointed officials also echoes the insular attitude of the Gloucester closed corporation. However, the granting of port status to the city in 1580 appears to have appeased the merchants of the town. The agreement meant that Tewkesbury had responsibility for the 'lending and discharging of ships with merchandise to and from the parts beyond the seas'.¹⁴⁶ The choice of Tewkesbury to host the Gloucestershire assize meeting of 4 July 1580 may have been a consequence of this royal approval, whilst affording Gloucester a convenient period in which to renovate the Boothall. The merchants could operate here due to Tewkesbury's position on navigable waterways and her export market began to flourish with the royal port warrant, increasing the amount of exports in grain, malt, textiles and leather.¹⁴⁷ In retaliation against the customs award, Bristol complained, in a similar suit to that against Gloucester's Severn-based revenue, that Tewkesbury would capture too much river traffic and requested that the Crown remove the port status; soon after, in 1582, the town had its privileges over Severn traffic revoked. However losing the rights over river tolls did not lessen the planned improvements to the town; the quay, off High Street, was 'newly paved' in 1583 and in 1584 works were completed on rebuilding the town

¹⁴⁶ Hannan, 'Excavations at Holm Hill', p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Hannan, 'Excavations at Holm Hill', p. 84.

hall.¹⁴⁸ The preparations for invasion by the Spanish appear to have overtaken the Tewkesburian consciousness in the later years of the 1580s as the town was put on alert. Tewkesbury contributed a seventy-five tonne ship, the *Bark Sutton*, plus smaller vessels at a total cost to the town of £56 14s. Furthermore, the inhabitants collected £120 to fund forty seven armed personnel to defend the town against invaders suggests a strong and united community, perhaps cemented by regular collective activities.¹⁴⁹

1600 The Tewkesbury Abbey Whitsun Fundraiser

The churchwardens of Tewkesbury Abbey further embraced the idea of the community project in organising plays in a fundraising venture for the building of a ‘battlement vpon the toppe of the churche tower’ in 1600.¹⁵⁰ The lead and timber spire had fallen off the roof of the Abbey in a storm of 1559, and the purpose of this enterprise was to replace the ‘beautifull wooden battlement’ surrounding the roof, by raising public funds.¹⁵¹ Peter Greenfield suggests that the three-day event resembled a ‘fair’, with the daily plays ‘as its focal point, but hardly its sole attraction’.¹⁵² The monies required to replace the stone parapet were to be collected from markets held over the year, and for extra finance the churchwardens decided to stage three plays on the first three days of Whitsuntide, in late May 1600, which I suspect were performed by professional travelling players, rather than men who were ‘evidently amateurs’.¹⁵³ Funds would also be raised by selling grain which had been generously donated by local husbandmen.

¹⁴⁸ *VCH VIII*, p. 112; Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁹ K. H. Fryer, ‘The Archives of the City of Gloucester’, *TBGAS*, 1 (1876), 59-68 (p. 61).

¹⁵⁰ *REED Glos.*, ‘Borough Minute Book’, p. 340.

¹⁵¹ *REED Glos.*, p. 340.

¹⁵² Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 86.

¹⁵³ Whitsun 1600 fell on 21 May <www.nentjes.info/teller.htm#Pesen> [accessed 21 August 2006]; Boas. ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

The raw materials - 16 bushels of wheat and 21 bushels of malt - were valued at £6 10s 10d and were sold at a mark-up of approximately 50%, so that the Abbey gained a total of £12 2s 10s from the enterprise.¹⁵⁴ The churchwardens appear to have been quite accomplished in bargaining for the price of this grain. The accounts state that they purchased sixteen bushels of wheat at 3s 4d per bushel and thirty-one bushels of malt at 2s 6d, yet the rateable value of these goods in 1597 were 12s 6d and 8s per bushel for wheat and malt respectively, prices which Bennett describes as ‘excessive’, although he fails to cite his source.¹⁵⁵ Using these prices as comparisons, the Abbey should have paid £10 for the wheat and £12 8s for the malt, saving around £20 on the outlay.¹⁵⁶ It is possible that prices may have fluctuated, however the significantly higher mark up cited by Bennett was probably the market value, suggesting that the Abbey paid cost price to yield the highest revenue possible.

Evidence in the churchwardens’ accounts states that the Abbey had made ‘further motion’ for an additional church ale to increase revenue, possibly as a consequence of the cheap prices they had negotiated for malt. However their request was denied as the church ale of midsummer 1599 had resulted in ‘some condicions of abuses’.¹⁵⁷ Church ale events, which mostly took place in the summer, were a usual medieval practice where the clergy would brew ale from donated malt and barley, usually accompanied by a banquet of bread and cakes, and sell the produce to the local community in order to raise funds for local projects such as fixing the church roof or providing for the poor.

¹⁵⁴ REED *Glos.*, p. 340.

¹⁵⁵ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 275

¹⁵⁶ £21 18s 10d would have been saved if the 1597 prices were applicable in 1600. There had not been a recorded grain shortage in Tewkesbury since 1586 suggesting that the cost of the raw materials would not have significantly increased 1597-1600. Besides, if grain was in short supply, the Churchwardens would not have adventured the idea of a church ale as a fundraising event.

¹⁵⁷ REED *Glos.*, ‘Borough Minute Book’, p. 340. There is no evidence to suggest whether this request was denied by the bailiffs of Tewkesbury or Gloucester Diocese.

Bennett observed that the yearly ‘wakes’ in Tewkesbury were purely economic, rather than for the benefit of the townsfolk:

they might draw together a large company of people, and annually collect from them, gratuitously as it were, such sums of money for the support and repairs of the church, as would be a great easement to the parish rates. By way of enticement to the populace, they brewed a certain portion of strong ale [which] contributed towards the collection.¹⁵⁸

A Tewkesbury church ale of 1566-7 had raised £11 10s and another which had taken place between 1572 and 1574 had gained £9 14s for the parish. Therefore they had been lucrative events, much more so than the leasing of the parish wardrobe.¹⁵⁹ The Abbey accounts of 1600-1 detailed the expenses meticulously and reveal to what extent the Whitsun festivities were funded from the parish purse. In total, the churchwardens spent £11, 12s and 9d on the plays and the various sundries:

Inprimis for the place to playe in	xiii s iiii d
Item for attendantes & other thinges	xi s x d
Item to T.B. for his charges	xxx s
Item for hier of apparel	xx s
Item for iij trumpeters	xv s
Item for musicians all the time	xxxiii s iiij d
Item for [i]j butte[s] and halfe] of beare and brewing our malte	xl s
Item for fruits and spices	xvii s
Item for coockery	xii s viii d
Item for meate for the players	xxx s vi d
Item for wayters in the seller and cuppes	ix s

I shall break down and analyse these above costs and attempt to identify where these productions took place and the calibre of acting company who may have performed them.

There is unfortunately no extant proof to suggest the style of the three plays or indeed if the players performed three productions of the same play. However the

¹⁵⁸ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 286, n.4.

¹⁵⁹ Litzeberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 8; p. 26.

adjectival use of ‘several’ in the description ‘iii severall stage playes’ does suggest three separate productions.¹⁶⁰ Although ‘we are told nothing about the nature of the plays performed’, it has previously been assumed that these were amateur local players performing a biblical play.¹⁶¹ In attempting to ascertain the style of plays at the Whitsun event in Tewkesbury, Greenfield makes use of John Coldewey’s research into playing in early modern Essex. In Chelmsford and Braintree playbooks were in the possession of parishioners, and Greenfield supposes that if ‘one would have existed at Tewkesbury, in the possession of the parish or [since it never shows in the inventories] perhaps some townsman’, this may have been the inspiration behind the performance.¹⁶² In fact, a local man did possess a playbook as a play text was mentioned in a will of a man who died in Bredon, a Worcestershire town about three miles north of Tewkesbury. The inventory of Richard Evans, dated 1594, catalogues a printed copy of ‘the comedie of Midas’ by John Lyly.¹⁶³ The play was written in 1589, printed in 1592, and was a piece of anti-Spanish propaganda.¹⁶⁴ That a copy of a London play could have reached the region within two years of publication may indicate that provincial folk had an interest in reading dramatic texts, and were probably also spectators at the playhouse. The book was classed as an asset in the inventory, and the whole collection of ephemera was rated at 2s; thus a play was classed as an item of some value in the 1590s.

The balance sheet for the 1600 plays also reveals that the actors who performed in Tewkesbury at Whitsun required sundries such as attendants, trumpeters, brewers and a chef. This suggests that these men were not simple guild or amateur players but players of quality. The evidence in the Gloucester Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts

¹⁶⁰ Preamble to play accounts, *REED Glos.*, p. 340; ‘Several’ meaning separate or respective, distinct.

¹⁶¹ Boas. ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

¹⁶² Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 84.

¹⁶³ *REED Worcs.*, p. 449.

¹⁶⁴ Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama: An Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1925), p. 91.

indicate that victuals and wine had often been provided for a professional nobleman's company at a local tavern, and this company may have been afforded with similar merrymaking after the event was over. The players had 11s 10d spent on their 'attendants and other things' which tends to advocate that, once again, Tewkesbury was visited by a troupe of national renown. Clues are scarce, but a company that required an entourage and over thirty shillings' worth of meat provided for their sustenance must have been preceded by their reputation.

The twenty shilling expenditure on wardrobe 'hier' has also raised questions about these three productions and who may have performed them. Greenfield speculates that 'it seems likely that the plays performed in 1600 were the same plays as those for which the wardrobe had served from the 1560s to 1585'.¹⁶⁵ Another proposal by Greenfield was that the project escalated further than had initially been conceived, thus a more 'ambitious production' required a larger wardrobe, and the strollers had to loan extra outfits whilst on location. However, he feels that a more relevant scenario was: 'that what the accounts identify simply as 'apparell' did not consist of specifically theatrical costumes, but of garments - ceremonial garb and other special clothing, belonging to local people'.¹⁶⁶ Yet, if the townsfolk were donating malt, which they would later buy back as ale, they would surely have offered their clothing free of charge. The question still remains: from whom did the players rent their wardrobe? It is possible that Roger Wyett was once again involved in Tewkesbury drama. He may have taken possession of the parish stock, although once again there is no evidence to corroborate such an exchange.

¹⁶⁵ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', pp. 83-84.

¹⁶⁶ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 85.

The appearance of musicians may also suggest that these players were not amateurs. A Whitsun church ale in Seal, Surrey, in 1592 lasted for five days:

Charges laide out concerning our Churchyale	
[...]	
It. for ix Barrells of Beere	xl s
It. for veele and lame	xxii s ix d
[...]	
It. for spice and frutte	vii s id
It. for more spice and frutte	iiis ii d
[...]	
It. paide to the musitions for v days play	xx s
It. to the drummer	ii s
[...]	
It. for meate and Beere for the musitions and other helpers	viii s iii d. ¹⁶⁷

Hiring musicians over a period of five days cost the churchwardens of Seal twenty shillings, compared with 33s 4d for three days' play in Tewkesbury. The victuals for the Seal musicians and helpers amounted to 8s 4d, whilst the meat for the Tewkesbury players alone came to over 30s.¹⁶⁸ Whether the audience or the actors were treated to the 'fruits and spices' listed above at Tewkesbury is not specified; but it was certainly a grand gesture by the Abbey. The two entries for spice and fruit in Seal totalled 11s 3d, contrasted with 17s in Tewkesbury. A similar event at Wells, Somerset, occurred in 1607. The Cathedral required new bells and repairs to the steeple and the Dean decided to permit an old-fashioned five-day fundraising 'ale' which involved a banquet in the churchyard.¹⁶⁹ Greenfield proposes that the Tewkesbury musicians played constantly to entertain the buyers at the grain sale, or paraded the streets to advertise the performance.¹⁷⁰ Yet the receipts for the musicians feature on the ledger for monies which were 'laid aboute the playes'. Greenfield suggests that because the players were

¹⁶⁷ Cox, *Churchwardens Accounts*, p. 290.

¹⁶⁸ Seal Whitsuntide church-ale accounts in Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 290.

¹⁶⁹ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 79-82.

¹⁷⁰ Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 86.

not directly rewarded with actual money they were ‘surely [...] local amateurs’.¹⁷¹ The musicians were paid, but the players were not, despite their efforts in raising awareness of the grain sale. These musicians may have been the waits of Gloucester city, but as there are no surviving Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts for 1600, this is cannot be proved. I should like to suggest that the players *were* paid, that their fee was 30s, and that their manager ‘T.B.’ received the money on their behalf.

Greenfield concedes that thirty shillings was ‘a very large payment to a single person, especially in what appears to be an amateur production’.¹⁷² Frederick Boas also believed that the Tewkesbury players were ‘evidently amateurs’ but in 1600, 30s was a commonplace fee for municipal performances by professional players.¹⁷³ It is also the same amount that the Queen’s Men received from Gloucester Corporation for playing publicly in the College churchyard in August 1590. Thirty shillings had been an average stipend for a noble company in Bristol in the 1580s and 1590s, as well as, for example, the players of Essex, Lord Strange, Lord Derby, the Admiral’s Men and the players of the Queen’s Household.¹⁷⁴ In the accounts for the Tewkesbury Whitsun plays, the thirty shillings is paid to T.B. for his ‘charges’, which may indeed refer to his expenses but might also indicate that T.B. was a custodian of his ‘charges’, the people for whom he was responsible, his employed players. Given that the meat, spices, beer and labour was also been funded by the Abbey ‘about the playes’ I am confident that the charges refer to the staff of T.B. rather than his costs.

The records for nearby Worcester, Hereford and Gloucester do not confirm that there were any plays performed in 1600 or reveal the identity of ‘T.B.’, although a

¹⁷¹ Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 85.

¹⁷² Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 85.

¹⁷³ Boas, ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

¹⁷⁴ *REED Bristol*, p. 142; p. 147; p. 136; p. 140; p. 145.

reference in Robert Armin's *Foole Upon Foole*, written in the same year, suggests that Lord Chandos' Men were active in the Worcestershire towns of Evesham and Pershore, just north of Tewkesbury.¹⁷⁵ In Bristol, there were two companies which played in early 1600 - Lord Morley's Men received 10s for their performance between 10 February and 25 March, and Lord Pembroke's Company received 30s for their play, acted between 26 March and 17 May.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps Pembroke's Men had travelled north to arrive in Tewkesbury by 21 May. Unfortunately, as we have no relative comparison with rewards made in Tewkesbury, we can only conjecture at this.

Frederick Boas suggests, on the advice of 'Mr W. G. Bannister, for many years custodian of [Tewkesbury Abbey] church, and a leading authority on its history' that 'T.B.' refers to 'Town Bailiff', who may have been paid 'for a licence of some kind' as 'it will be noted that the musicians were paid for their services, but that the players [...] had only their "meate" provided'.¹⁷⁷ If this was the case, then we would have a direct connection between civic playing and the churchwardens in early modern Tewkesbury. However, the Borough Minute Book does not state that the bailiff or any other town official was in receipt of monies and as this was a charity event, it is unlikely that a bailiff would wish to be seen profiting from it. Edward Alye and William Turberville were bailiffs in 1600.¹⁷⁸ A possible, if very tentative, connection between the bailiffs and the Abbey was that Edward Alye was the 'Mr. Lye' who was renting the churchyard in 1600, although if this was the case there may have been more of a mention made of the event in the Borough Minute Book.¹⁷⁹ The city accounts of

¹⁷⁵ REED *Worcs.*, pp. 376-77.

¹⁷⁶ REED *Bristol*, p. 155.

¹⁷⁷ Boas, 'Tuesday's Productions at Tewkesbury', *The Observer*.

¹⁷⁸ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 381.

¹⁷⁹ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, pp. 87-88; however there were other men called Lye in Tewkesbury c. 1600: Henry Lies was a tailor, an Edward Lye was admitted as a freeman in 1578, John Lyes, gent, lived on Church Street, John Lyes, cutler, lived on Barton Street. The Lyes of Tewkesbury appear to have been a family of cutlers [Day, *Tewkesbury*, p. 216-17; pp. 135-36; p. 218].

Worcester record a payment for ‘charges’ relating to drama in the late 1560s: ‘to Henry Hybbyns towards his grete charges Concernyng the setting further of A plaie in septembre xx s’.¹⁸⁰ Regrettably, there is no evidence to corroborate whether these charges were for his players or for his personal expenses. There are references to ‘charges’ in the Worcester Chamber Order Book in 1575, which appear to be expenses paid to the city by the parish constables.¹⁸¹ Perhaps ‘T.B.’ was a constable of Tewkesbury and he was compensated for peace-keeping duties at the public gathering.

Greenfield suggests that ‘T.B.’ may have been a hired ‘property player’, whose role was as:

a professional man of the theatre called in [probably from London] to organise and direct local productions. Such a man would have been invaluable to a town which remembered its dramatic tradition, yet was no longer familiar enough with the practicalities of play performances to produce the sort of spectacle that would bring in a profit.¹⁸²

These men were the source of props, costumes and playtexts. Such a man may have been Thomas Bubbe of Gloucester, who was experienced in public pageantry, as he had been paid 10s ‘for a wagon in the pageant for the Turke’ in Gloucester, 1593-4.¹⁸³ Unfortunately, there is little trace in the archives about this person, only that a Thomas Bubbe of Gloucester died in 1601.¹⁸⁴ Pageant-wagons, or play-wagons, were two-tier carts, with the top deck as a stage and the bottom section used as a tiring-house and storage facility.¹⁸⁵ These wheeled structures were simply ‘rolled into innyards on play-days’.¹⁸⁶ They may also have been set up in different parts of the town as fixed

¹⁸⁰ City Accounts I, *REED Worcs.*, p. 424.

¹⁸¹ Chamber Order Book 1, *REED Worcs.*, p. 444.

¹⁸² Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 84-85.

¹⁸³ *REED Glos.*, p. 313.

¹⁸⁴ Bill Rennsion and Cameron Talbot, *Wills and Inventories of Tewkesbury Testators*, I, p. 110.

¹⁸⁵ Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare’s Wooden O* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), p. 63.

¹⁸⁶ Hotson, *Shakespeare’s Wooden O*, p. 65.

‘stations’ to represent tableaux for pageant processions.¹⁸⁷ Although there was no universal rule for pageant drama, wagons were used as they were mobile and could move the stage easily around the city. It is possible that Tewkesbury paid 30s for three days’ use of Bubbe’s wagon, which would make sense as Gloucester had previously paid 10s for what appears to have been a single midsummer pageant in 1594.

There is a further possibility that ‘T.B.’ may refer to Thomas Berkeley, son of Henry and soon to be MP for Gloucestershire.¹⁸⁸ Thomas was also the son-in-law of George Carey, son of Lord Hunsdon, Henry Carey, patron of the Chamberlain’s Men. It has been suggested that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was composed by Shakespeare for the nuptials of Thomas Berkeley and Elizabeth Carey.¹⁸⁹ The couple married in George Carey’s house in Blackfriars on 19 February 1595, the same year in which the play was composed.¹⁹⁰ Katherine Berkeley, Thomas’s mother, had been in weekly communications with George Carey for many years, sometimes on the subject of marriage. The families were clearly close.¹⁹¹ The plays may have served to remind the townsfolk of the importance of the Berkeley family at court and in national renown. The Berkeleys may have been searching for a means to rid the area of Leicester’s influence, and after Dudley’s death, this may have been a unique opportunity to exorcise the problems of Henry’s mismanagement of the family lands. It is also possible that Henry Berkeley may have arranged a visit to Tewkesbury by professional players. In his household account book for Caludon in 1600 there are three entries relating to travelling players:

¹⁸⁷ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 Volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), II, p. 134.

¹⁸⁸ Williams, *Parliamentary History*, p. 49. Thomas and Richard Berkeley were elected as MPs on 7 March 1604.

¹⁸⁹ David Wiles, ‘A Play for a Wedding’, RSC Programme for *MSND*, directed by Gregory Doran, 2005 Summer Season at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

¹⁹⁰ Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, II, p. 865.

¹⁹¹ Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, II, p. 383.

31. Item geven to in reward to my Lord Dudleyes players in reward xls
 Januarie 1600
 [...]
 3. Item geven to my Lord Huntingdon's players. xls.
 3. Item geven to the Queenes players in reward. xxs.¹⁹²

Thus the players of Huntington or Elizabeth could have stopped at Tewkesbury to help raise money for the parish church, or Berkeley may have used his contacts to arrange the performances. Henry's own players were also still active at Caludon, and were earning in 1603 the same amount as Tewkesbury paid to the playing company in May 1600:

19. Item geven to my Lords players in reward. xxx s.¹⁹³

Perhaps Thomas Berkeley was assuming some of his father's responsibilities in organising local entertainments at charity events. There was also a T. Belt who was a member of the Chamberlain's Men in the last years of the sixteenth century. He was an apprentice boy actor in the company in 1590 that apparently specialised in female roles. He may have matured into a property player or provincial manager.¹⁹⁴

There is a final candidate for the identity of 'T.B'; Thomas Blackwood was a member of Nottingham's Men, later the Admiral's Men. Blackwood is noted, in Henslowe's diary in 1602, as signing to accept a significant debt of £131 12s 4d and was involved in a number of business transactions at the Fortune Theatre in London.¹⁹⁵

Nottingham's Men may have been the company which performed at the Whitsun plays in Tewkesbury and Blackwood may have acted as manager whilst in the country. His elevated status in 1602 may have been a consequence of a successful tour. The Fortune

¹⁹² Peter H. Greenfield, 'Entertainments of Henry, Lord Berkeley, 1593-4 and 1600-5', *REEDN*, 8:1 (1983) 12-24 (p. 18).

¹⁹³ Greenfield, 'Entertainments', p. 19.

¹⁹⁴ John Southworth, *Shakespeare the Player* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2000), p. 90.

¹⁹⁵ *Documents from the Rose Playhouse*, rev ed. by Carol Chillington Rutter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 200-11.

was being built during May 1600 thus the company may have toured whilst waiting for it to be completed.¹⁹⁶ There is evidence that ‘lord haywardes [Howards] players were rewarded with ten shillings by the Bath Chamberlains in 1599-1600’, but there are regrettably no precise dates attached to the entry.¹⁹⁷ Howard’s Men were recorded in Bristol in the last quarter of 1599, where they received 30s for their performances.¹⁹⁸ This troupe was also rewarded by the city of Coventry on 28 December 1599. Charles Howard was the first Earl of Nottingham and patron of Blackwood’s troupe. Although there is no evidence to place Nottingham’s [Howard’s] Men in the region in 1600, they were definitely familiar with the south west circuit. Henslowe’s diary notes that Nottingham’s Men left London on 27 April 1600 to go to ‘winswarth’ [Windsor], and they may have continued west to the towns they had previously played at.¹⁹⁹ The takings for the last season played by Nottingham’s Men at the Rose, 6 April to 13 July 1600, have been described by Carol Rutter as ‘rather disappointing’ but she notes that a single entry into the accounts for this year is unusual: ‘one wonders what huge success the Company performed the week of 18 May to treble their receipts’.²⁰⁰ The company averaged five pounds’ worth of receipts in this season, yet in the week of 18 May they gained £12 4s. It may well be that they were rewarded by Tewkesbury for the Whitsun plays.

There are no further references to playing in the Tewkesbury Abbey churchwardens’ accounts after the detailing of the Whitsun plays. Indeed Frederick Boas has blamed the ‘commercial failure’ of the 1600 plays as the grounds for no further plays being commissioned for fundraising or other purposes by the clergy in

¹⁹⁶ Rutter, *Rose Playhouse*, p. 187 Henslowe paid Peter Street £3 8s on 8 May 1600 in return for completing the ‘foundations’ of the Fortune playhouse. The Fortune opened in November 1600.

¹⁹⁷ REED *Bath*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁸ REED *Bristol*, p. 154.

¹⁹⁹ Rutter, *Rose Playhouse*, p. 187.

²⁰⁰ Rutter, *Rose Playhouse*, p. 186.

Tewkesbury. ‘This’, suggests Boas, ‘we learn from the statement of expenditure’.²⁰¹ Conversely, I believe that the detailed statement of expenditure gives rise to the idea that the plays were performed by a professional troupe and were never intended to be a commercial success. The plays were a gift to the burgesses on behalf of the churchwardens purely because they were performed for the sake of drama and the community. It is not in the statement of expenditure where one may find the reasoning for the plays’ production, but in the Borough Minute Book and general entries into the churchwardens’ accounts. It is noted in the Minute Book that the decision to instigate these plays as a fundraising device was taken ‘after Michaelmas’ 1599. The ‘woorck’ in actually organising the specifics of the event, was undertaken in the ‘lent before’ Whitsun.²⁰² Thus the churchwardens had from October 1599 to Eastertide 1600, a period of about six months, to forecast costs for the event.²⁰³ Greenfield’s reading of the Tewkesbury churchwardens’ accounts for 1600 notes that the incumbents had already spent the £66 on materials to repair the spire and were recouping this amount in subsequent fundraisers.²⁰⁴ Therefore the conscious decision to spend £11 12s 9d on these actors and their associated expenses must have been taken with the knowledge that £66 of church money had already been allocated to the project. The same churchwardens, John Cooke and Thomas Deacons, served from 1598 to 1603, so there is no excuse for ignorance in the matters of expense. It is possible that these players may have been recruited for the festivities after the budget was set and their demands overwhelmed the churchwardens, but as this was a charity event, they would likely have declined the offer had they been solely interested in achieving the highest profit margin. It seems unlikely that exceptional grain prices were negotiated to maximise revenue, but

²⁰¹ Boas, ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

²⁰² Borough Minute Book, *REED Glos.*, p. 340.

²⁰³ In accordance with the calculations that Whitsun was celebrated on 21 May 1600, Ash Wednesday occurred on 23 February, and Easter fell on 2 April 1600.

²⁰⁴ Peter Greenfield, ‘Drama outside London after 1540’, p. 182.

all of the money saved by that deal was squandered on players who, if amateurs, would surely have played for free. I am confident that the company who performed the three stage plays in Tewkesbury at Whitsun 1600 were professional players, rewarded out of charity money for the pleasure of the townsfolk as a present of gratitude for raising funds for the church battlements. Despite the number of candidates, Leicester's Men, Berkeley's Men, the Admiral's Men or the players attached to Thomas Bubbe's pageant-wagon, there is no evidence for who may have played at the Tewkesbury Whitsun fundraiser; all that it is certain that there were no playing companies performing at court in May 1600.²⁰⁵

By 1600, Tewkesbury's economy appeared to be thriving. Despite losing the port privileges to Gloucester and Bristol in 1582, there were a great number of the town's boats on the river shipping goods up and downstream. Tewkesbury boats accounted for 'about one third or even half of the cargoes passing through Gloucester about 1600'.²⁰⁶ Although there are few references to 'merchants' in the late Elizabethan or early Stuart records, the trades seemed to be prosperous, as Tewkesbury was exporting goods such as grain, malt and hides, to Bristol and Gloucester, possibly to be sold on to further markets supported by these cities.²⁰⁷ The town was also famous, made even more so by Shakespeare, for its 'thick mustard', and trade in this condiment must also have been flourishing at the turn of the seventeenth century.²⁰⁸ Boat-building also features as a growing trade in Tewkesbury, probably as a consequence of the river trade.²⁰⁹ In July 1603 Tewkesbury held the Gloucester Quarter Sessions, again as the Boothall was undergoing some renovations but this still shows that Gloucester Corporation viewed

²⁰⁵ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV, p. 112.

²⁰⁶ Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 66.

²⁰⁷ Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', p. 85.

²⁰⁸ '...his/ wit's as thick as Tewksbury mustard', *Henry IV, Part II*, II:iv, 230-31.

²⁰⁹ Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', p. 84.

the town as a sufficient place for important civic gatherings.²¹⁰ March 1604 saw a new Charter awarded to Tewkesbury, which gave the enlarged Borough powers to choose their own stewards and chamberlains and to set up a magistrate's court. The town was also free to elect its own two MPs.²¹¹ A further charter of October 1605 confirmed the incorporation and gave Tewkesbury the ability to tax the inhabitants.²¹² These charters were a 'further measure of independence' for the town away from Gloucester and may have encouraged investment in Tewkesbury as opposed to the county capital, with its inward looking elite and guild restrictions. Perhaps players would have preferred Tewkesbury as a market too.

1620s The Churchwardens' Legacy?

It has been suggested by Siobhan Keenan in *Travelling Players in Shakespeare's England* that a reason for the decline of travelling players in the provinces was a consequence of James I's act of 1604 where he forbade acting in church buildings, house and churchyards; this declaration denied the parish and strolling companies a venue for community entertainments and thus the practice diminished early in the seventeenth century. The Church Canons Order 88 prohibited 'plays, feasts, banquets, suppers, church ales, drinkings, temporal courts or leets, lay juries, musters or any other profane usage'.²¹³ The problem in identifying whether this edict was responsible for a decline in community playing is, as always, one of evidence. There are no further mentions of playing in the Tewkesbury churchwardens' accounts, but this may have been an effect of the Canon order; plays may have taken place in the Abbey grounds, as they do today, but were not entered into the official log for fear of reprimand. Certainly

²¹⁰ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 275.

²¹¹ 'Abstract of the Charter of 7 James I', 23 March 1604, cited in Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 351.

²¹² 'Abstract of the Charter of 8 James I', 18 October 1605, cited in Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 350.

²¹³ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 46.

the various references to the prohibition of playing on church property in the Visitation Articles in the first quarter of the seventeenth century confirm that the practice was still occurring somewhere in Gloucestershire. The Visitation Articles, issued by the Gloucester Diocese, are dated 1607 and 1612 and ask of the incumbent clergy or their predecessors whether the church, chapel or churchyard have undergone any ‘profane usages’ contrary to the 68 [88] Canon, notably with plays as there primary concern.²¹⁴ The Visitation Article of 1622 is more specific in its enquiry, but only regarding Sundays and during times of divine service:

28. Whether have any Lords of misrule, dauncers, players, or any other disguised person, beene suffered to dance or play upon the Sabbath [...]
29. Whether there be any stage-playes, beare-baitings, bul-baitings, or other such unlawful and prophane exercises used upon the Sabbath day, and who gave them Licence. Whether there be any common drinkings in the Church...

It is interesting to note the change in attitude in this third Article, which seems to be more liberal in its tone. There are no explicit instructions not to play within the church, only that playing on the Sabbath and at mass time was forbidden. It was perhaps due to a change in personnel in the Diocese, as the puritan Bible translator Miles Smith was Bishop of Gloucester in 1622. This may have been a reaction against the tenure of the religious reformer William Laud, who served as Dean of Gloucester Cathedral from 1616 to 1621, as the pair had contrasting views on many elements of Protestant theology. Laud had encouraged Gloucestershire rectors to revive High Church practices and return to the ceremonial decoration of churches outlawed by Henry VIII after the Reformation; perhaps playing within the church area was a custom he also wished to revive.²¹⁵ Peter Clark proposes that Laud’s ‘sympathetic influence’ may have

²¹⁴ REED *Glos.*, p. 345.

²¹⁵ John Wroughton, *An Unhappy Civil War: The Experiences of People in Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire, 1642-1646* (Bath: The Landsdown Press, 1999), pp. 9-10.

engendered a return to parish rituals, ‘but the revival was short-lived’.²¹⁶ The fourth Visitation Article, from 1624, states that ‘a pardon’ has been given for previous instances of playing in Gloucestershire churchyards, suggesting that the practice was taking place and forgiveness was given for such events. Anthony Denning observes that the existence of these pardons was evidence of continued playing in on clergy land, ‘the very fact that these questions are put forward suggests that the church already knew the answer’.²¹⁷ Similar requests for information on church playing were issued by the adjacent Diocese of Worcester in greater frequency than Gloucester, and for longer. These Articles of Enquiry, dated 1607, 1609, 1615, 1625, 1626, 1632, and 1634-38 echo the questions on profane uses of church property, although it seems that Worcester churchwardens were more culpable than their southern neighbours, who had to answer only four charges of breaking the Canon Order 88 of 1604.

Although Canon 88 had forbade playing in the Abbey, Abbey House and churchyard, it is possible that the Tewkesbury churchwardens maintained an interest in drama in venues outside of the precinct and a number of incumbents may have been involved in drama on an individual basis. Thomas Deacons, who was serving as churchwarden when the Whitsun plays were devised and executed, was called as a witness in a case put before the Gloucester Diocese Consistory Court on 12 June 1601.²¹⁸ The case Deacons had been called to comment upon also involved churchwarden John Cooke. The Court was investigating an adultery charge, whereby ‘Margery Hodges as one John Cooke’ was caught in an upper chamber of Richard Brush’s house with John [Hodges] hazard’. Although the names are puzzling, I have read the statement as an accusation of Mrs Cooke having an illicit tryst with John

²¹⁶ Peter Clark, ‘Early Modern Gloucester’, p. 91.

²¹⁷ Anthony Denning, *Theatre in the Cotswolds*, p. 82.

²¹⁸ Gloucester Diocese Consistory Court Book, 12 June 1601, cited in *REED Glos.*, p. 342. Greenfield offers no comment upon this in the endnotes or his PhD thesis on Gloucester drama.

Hazard in the bedroom of a Tewkesbury citizen. She is charged not only with adultery, but also with bribing another man, Robert Jeynes, with the choice of five pounds, or three pounds and a gold ring, ‘to save her honesty and conceal this matter’. It appears from the text that Thomas Deacons was distrustful of the behaviour of Mrs Cooke and suspected her whereabouts in High Street and approached Robert Jeynes in the street to come with him as a witness and the pair uncovered the affair.²¹⁹ Interestingly, there were a great many people in Brush’s house at the time, men of civic importance: ‘Constable & divers others to the number of xx^{ly} persons or thereabouts’. This court record is included in REED because Jeynes was ‘comminge from the play’ when he met Deacons. The extract dates this performance to ‘aboutes Christmas last [...] 3 yeeres’, therefore December 1598. This piece of evidence proves that, by the end of the sixteenth century, there was at least one production in the town not involving the Abbey which is critical in determining whether playing may have continued without church endorsement. Greenfield supposes that because the church was not involved, the record of the ‘play’ pertains to a secular, professional performance.²²⁰ That the Cause Book makes no comment about Jeynes watching a play is also useful in ascertaining the reaction of the clergy to playing in 1601; they do not appear to judge Jeynes for watching a play which suggests that playing was tolerated amongst the ecclesiastical courts. However, what is most interesting about this entry is that it mentions the personalities involved. Cooke was a churchwarden, as was Robert Jeynes, who was serving in 1598 when this incident was likely to have taken place, implying that the Abbey staff was fond of drama.²²¹ John Hazard had been junior bailiff under William Willis, who had sanctioned the 1584 market play. There also remains a question of the

²¹⁹ Richard Brush’s house, where Mrs Cooke’s indiscretions were uncovered, was possibly on High Street. His father, also Richard, had in 1558 bequeathed the son his property ‘joyning to the said water of Severne and nere to the passage aforesaid over the east side’, which is Quay Lane today. [*GRO* 1558/332, 16.11.1558].

²²⁰ Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 87.

²²¹ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens’ Accounts*, p. xxiii.

venue used for this production. The Abbey was not likely to have been used as there are no records in the churchwardens' accounts.

One candidate for where the 1598 play took place may have been The Wheatsheaf Inn at 132 High Street. This building, and its grounds at the rear, has seen at least four variations of public venue, as it has been used as a cock-pit, a fives court, a Shakespeare-themed Georgian theatre and a post-World War Two jazz café. It is now an antiquarian book shop with a notice in the window that this building was home to 'Tewkesbury's first theatre'. It is likely that this claim refers to the playhouse fitted out in 1823 and described by James Bennett as an 'elegant little theatre'. However, it is possible that the building was used as a theatre in the sixteenth century. The inventory of a Tewkesbury baker Thomas Underhill, who died in 1587, describes a room in the property reminiscent of a playing place. The Underhill family owned The Wheatsheaf in the seventeenth century and Anthea Jones has proposed that Thomas Underhill's inventory is describing the High Street inn.²²² During his lifetime, Thomas Underhill had renovated the second floor to include a 'new hall' above the parlour, which may have been the location of the staging area, and there was ample stabling and a horse yard leading through to where the Wheatsheaf theatre later stood.²²³ Underhill's house contained no carpets and very few soft furnishings. The tables were of the trestle variety, suggesting portability, and he had limited storage. However, it is the seating arrangements which principally aroused my interest in the contents. There were very few chairs, 'benches and forms were the usual sort'.²²⁴ This description may remind us of the 'fowrnes' that were destroyed in the Bristol Guildhall in 1581 by the 'great

²²² Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 103; Jones believes that the initials 'J. V.' which are carved above the front door identify the John Underhill who was junior bailiff of the town in 1614, therefore it is likely that Thomas Underhill would have owned the property prior to John Underhill.

²²³ Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 99; G. H. Baker, 'The Wheatsheaf Stables', *THSB*, 7 (1998), p. 36.

²²⁴ Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 103.

disordre of the people'.²²⁵ Therefore if Jeynes had left The Wheatsheaf on High Street, he could have easily been accosted by Deacons who was on his way to Brush's house on the opposite side of the thoroughfare. The Crumpe family, the kin of Thomas Crumpe who had granted Leicester the town's gifts at Twynning and permitted the munificent expenditure to the 1584 market play, also owned the Star and Garter public house on Barton Street where it was thought that early modern plays took place. Regrettably this assertion, by Bryan Linnell in his work on the 'First Tewkesbury Theatre' cannot be proven nor corroborated as the historian who made the claim died without naming the source and the manuscript in which it is cited is lost.²²⁶ Anthea Jones suggests that the remains of a wooden gallery in the courtyard confirm that the inn was important in Tudor times.²²⁷ Frederick and Henry Paget Moore, in their study of old Tewkesbury property, commented in 1886 that the Star 'must have been a fine specimen of an ancient tavern' and compares the remains of the gallery which 'ran around the courtyard' with the New Inn at Gloucester, which suggests it may have been large enough to host itinerant players.²²⁸

Another possible venue for early seventeenth century playing in Tewkesbury lies off Church Street and is now known as The Old Baptist Chapel as it was used as a place of worship from 1623.²²⁹ The property was renovated in 1720 to allow for a Minister's

²²⁵ REED *Bristol*, p. 122.

²²⁶ The Woodard Database states that a copy of *First Tewkesbury Theatre* is located in Tewkesbury Borough Museum Inventory Drawer E3, V, but it is missing. Linnell, the former Museum curator, has unfortunately passed away so the location of this document now remains unknown and unverified. The current curator, Maggie Thornton, does not know of its whereabouts.

²²⁷ Jones, *Tewkesbury*, p. 95.

²²⁸ Frederick and H. P. Moore, 'The Old Houses of Tewkesbury', in *Notes on Old Tewkesbury* (Tewkesbury: T. W. North, n.d.), 19-35 (p. 31).

²²⁹ Anon, *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses: Gloucestershire*, p. 98; Yvonne Griffin, *Tewkesbury Heritage: Aspects of a Medieval Market Town* (Tewkesbury: Tewkesbury Civic Society, 2003), p. 7; A guide book, 'Old Baptist Chapel Court & Burial Ground Tewkesbury' (Tewkesbury Borough Council, 2001), p. 1, suggests 1623 as the date which the Chapel was converted.

Room and the roof was altered; thus the original layout cannot be deduced exactly.²³⁰ Today, the upper level is reminiscent of a minstrel's gallery, and the size is certainly acceptable to have once been a small playhouse.²³¹ This building is located off Church Street to the west, almost directly opposite the Abbey, via an alleyway which is now called Old Baptist Chapel Court. The original property was a fifteenth century three-bay hall, with upstairs rooms which are reached via a later renovation, 'a very fine Jacobean staircase'.²³² A construction sketch of c.1480 shows that the entrance would have been in the bay closest to Church Street, suggesting that it was a single property.²³³ Thus, this may have been of a similar nature to the early modern two-storey church houses that Siobhan Keenan commented upon in her investigation into 'church as theatre'.²³⁴ The central hall of the property rose through two stories, with upper floors on either side.²³⁵ It is this original layout that alerted my attention to this property; it may have been an early playhouse before its conversion into a religious house. Before the change of use from domestic dwelling to Baptist Chapel in the mid-seventeenth century, the adjacent alleyway which ran northward alongside the western side of the property from the Avon to Church Street had been named 'Millicheape's Alley', suggesting that the residents owned a substantial amount of property.²³⁶ Cliff Burd, in his research into *The Lost Alleys of Tewkesbury*, discovered that the titling of these thoroughfares was connected to landmarks or residents:

the naming of these passageways is of great importance to the history of the town. Those that carry the name of a pub are, of course, self-explanatory. [...] Most of the remainder are family names, where the owner of the property facing onto the street would give the name to the alley [...] when these families moved, the name of the alley changed.²³⁷

²³⁰ 'Old Baptist Chapel Court and Burial Ground', p. 2.

²³¹ See Appendix, Plates VII-IX.

²³² Griffin, *Tewkesbury Heritage*, p. 6; 'Old Baptist Chapel Court & Burial Ground', p. 2.

²³³ Griffin, *Tewkesbury Heritage*, p. 2.

²³⁴ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, Chapter 3, 'Playing to the Gods: Church as Theatre', pp. 45-65.

²³⁵ Anon., *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses*, p. 98.

²³⁶ See Appendix, Plate VI.

²³⁷ Cliff Burd, *The Lost Alleys of Tewkesbury* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2004), p. 10.

Thomas Millichep was a Tewkesbury churchwarden in 1580-3, and as churchwardens appeared to have been receptive to drama in the town from 1567 to 1600 this led me to examine the family's affairs.²³⁸ Thomas Millichep would have been the man who loaned out the costumes to Matthews and Salisbury on credit, which further suggests that he may have favoured playing. The Millicheape family was involved in local affairs throughout the early modern period. Edward, Thomas's son, was admitted as a freeman in 1599 and also acted as a churchwarden between 1618 and 1622.²³⁹ A title deed for the property states that Millicheape sold the property in 1620, so the building may have served as a playing space after the legislation prohibiting plays in the Abbey precinct.²⁴⁰

The Millicheapes owned another property off Church Street which was later converted into a nonconformist chapel. This may also have been a playing place in seventeenth century Tewkesbury. James Bennett wrote in the 1830s that the first theatrical performances in the town were played out in 'a barn'. He proposed that this venue was the 'Oldbury barn', which later became The Theatre at the rear of The Wheatsheaf.²⁴¹ I have also located an early modern barn in St. Mary's Lane, two hundred yards from the Old Baptist Chapel. This, in itself, is not proof that the barn may have been an early playhouse, but the fact that the owner of the property prior to 1666 was a Millicheape prompted an investigation. Alan Hannan, in his topographical survey of Tewkesbury, believed that the 'curvilinear outline' of the St. Mary's Lane which was 'almost opposite to the entrance to the abbey precinct' was 'reminiscent of monastic enclosures [...] commonly associated with the sites of early churches'.²⁴² This building may have been the Millicheape family home/business after the sale of the 'Baptist

²³⁸ Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. xxiii.

²³⁹ Day, *Tewkesbury*, p. 220; Litzenberger, *Tewkesbury Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. xxiii.

²⁴⁰ Deed for Old Baptist Chapel, cited in Griffin, *Tewkesbury Heritage*, p. 5.

²⁴¹ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 185, n. 13.

²⁴² Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', pp. 88-9.

Chapel' in 1620 and conceivably acted as a church house after the prohibition of church playing by Canon 88. Edward Millicheape, grandson of Thomas Millicheape, who had forged himself a career as a London clothier 'of Paul's Covent Garden'.²⁴³ If Mr. Millicheape *was* Tewkesbury's impresario in the mid-seventeenth century, he would have had ample opportunity whilst in the city to recruit metropolitan actors keen on a career in the provinces: 'in London there were certain inns in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden which were used as houses of call where country managers could be sure of meeting unemployed comedians'.²⁴⁴ It was likely that Edward Millicheape had encountered players whilst in the capital. The transfer of the land and property in St. Mary's Lane reveals that the materials of the barn were part of the sale. On 25 July 1666 'a parcel of ground formerly called a messuage Barn and tenement with a garden plot thereunto' was sold along with 'all the timber, slatt and stones of the said Barn & tenement now thereon standing'.²⁴⁵ It seems that before the sale, Millicheape had dismantled the building. The land had measured 60 feet in length and 20 feet in breadth, which may have been sufficient for a small theatre space. A mid-eighteenth-century 'regular theatre' was measured at 65 feet 7½ inches in length by 30 feet wide; thus a theatre of sixty or seventy years earlier may have been of smaller dimensions such as those of Millicheape's barn.²⁴⁶ If this building was indeed a playhouse, then Millicheape may have razed the property after its closure, to prevent others from trading there, or having it turned into a place of devotion like his father's house became in 1623. In 1670 the development was converted, like Millicheape's other property, into a

²⁴³ Bridget Jepson and Anthony Skelsey, *A History of the Friends' Meeting House and Burial Ground, St. Mary's Lane, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire* (Tewkesbury: Tewkesbury Borough Council, 2003), p. 8.

²⁴⁴ Sybil Rosenfeld, *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660-1765* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p. 12.

²⁴⁵ GRO D1340/B3/T9/1-2; See Appendix, Plate XI.

²⁴⁶ Mark A. Howell, 'The 'Regular Theatre' at Jacob's Wells, Bristol 1729-65' in *Scenes from Provincial Stages: Essays in Honour of Kathleen Barker* ed. by Richard Foulkes (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1994), 19-42 (p. 19).

place of religious worship. A Quaker burial ground was established there.²⁴⁷ Hannan proposed that many houses in this area of Tewkesbury may have had religious association. The geology of St. Mary's Lane suggests that it was once inside a 'fossilised monastic enclosure' and the plots fronting Church Street, of which the Baptist Chapel would have been one in Millicheape's day, would have been 'closely associated with the Abbey and were perhaps originally created to serve it'.²⁴⁸ The Millicheapes' two houses, occupied by at least two generations of churchwarden, may have been the natural home of drama when relocated from the Abbey House and churchyard in the early 1600s. Kathleen Barker, in exploring the dramatic heritage of Bristol in her 1991 article 'Churches and Stages in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Bristol', recognised the correlation between the playhouses in the city and Non-Conformist chapels and meeting houses of the moralist movement; the reformation societies had renovated old playhouses into meeting houses because the preachers required large auditoriums, and theatres could readily provide this facility.²⁴⁹ This same evolutionary process may have occurred in early modern Tewkesbury.

Interestingly, Hannan also identified another potential playing place to the east of the Abbey, between St. Mary's Lane and the churchyard, as 'the broadened stretch of Church Street, which bisects this early enclosure [...] may well indicate the site of a later market place, situated outside an entrance to the abbey precinct'.²⁵⁰ Perhaps this market, not the site at the Cross, was the place where the players performed in 1584, in keeping with the Abbey's intimate association with dramatic performances in the town. James Bennett identified this area of Church Street as the 'Bull Ring', the 'spot

²⁴⁷ Griffin, *Tewkesbury Heritage*, p. 7.

²⁴⁸ Alan Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester: Excavations at Holm Hill', p. 88.

²⁴⁹ Kathleen Barker, 'Churches and Stages in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Bristol', *Theatre Notebook*, 45:2 (1991), 84-91. See Appendix, Plate X.

²⁵⁰ Hannan, 'Tewkesbury and the Earls of Gloucester', p. 89.

anciently appropriated to bull-baiting', therefore a probable place of public spectacle which may have been adopted by the townsfolk for later civic entertainments such as plays.²⁵¹

It certainly appears that there would have been sufficient support for playing in Tewkesbury after the legislation of 1604, through the churchwarden community or the enterprising merchants who may have benefited from church-endorsed playing during Elizabeth's reign. Although Tewkesbury was not as economically successful as her neighbour Gloucester, the church and civic authorities were certainly more receptive. I had assumed that Tewkesbury would have been similar in cultural character to Gloucester considering the closeness of the towns and their shared markets; however, Tewkesbury appeared to be more aligned with Bristol in her attitude to drama, although Bristolians who were involved in theatre seemed to be more concerned with profit than the good of the community.

²⁵¹ Bennett, *Tewkesbury*, p. 172; See Appendix, Plate XII.

CHAPTER FOUR

***“With two Provincial Roses [...] get me a fellowship in a cry of players”*:¹ Public and Private Playing in Bristol in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

Bristol was the largest south western urban centre in early modern England and was, unsurprisingly, a ‘lure to the southwest for entertainers on tour’ due to its ‘cultural primacy in the region’.² It can be deduced from the unusually detailed record keeping by the Corporation that Bristol embraced playing as both a cultural attraction in the sixteenth century. The city had been familiar with national protocols in positively welcoming and rewarding players since the reign of Henry VIII. By 1560, there was an identifiable itinerary in place between Gloucester and Bristol and the latter was already more generous in its rewards than her neighbour, suggesting Bristol favoured these visitors. Evidence for Bath is extant for the late 1570s, and an analysis of comparative prices illustrates that Bristol was the most profitable stop on this section of the southwest itinerary. This period also saw the inclusion of play titles into the records which suggests that drama was important to the chamberlains in the few years leading up to the Queen’s progress in 1574.

There was an unusual decline in recorded municipal playing in the 1580s which is, I will argue, suggestive of an alternative private venue in use. It is possible that hostility by the council was capitalised upon by an entrepreneurial spirit in the city and its liberties. An Ordinance of 1586 confirmed that the Corporation had concerns about players in the city. By the end of the sixteenth century the Corporation continued to pay players who came to the city, but it is not specified whether these productions took place in the Guildhall or an alternative space, such as the Wine Street playhouse.

¹ *Hamlet*, III:ii, 260-61.

² Sally-Beth MacLean, ‘At the End of the Road: An Overview of Southwestern Touring Circuits’, p. 22.

Further legislation against playing in 1595-6 also may have been to the advantage of Woolfe and others who sought to profit from the lucrative pastime. The lack of rental revenue from the Wine Street playhouse and entries of playing into the Mayor's Audits in the 1620s has been cited as the evidence for a decline in travelling players in Bristol, yet I am sure that the commercial aspect of playing which had established itself in the city by the early seventeenth century was responsible for the lack of evidence for municipal playing; the attitude of the civic authorities had altered in the years before the official 1597 statute revoking the mayors' privileges in licensing plays as they had already found alternative venues for the drama which suited the puritan common council and the merchants who were profiting from the commercial playhouses in the city.

Venues

Bristolians, especially at the turn of the seventeenth century, were fortunate in having a number of civic and private venues available to them, most of which were clustered around the High Cross at the intersection of Broad Street to the north, High Street to the south, Corn Street to the west and Wine Street to the east. The High Cross appeared to be a focal point for all civic entertainments. Bristol's underground cellar storage system meant that pageant wagons, or any other vehicle, could not be wheeled around the city; the pageants would probably take place on static stages at the High Cross. It was customary for the Corpus Christi procession to terminate here.³

The majority of known municipal performances took place in the Guild Hall in the centre of Broad Street. The Guildhall was the 'premier performance space [...] for

³ F. F. Fox, 'History of the Guilds of Bristol', *TBGAS*, 3 (1878-79), 90-98 (p. 97).

professional players in the sixteenth century' - and had undoubtedly been used for entertainments as early as 1535-6 when 'certain boys' were recorded as playing there before the mayor and aldermen.⁴ The last explicit reference to playing in the Guildhall occurred in 1597; therefore playing was accepted in Bristol's Guildhall for over sixty years. The building occupied 18-21 Broad Street, adjacent to St. George's Chapel.⁵ The ancient Guildhall has been demolished; the current structure at 23 Broad Street was rebuilt in 1843 and is much smaller than its predecessor.⁶ A plan of the first floor of the earlier property, dated 1775, details the room identified as the 'Guildhall', within the whole building also collectively known as the Guildhall, as sixty-five feet in length by just short of twenty seven feet in width.⁷ There is a set of stairs at the Broad Street entrance suggesting that the performances took place in the upper storey of the hall. An engraving from Jacob Millerd's 1673 map of Bristol shows that there were four entrances to the Guildhall and fusing this with the 1775 plan, one can deduce that it was the most southern door, on the far left of the building, which led up to the playing space.⁸ Millerd's sketch shows that the upper storey significantly exceeded the ground floor in height, which suggests that the hall had extremely high ceilings. The 1775 plan identifies 'galleries' to the rear of the main hall, which measured seventeen and a half feet by twenty seven feet. Interestingly, the galleried section of the Guildhall appears to have been built in the style of an atrium, as the central section of the galleries, an area of around ten square feet, is marked 'pavement', suggesting that this part of the property reached ground level. A section to the right of the hall is also

⁴ Pilkington, 'Drama Music and Ceremony', p. xxxvi; *REED Bristol*, p. 46.

⁵ Leech, *The Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol, Part I*, Map 3, p. xxi.

⁶ The Guildhall was rebuilt by R. S. Pope in a Victorian Gothic style [Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxvii]. See Appendix, Plate XIII.

⁷ Plan (1775) of first floor, Guildhall, Bristol, in N. Dermott-Harding, 'Archives of Bristol', p. 229. The Guildhall measures 100ft x 60ft; the measurements identified by Mark Howell as the size of a 'regular theatre' in eighteenth century England was 65 ft x 30 ft and almost identical to the dimensions of the Jacob's Wells theatre fitted out in the west of Bristol in 1729, 'The 'Regular Theatre' at Jacob's Wells, Bristol, 1729-65', p. 19. See Appendix, Plan of Bristol Guildhall, c. 1755.

⁸ Jacob Millerd's 1673 map, John E. Pritchard, 'A Hitherto Unknown Original Print of the Great Plan of Bristol by Jacobus Millerd, 1673', *TBGAS*, 43 (1922), 203-20 [including plate facing].

identified as ‘pavement’ with an open section in the wall. Perhaps these two ground floor sections were used when the players performed for extra members of the public who could at least hear the plays if not see them. Mark Pilkington, editor of the Bristol REED volume, has questioned the noting of the venue in the Mayor’s Audits:

It is unclear why the City Chamberlain includes the location ‘in the Guildhall’ on some occasions but not on others. It is possible that for economy of time or space the location is omitted, unintentionally, with virtually all performances recorded in the Mayor’s Audits taking place in the Guildhall.⁹

It was perhaps because the building was known as the ‘Guildhall’ as well as the galleried room within the building, therefore only when the room known as the ‘Guildhall’ was used that this was worthy of note.

It is probable that the galleried hall was used for the performances by the travelling players, however the Guildhall could also boast a ‘Dancing Room’, measuring thirty-eight by twenty-three feet, which may have been an alternative space should the galleried hall have been in use for other purposes, or when a less experienced company came to call.¹⁰ A single reference in the Mayor’s Audits details that another civic venue was used for strolling players. Leicester’s Men were privileged enough to perform in the Tolsey in October 1573. This production was noted as taking place in the mayor’s personal offices, which were located on the corner of High Street and Corn Street at the High Cross. The incident was recorded in the Mayor’s Audits as it involved some furniture removal: ‘20d for taking down the table in the mayor’s court [Tolsey] and setting it up againe after the saide players were gone’.¹¹ Thus players of exceptional calibre were permitted to play outside of the Guildhall in Elizabethan Bristol. Perhaps this was a special performance which was

⁹ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xxxvii.

¹⁰ See Appendix, Plan of Bristol Guildhall, c. 1755.

¹¹ REED *Bristol*, p. 85.

played in private to prevent audience disorder, or another example of local authorities courting the players of the Earl of Leicester in order to appease their powerful patron while he was on his mission to acquire lands in Gloucestershire.

Another venue, and possibly the most exciting element of Bristol's theatrical history, was the Wine Street playhouse owned by Nicholas Woolfe until his death in 1614.¹² This property was *No.X ch/7* Wine Street.¹³ Woolfe was a cutler by trade and also owned at least two public houses, the White Hart on Broad Street and the Lamb Inn on Wine Street.¹⁴ Perhaps the travelling players had lodged at his inns whilst playing at the Guildhall and he saw the potential business opportunity in establishing his own theatre, rather than simply converting an innyard. Mark Pilkington believed that the Bristol cutler had greater ambitions for his theatre business, 'clearly the notion of the innyard as a performance space did not capture Woolfe's imagination'.¹⁵ Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa refer to 'inns at Bristol and York' which were converted for playing 'when visiting players were stopped from using guildhalls'.¹⁶ Gurr believes that the Wine Street playhouse was originally an inn, which was converted into a theatre in 1604, although he has not cited the source for this proposition, or whether he believes that the Wine Street playhouse was at *No.X ch/7*.¹⁷ I believe Gurr has assumed that Woolfe converted an inn as the cutler, in addition to his metalworking skills, was a publican, and that the majority of London players moved

¹² Will of Nicholas Woolfe, dated 2 June 1614, *REED Bristol*, pp. 195-99; Woolfe was paying rent of £3 10s on this property, 'a tenement in the tenure of Nicholas Woolfe' from 1598 to 1612, Mark C. Pilkington, 'The Playhouse in Wine Street, Bristol', *Theatre Notebook*, 37:1 (1983), 14-21, p. 15.

¹³ See Appendix, Plate XV, Map III and Map IV.

¹⁴ Pilkington, 'Drama and Ceremony', p. xxxviii; J. F. Nicholls, 'The Old Hostelries of Bristol', *TBGAS*, 7 (1882-1883), 307-17, p. 311; an extract of Woolfe's Will in 1614 stated that he was bequeathing The Three Vices to his nephew Isaac (Woolfe's will, 2 June 1614, [*PROB* 10/314], cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 195-199 (p. 197). This may have been a reference to one of two public houses in the area called Three Tuns, one which lay on Wine Street, the other to the east of this thoroughfare on Broadmead (Nicholls, 'Hostelries', p. 315).

¹⁵ Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxviii.

¹⁶ Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 25.

¹⁷ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*, p. 105.

into innyards ‘under the Stuarts’.¹⁸ Gurr and Ichikawa have argued that strollers were limited in their choices once they had arrived in a receptive space:

When a company visited a provincial town or country house no one location could be used more than two or three times, and no play could be staged in the same location more than once [...] they could rarely stay more than two or three days in one place.¹⁹

If this was the case, an argument of which I am not entirely convinced, then Bristol was the natural choice for players who had tired of the capital, as ‘no other dedicated performance spaces are known outside the London metropolis’.²⁰

A complaint by one of Woolfe’s tenants stated that actors sought accommodation in the Wine Street playhouse, thus the cutler may have incorporated the two into one venture.²¹ All the sources say for certain that this playhouse was in operation in the early seventeenth century, although I will argue the case for sixteenth century usage. We are not fortunate enough to possess a floor plan of the Wine Street playhouse; however it is possible to estimate the location of the ‘first indoor theatre built in the provinces’ by comparing the topographical evidence with the documents relating to the property.²² The main source of information regarding the playhouse comes from a lease for the property, dated 8 April 1598.²³ This document details the terms of a forty-one year lease between fourteen feoffees of Christ Church, the parish district within which Wine Street lay. The property to which the 1598 lease refers has been identified as the ‘strongest candidate’ for the theatre and although it is later referred to as a

¹⁸ Andrew Gurr, ‘The loss of records for travelling companies in Stuart times’, p. 5.

¹⁹ Gurr and Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres*, p. 22.

²⁰ MacLean, ‘End of the Road’, p. 22.

²¹ Mark C. Pilkington, ‘New Information on the Playhouse in Wine Street, Bristol’, *Theatre Notebook*, 42:2 (1988), 73-75 (p. 73).

²² David Galloway, ‘REED in the Provinces’, p. 95.

²³ Lease for Wine Street, 8 April 1598, in the Barker Notes, cited as *BRL 26166 (252)*.

residential property this ‘does not preclude its earlier use as a playhouse’.²⁴ It appears that Woolfe had applied for permission to renovate the building, ‘in the rearing up higher of the said tenement’. This seems to have been a request to increase the space in the upper storey of the building, perhaps to accommodate more seating or to create an auditorium. The request was granted on the proviso that he did not inconvenience the adjoining properties by undertaking the improvements, which included Christ Church itself, as the property abutted the church building and that the building work was completed in four years, by 1602. Using this information, one can confirm the exact location of this building. Woolfe’s neighbours are identified in the lease, as the property lay:

Between the Tenement now in the tenure of Humphyre Clovill goldsmith on the east parte, And the Tenement noew in the teanure of Richard Harsell gouldesmith on the west parte, and extendeth it selffe from the said Streate forwardes unto the wall of the Chauncell of the parishe Church of the blesses Trinity of Christchurch backwardes.²⁵

In 1983, Pilkington questioned the connection between the lease and the playhouse:

Records contained in the Christ Church Churchwardens’ Accounts, Mayor’s Audits and St. John the Baptist Churchwardens’ Accounts suggest that the 1598 Christ Church lease may be an unreliable source [indeed the lease is probably unrelated to the playhouse, especially in view of the clause “provided always that there be no place buylded to Annoye the said Church or any part thereof”].²⁶

As surviving church records make no mention of the Wine Street theatre: ‘it is therefore precipitous to infer a connection between the parish and the playhouse’.²⁷ Although Pilkington suggests that the players may have ‘annoyed’ Christ Church, which would explain why there are no entries in the churchwardens’ accounts it is also possible that a guaranteed rental income from the playhouse was favoured by the feoffees, who may have been receptive to the drama which had been displayed in the property prior to the refurbishments.

²⁴ Siobhan Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 148.

²⁵ 1598 lease for *No.X ch/7*.

²⁶ Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 15.

²⁷ Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 16.

Roger Leech has explored the topography of early modern Bristol in a book published in 1997 in conjunction with Bristol Record Society, and has identified three houses on the north side of Wine Street which belonged to Harsell, Woolfe and Clovill. These properties, and five others, were ‘built against the nave, between the corner with Broad Street and the S door and are denoted by the prefix *No.X ch* to differentiate them from numbers 1 to 4 Wine Street which lay to the east of these abutting properties.’²⁸

PROPERTY NUMBER	TENANT / DESCRIPTION IN ROGER LEECH <i>TOPOGRAPHY OF EARLY MODERN BRISTOL</i>
<i>No.X ch/6</i>	In 1583 this was the tenement leased by the feoffees of the church lands to Richard Harsell, the tenements of Nicholas Woolfe and John Woodward to the E and W
<i>No.X ch/7</i>	In 1589 it was occupied by Nicholas Woolfe, cutler [...] being given permission, in the new building and in the “rearing up higher” of the tenement, to place beams in the adjacent properties
<i>No.X ch/8</i>	In 1589 this was the tenement occupied by Humphrey Clovell. In 1598 it was in the tenure of Humphrey Clovell, goldsmith.

Table 7: Descriptions of Wine Street properties in Elizabethan Bristol.

Scholars of Bristol theatre have also disagreed about the provenance of the Wine Street theatre. Alfred Harvey, who first identified this venue in 1906, stated that at some point ‘a permanent building was erected for the drama in Wine Street’.²⁹ Kathleen Barker read the four-year renovation period as one of rebuilding, believing that ‘the erection of the playhouse’ took place between 1598 and 1602.³⁰ P.M.E. Jones states that: ‘it may not have been a custom-built theatre; there is a long tradition of using

²⁸ Leech, *Topography Part I*, p.p. 170-71. On his ‘Map 4’ (p. xxii) the buildings abutting Christchurch are numbered 1 to 8, then the sequence starts afresh at 5, [Merchant Tailor’s Hall] suggesting that *Nos.X ch/1-8* were 1-4 Wine Street, p. 174.

²⁹ Alfred Harvey, *Bristol: An Historical and Topographical Account of the City*, p. 247.

³⁰ Kathleen Barker, ‘An Early Seventeenth-Century Provincial Playhouse’, *Theatre Notebook*, 29:2, 1977, 81-84 (p. 83).

public buildings and private houses for performance. It was probably a “private” theatre’.³¹ Mark Pilkington also believes that it was not purpose-built, that it ‘occupied space within a larger residential house’.³² Siobhan Keenan does not comment upon whether the playhouse was custom-built, but she does suggest that ‘the rebuilding of the property between 1598 and 1602 might have included preparing part of it for theatrical use’.³³ She also believes that Woolfe owned ‘No. 7’, but is unsure as to whether this property was the playhouse or the dwelling house of the Woolfe family. She bases her view on the evidence provided by Woolfe’s widow Margaret, as she ‘spoke of her husband having two Bristol properties at his death’ but concedes that if No. 7 ‘was their dwelling house it would suggest that the playhouse was in a third Wine Street property, unless the two were part of the expanded 1598 tenement’.³⁴ However, if one examines the 1598 lease, *No.X ch/7* was to be completely rebuilt:

Nicholas Woolfe [is] to new buyld the said Tenemente and every parte thereof with apputenances within fowre yeares [and] in the newe buyldinge thereof to settle and place any Tymber Worke [...] and also in the rearinge up higher of the tenement (yf it so happen).³⁵

The rental evidence for *No.X ch.7* suggests that it was a single property; Leech’s map suggests that the property measured thirty feet in length by ten feet in width at street level, but is not precisely dated.³⁶ Siobhan Keenan believes that it was ‘a commercial playing venue from which Woolfe profited like any metropolitan playhouse owner’.³⁷ She has struggled to determine which house Woolfe lived in and which property was his playhouse. The other Wine Street property to which Keenan refers is likely to have

³¹ P. M. E. Jones, ‘An Early Theatre in Bristol’, *TGBAS Notes*, 106 (1988), 207-8 (p. 208).

³² Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xxxix; p. xxxviii.

³³ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 148.

³⁴ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 219, n. 25. She only refers to ‘No. 7 Wine Street’, not *No.X ch/7*. I am making the differentiation that No. 7 Wine Street was a separate property.

³⁵ 1598 lease for *No.X ch/7*.

³⁶ Leech, *Topography Part I*, pp. 172-73; Map 4, p. xxii.

³⁷ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 146.

been *No.X ch/2*, the ‘little shoppe under Christ Church’ owned by Woolfe and bequeathed to Issac Woolfe, nephew of Nicholas, in Woolfe’s will of 1614.³⁸

The proposal for the renovation project for *No.X ch.7* was granted to Woolfe as he had given ‘divers good and reasonable causes’ which were accepted by the feoffees as ‘speciallye movinge’.³⁹ Perhaps Woolfe had specifically told the feoffees of his intention to professionally convert part his property into a playhouse auditorium. The principal signatory on the deed was William Yate, who had served as mayor in 1596 when the ordinance against playing in the Guildhall was issued. Yate may have approved Woolfe’s application in order to secure a proper venue as a substitute for the Guildhall.⁴⁰ Henry Yate, perhaps brother to William, was the overseer of Woolfe’s will and ensured that the charitable bequests contained within were executed. Four other of the men who approved the lease were tenants of the properties adjoining Christ Church and may have had a mercenary motive in improving a property in their vicinity.⁴¹ From two pieces of contemporary litigation against Nicholas Woolfe and his estate, one can gather that there was a stage within one room in the playhouse and that there was sufficient accommodation for the ‘comedyantes’ to lodge.⁴² Keenan believed that the stage was:

likely to have been a platform fitted at one end of a particular room [...] a wooden platform like those in the metropolitan open air and indoor playhouses (perhaps between one and three feet above the ground, depending on the height of the ceiling). The space may have been fitted with benches as well.⁴³

³⁸ Leech, *Topography Part I*, p. 171; Woolfe’s will, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 195-99.

³⁹ 1598 lease for *No.X ch/7*.

⁴⁰ Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 158.

⁴¹ William Yeamans lived at *No.X ch/3*, John Woodward and Thomas Thomas lived at *No.X ch/5* and Thomas Fawcett lived at *No.X ch/8*, Leech, *Topography Part I*, pp. 172-73.

⁴² Answer from Henry Yate to Miles Woolfe’s suit, 2 October 1619; Replication of Richard Cooke, 1606, *REED Bristol*, p. 213; p. 164.

⁴³ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 149.

Although we know little about the operation of the Wine Street playhouse, it is not in doubt that its ‘contribution to the cultural life of Bristol must have been significant’.⁴⁴

Bristol was not only exceptional in that it had a private playing space but also that it could boast a second independent playhouse. Even less is known about this other venue, only that it was purpose built in the Redcliffe Hill district of Bristol, south of the River Avon. Peter Greenfield called this venue ‘Redcliffe Hall’ in 2004, but I have found no further reference to this as an actual building.⁴⁵ The evidence for the existence of this theatre is contained within the will of a widow, Sarah Barker, dated 31 May 1637. She bequeathed her son William ‘that howse and being which my late husband built for a playhouse’. Mrs. Barker had acquired a further five properties on the west of Redcliffe Hill, purchasing them from her son James.⁴⁶ Pilkington dates this contract exchange to 1627-28 when the ‘widow Barker’ was paying rent to the Corporation of £2 3s for six tenements on the west side of Redcliffe therefore her husband had built the playhouse prior to this date. Keenan has identified this man as Richard Barker who was part owner of a vessel, *Hopewell*, and who had been among the entrepreneurs who received letters patent from James I for a new Spanish trading company.⁴⁷ She has also identified the date of Richard Barker’s death, as the Redcliffe parish documents record the burial of Richard Barker, ‘merchant’, on 30 September 1614.⁴⁸ This implies that both the Wine Street and Barker playhouses operated contemporaneously, although I shall analyse the relevance of competition later in the thesis. The only clue to the position of the playhouse is a reference to ‘a chamber over the well att th’end of the said Playhouse’, but no more specific than that. Keenan

⁴⁴ Pilkington, ‘New Information on the Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 74.

⁴⁵ Peter Greenfield, ‘Drama Outside London After 1540’, p. 194.

⁴⁶ Will of Sarah Barker, dated 31 May, probated 25 August, 1637, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 242-43.

⁴⁷ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 162.

⁴⁸ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 161.

suspects that the Barker playhouse would have been ‘another indoor theatre in a roughly rectangular building’ as a circular construction would not have had ‘an end’.⁴⁹ As it stands today, Redcliffe Hill is a thoroughfare which would have been outside the city walls in early modern Bristol. It is also where the A38 leads south out of Bristol, heading south towards the M5 corridor. Perhaps the principal thoroughfare was the instigating factor in opening a playhouse here. In any case, ‘the evidence indicates that Bristol had two playhouses in operation, possibly simultaneously, in the early seventeenth century, a situation unique in the provinces’.⁵⁰

1560

The Development of Commercial Theatre in Bristol

Whether the Council kept records of corporate events before the 1530s is unknown, but payments to travelling players of noblemen begin to appear in the year after Henry VIII was declared Head of the Church in England. Muriel Byrne asserts that ‘references to plays and interludes, whether scriptural or secular [were] of sufficient rarity in this reign’ yet the Mayor’s Audits of Bristol record dramatic performances from 1531-2, the first year that the council rolls are extant.⁵¹ The mayor may have been entertained by such troupes in the past, but felt it now necessary to record the performances. E. K. Chambers believed that it was any event which ‘struck the fancy of the Chamberlains’ which was noted, but the authorities may have also felt it necessary to establish a paper trail to confirm how important visits by professional players were to Bristol Corporation.⁵² The 1560s saw the development of a south-west itinerary, which is demonstrated in the same companies appearing in both Bristol and

⁴⁹ Will of Sarah Barker, *REED Bristol*, p. 242.

⁵⁰ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xl.

⁵¹ *The Lisle Letters: An Abridgement* ed. by Muriel St. Clare Byrne (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 246.

⁵² E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, p. 333.

Gloucestershire. More companies played in Bristol in this early period of playing than in Gloucester, even with a sixteen-month hiatus between July 1561 and November 1562.⁵³ From Queen Elizabeth's official ascension on 17 November 1558 to her excommunication on 25 February 1570, twenty-nine strolling companies visited Bristol, as opposed to the twenty-five which called upon Gloucester, although a similar number in the smaller town does demonstrate parity between the two in this period of dramatic prosperity.⁵⁴ The first identifiable itinerary can be traced to the players of the Dudley brothers, which may have been an early attempt by the avaricious courtiers to make their influence felt in Bristol and Gloucestershire. The players of Andrew Dudley were noted as having played in Gloucester in the financial year 1559-60 and were in Bristol at the start of 1560-1, suggesting that they travelled southward. The players of Robert Dudley also visited the two cities in 1560-1, appearing in Bristol in mid-July.⁵⁵ The data for the fiscal year 1561-62 sees an exact correlation between players appearing in Bristol and Gloucester:

DATE	COMPANY PERFORMING
2 -8 Nov 1561	Queen's Men
25 June – 4 July 1562	Warwick's Men
20 Aug – 5 Sep	Robert Dudley's Men
15 – 21 Nov 1562	Duchess of Suffolk's Men

Table 8: Performances in Bristol, November 1561-November 1562

Although the dates for Gloucester have not been entered into the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts, the same noblemen's companies were rewarded in the city, in the same order as in Bristol in 1561-62. This suggests that a common itinerary was in place which was adhered to by all companies in that particular year, if the municipal

⁵³ REED *Bristol*, p. 67.

⁵⁴ Alison Weir, *Elizabeth the Queen*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 1998), p. 1; p. 213; REED *Bristol*, pp. 63-80; REED *Glos.*, pp. 298-302.

⁵⁵ REED *Bristol*, p. 66.

awards were noted in chronological order.⁵⁶ Performances by Strange's Men in 1564-65 and in the following year by the Queen's Men and Lord Hunsdon's Men also follow this south west circuit, 'the direct route to Bristol via Bath, and often including Gloucester along the road north west of Bristol, was very popular'.⁵⁷ From a rare admission of dates in the Gloucester records, one can deduce that the players did in fact arrange their routes with both Bristol and Gloucester in mind. On 1 December 1572, Worcester's Men appeared in Gloucester, and by late January 1573 they were in Bristol.⁵⁸ Sussex's Men played at Gloucester on 3 April 1573 and by the week of 5 to 11 April were performing in Bristol Guildhall.⁵⁹ Conversely, Essex's Men chose a northerly route in the summer of 1573, playing at Bristol between 31 May and 6 June, and appearing in Gloucester on 10 July.⁶⁰ All three companies were rewarded in Bath in the fiscal year 1572-3 suggesting that the Somerset town was also part of their route plan.⁶¹

Medieval Bristol 'owed its greatness to its geographical position and natural harbour'.⁶² By the 1480s Bristol was 'firmly established as the chief provincial port of the realm'.⁶³ The city proper was expanding over Bristol Bridge, spanning the Avon, drawing the merchant districts into the main community life of the town.⁶⁴ Her position at the mouth of the Bristol Channel gave access to sea trade; the city was also fortunate to have access to two main trade arteries in the Severn and the Avon, ensuring that local markets could be catered for. Early business relationships had been

⁵⁶ Mary Blackstone advises that the payments in corporate accounts may not be in chronological order, 'Notes towards a patron's calendar', p. 8.

⁵⁷ Maclean, 'At the End of the Road', p. 23.

⁵⁸ *REED Glos.*, p. 302; *REED Bristol* p. 82.

⁵⁹ *REED Glos.*, p. 302.

⁶⁰ *REED Glos.*, p. 302; *REED Bristol*, p. 83.

⁶¹ John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies*, II, p. 200.

⁶² Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1909), p. 2.

⁶³ Patrick Carter, 'Historical Background', in *REED Bristol*, xiii-xxvi (p. xvi).

⁶⁴ Brian Smith and Elizabeth Ralph, *A History of Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 37.

forged with Irish, Iberian and Mediterranean ports. However, the sixteenth century saw an economic downturn in the fortunes of the city; a depression in the cloth trade had severe repercussions for Bristol's mercers and drapers. In addition, the rise of Exeter as a rival south west port and the growing dominance of London as the financial centre of England did little to aid Bristol's floundering economy.⁶⁵ The capital, with its better offers of credit terms and networking opportunities with the international community of weavers which had settled in London, began to attract the wealthier Bristol merchants, leaving the western port short of skilled businessmen.⁶⁶ However, the pragmatism of the mercantile community in Bristol merely adapted to the circumstances. The apprentice records for Bristol from 1542 to 1565 confirm that there was a major change in the trading patterns of the city, with a huge influx of migrants and an increase in urban distributive trades. In this period 78.8% of Bristol's apprentices were from outside of the city, mostly from the Midlands.⁶⁷ 14.1% of the city's apprentices relocated from Gloucester. These 434 Gloucester boys did not always follow their father's craft, which suggests that the early modern period saw a shift in industry patterns and family trends. Only 21.8% of all Bristol Apprentices in the period continued with their father's trade.⁶⁸ Bristol was a more appealing option for young men who wished to learn a skill, which may explain the lack of solid guild factions in Gloucester. The defecting youngsters who learned their trade in Bristol, dominated in certain, often smaller, crafts. 40.5% of these boys joined the wiredrawers, 20.7% trained with shipwrights, and 38% became hoopers. Anne Yarbrough suggests that the choices made by the Gloucester sons reflected the equivalent 'status and

⁶⁵ David Harris Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy 1450-1700* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), p. 24.

⁶⁶ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 30.

⁶⁷ Anne Yarbrough, 'Geographical and Social Origins of Bristol Apprentices 1542-1565', *TBGAS*, 98 (1980), 113-129 (p. 115).

⁶⁸ Yarbrough, 'Bristol Apprentices', p. 114.

aspirations' of their fathers, but also reflects the fact that parents were aware that Gloucester did not offer the same prospects or opportunities as its neighbour.⁶⁹

Much business in the city was done at the city fairs. The main gathering was St. James' Fair in the Horsefair district in the north of the city. It was one of the 'great English fairs' and occurred 'every year at the Feast of Pentecost' drawing merchants 'from all over Europe'.⁷⁰ This annual market drew large crowds of both traders and buyers; it was 'one of the greatest business gatherings in the kingdom [...] during its continuance practically no business was done within the walls'.⁷¹ Frederick Jones suggests that it was of enormous economic importance to provide plays for the consumers: 'great theatrical performances were given at St. James's Fair under the direct patronage of the church, which drew thousands of people to the city and added immensely to the revenue and trade'.⁷² There is, as Mark Pilkington concedes, no evidence in the churchwardens' accounts for St. James' parish relating to plays, but they may have taken place as private ventures.⁷³ The national and continental rialto in the Horsefair would have been a lucrative site for perambulatory players from Bristol, Gloucestershire and the capital. The 'void' which had been left by the absence of traditional guild pageants was, according to the antiquarian Alfred Harvey, 'soon filled by the sudden rise of the English drama, which was nowhere more speedily and heartily welcomed than at Bristol'.⁷⁴ The wealth of the area would have 'created a steady demand for groups of actors and musicians with a capacity for responding spontaneously to the needs of the moment'.⁷⁵ There is unfortunately no other evidence

⁶⁹ Yarbrough, 'Bristol Apprentices', p. 117.

⁷⁰ Carter, 'Historical Background', p. xvii; Smith and Ralph, *Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 41.

⁷¹ Alfred Harvey, *Bristol*, p. 251.

⁷² Frederick C. Jones, 'XV: Broad Street and its Shakespearean Associations', *Bristol Adventurer*, p. 19.

⁷³ Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxii.

⁷⁴ Harvey, *Bristol*, p. 245.

⁷⁵ Joan Johnson, *Tudor Gloucestershire*, p. 142.

to suggest that players entertained at these trade conventions but as there was an ample audience gathered in a public place, and with the environment suited to commercial exchange, it has been assumed that the practice took place. The generous gift of John Willy in 1565 may have been a consequence of such gatherings; Bristol's 'best chamberlain' personally paid for the city streets to be repaired for a seven-mile radius out into the countryside.⁷⁶ The 'interest in highly profitable commodities' appeared to lessen the blow felt in the mid-sixteenth century and Bristol's fortunes began to improve.

The city's commercial strength was personified by the creation, by a royal charter of 18 December 1552, of the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol. In addition to protecting the rights of the city's wealthy merchant class, the Society also played a philanthropic role in Bristol, supporting education and poor relief. It also 'maintained the quays and rented the cellars of its hall in King Street [...] to merchants for storage'.⁷⁷ The Society was granted a further parliamentary statute of 1566 which secured their privileges on overseas trade and ensured that their monopoly could not be interfered with, not even by Bristol retailers or merchants who were not members of the Society. Unfortunately, the early modern evidence is 'pitifully limited' and the Tudor records for the Society 'do not exist'; if they did they are, along with many Elizabethan guild records, missing and 'their loss to history is great'.⁷⁸ Like Gloucester, Bristol was a regional distribution point for national and international goods, but unlike her neighbour, Bristol was more receptive to outside traders and continental merchants. The city 'drew on a wide inland area', such as Wiltshire and

⁷⁶ Smith and Ralph, *Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 38.

⁷⁷ Bryan Little, *The City and County of Bristol: A Study in Atlantic Civilisation* (London: Werner Laurie, 1954), p. 105.

⁷⁸ Patrick McGrath, *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol*, p. 1; L. G. Taylor, 'The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: An Address', *TBGAS*, 71 (1952), 5-12 (pp. 7-8).

Somerset, for her exports, acting as ‘an emporium for all commodities intended for foreign markets’. The inland trade served the city well for staple trades, but ‘it was to far flung foreign trade that she looked for her chief wealth, and which she regarded as her greatest glory’.⁷⁹

1576 - 1586 A Decade of Change in Bristol Drama

The ten years between 1576 and 1586 saw a shift in the theatrical culture in Bristol, from the Corporation having such a positive response to strolling players that the titles of the plays performed were entered into the Mayor’s Audits, to a serious decline in the recording of plays in the 1580s and closing with a Common Council Ordinance of 21 June 1586 which revoked the privilege of the Bristol mayor to licence plays in the Guildhall. I would argue that there was at least one alternative venue to the Guildhall by 1581, which may explain the dearth of professional companies receiving corporate awards.

The inclusion of the play titles between 1576 and 1578 is a rare, but exciting, episode in the dramatic history of the city. Regrettably, the texts of the plays have not survived, but without this evidence in the Mayor’s Audits, we would never have known of the existence of *The Red Knight*, *What Mischief Works in the Mind of Man*, *The Queen of Ethiopia*, *The Court of Comfort* or *Quid Pro Quo*. However, there is no evidence to confirm the style of these plays, whether comedies, tragedies, mysteries or moralities.⁸⁰ The local playgoers were also appreciative of the companies chosen by the mayor to perform before the mayor, aldermen and members of the public as it appears from the evidence of crowding at the Guildhall. I have already noted the

⁷⁹ C. M. Macinnes, *A Gateway of Empire*, repr. (Newton Abbot: David-Charles (Holdings) Ltd, 1968 [1939]), p. 20-21.

⁸⁰ Galloway, ‘*REED* in the Provinces’, p. 93.

damage to the seating in 1581, [see page 112] but the appearance in 1576-77 of another two famous troupes caused substantial damage to furniture, the repairs to which had to be funded by the municipal purse. The crowd who wished to see a performance of *The Red Knight* by the Chamberlain's Men caused 6d-worth of damage to the front entrance, the public being so keen to view the spectacle that the door 'was stretched with the press of people at the play'.⁸¹ This is also further evidence to suggest that there was only one entrance to the galleried room within the Guildhall, which was the door to the left of the building, as indicated by the stairwell on the 1775 plan of the Guildhall. The number of potential audience members impatiently trying to force their way into the building had buckled the main door to the upper storey of the Guildhall. The 'board' [stage] was also damaged after Leicester's performance of *Myngo* in late October 1577, costing 3s 6d to repair.⁸² This play may have been tailored to the Bristol audience as Mingo is 'an Iroquoian language native to the areas of western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio and West Virginia', so Leicester's Men may have adopted this play for performance in the city as it had ties with West Virginia with the tobacco trade, and a namesake city on the Virginia-Texas border.⁸³

Although scholars agree that the Wine Street playhouse was in operation in the early seventeenth century, I propose that this building may also have been used as a playing place in Bristol from the 1580s. Bristol differs from her neighbour Gloucester significantly in this decade; as Gloucester was reaching a peak of playing with regular visits by travelling companies on an annual basis, the records in the Mayor's Audits suggest a decline in municipally-funded strolling plays at civic expense. Mark Pilkington has listed the 127 instances of named professional companies visiting

⁸¹ REED *Bristol*, p. 112.

⁸² REED *Bristol*, p. 115.

⁸³ 'West Virginia Mingo' <<http://mingolanguage.org>>, [accessed 6 April 2005], page 1 of 1.

Bristol in the early modern period in decade order, yet has offered no explanation for the seeming anomaly of the 1580s:

1550s	9 Companies
1560s	27 Companies
1570s	28 Companies
1580s	17 Companies
1590s	26 Companies

Table 9: Number of Professional Players Visiting Bristol [REED *Bristol*, p. xxxiv].

In the five years between the visit by Oxford's boys in September 1581 and the edict of 21 June 1586 only six troupes stopped at the Guildhall to play.⁸⁴ Three companies visited in 1583: Oxford's Men returned on 20 May; the collaborative company representing Lords Morley and Hunsdon entertained Bristolians on 8 June; and the Queen's Men earned an impressive £2 for a performance on 24 July.⁸⁵ Over a year passed until Essex's Men earned 20s for a stop in autumn 1584, and another hiatus of almost two years expired before they returned in late March/early April 1586 when they earned 26s 8d. The Queen's Men attempted to perform for the Mayor in July, but were refused, with a 20s fee for their pains.⁸⁶ However, the correlation of the records of Bath and Gloucester state that there was a definite pattern in playing between the spa town and her northern neighbour, and it is unlikely that the players would have circumvented such a commercial opportunity as lay in Bristol. Between 1580 and 1589 there were thirty-eight performances recorded in Gloucester, thirty-six in Bath, yet only seventeen in Bristol.⁸⁷ The evidence for the year 1584-85 again illustrates the popularity of the mayor's play in south-west England, with the aldermanic benches of Bath and Gloucester both being entertained by seven companies representing noblemen. If one compares the instances of perambulatory troupes visiting the cities,

⁸⁴ REED *Bristol*, p. 122. Oxford's Boys played 17-23 September 1581.

⁸⁵ REED *Bristol*, pp. 123-24.

⁸⁶ REED *Bristol*, p. 128.

⁸⁷ The evidence for Bath may be found in REED *Bath*, pp. 12-14.

four out of the seven appear in the same year, suggesting an itinerary; Essex's Men, Oxford's Men, Sussex's Men and Leicester's Men performed in Bath and Gloucester in this fiscal year. Perhaps such companies did visit and the Chamberlain neglected to record the amounts that they were rewarded with, or perhaps they did stop in Bristol but declined the Guildhall as a venue. Pilkington has questioned whether an alternative venue was used, even when the Mayor's Audits note corporate payments:

It is also possible that the City Chamberlain quite deliberately included the location 'in the Guildhall' [into the Mayor's Audits] to differentiate performances there from those which took place elsewhere in Bristol, locations which remain a mystery to this day.⁸⁸

Perhaps strolling players who visited Bristol would have been familiar with alternative venues to the Guildhall, the existence of which made the city 'unique in the provinces'.⁸⁹

I propose that one of these alternative venues in the 1580s was Woolfe's Wine Street property. I have stated above that this venue was active in the early years of the seventeenth century, yet there is evidence to suggest that Woolfe had owned *No.X ch/7* from 1581. If another venue accommodated players, this would explain the dearth of playing evidence in the Mayor's Audits from 23 September 1581 to 20 May 1583 and why the frequency of players in Bristol is reduced until April/May 1597. Perhaps plays which were not specified as being played 'in the Guildhall' were performed here also. There is a possibility that Woolfe's playhouse in Wine Street was used for the majority of performances from 1581 to 1597 and that the increase in municipally-rewarded performances for a short period from 1597 to 1600 is evidence of Woolfe's lengthy renovation project. Woolfe may have wished to build a theatre in London but was

⁸⁸ Mark Pilkington, 'Playing in the Guildhall, Bristol', *REEDN* 14:2 (1989), 14-19 (p. 17).

⁸⁹ Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xl.

prevented by an act of 1580 which forbade the building of new properties or the renovation of existing ones.⁹⁰ The 1598 lease stated that Woolfe had four years to increase the space at *No.X ch/7* and ‘newe build’ the property. It is possible that the receipts in the Mayor’s audits, in the four years from 1597 to 1600, appear as the Corporation felt obliged to pay the travelling players for their services for playing at the Guildhall, as the city’s principal venue was temporarily unavailable. Pilkington has stated that ‘1597 is the last year when the Guildhall was unquestionably used by players’, as there is no evidence in the records after this date which specify a location; however this is not unusual, as previous entries into the Mayor’s Audits had also neglected to mention the venue, a point which Pilkington has also stressed.

Mark Pilkington has identified a rental payment dated seventeen years prior to the 1598 indenture for *No.X ch/7* relating to the cutler, ‘as early as 1581 the parish [Christchurch] received £3 10s from Nicholas Woolfe’. Despite questioning the validity of *No.X ch/7* as the site of the Wine Street playhouse, Pilkington has stated that ‘the property occupied by Woolfe as early as 1581 could well be the 1598 property’.⁹¹ I am certain that the property was one and the same. Woolfe continued to have an interest in the premises into the 1580s and 1590s as further entries into the Christ Church accounts note that in 1583-6, a rent of £3 10s was paid for a tenement between that of Elizabeth Boydell, widow and Richard Harsell, goldsmith and between 1590 and 1597 £3 10s was again paid for a messuage between Harsell and Humphrey Clovill, also a goldsmith.⁹² The evidence cited by Roger Leech in his *Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol* states that the properties flanking *No.X ch/7* were owned by Clovill and Harsell in 1598 but also that prior to Clovill the occupier of *No.X*

⁹⁰ Thomson, *Shakespeare’s Theatre*, p. 21.

⁹¹ Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 16.

⁹² Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 16.

ch/8 was John Boydell. Therefore the same family were tenants of this property neighbouring the playhouse. Neither was the 1598 indenture a new contract, but a renewal of an older 1589 lease on the same tenement.⁹³ Thus Woolfe had inhabited or at least had a vested interest in *No.X ch/7*, the playhouse, from 1581.

Like the metropolitan City Fathers, the Bristol authorities issued a number of Common Council Ordinances to curb dramatic practices in the city centre. Four were passed in 1585 - the latest by 18 November.⁹⁴ These related to concerns about ‘unlawful games’ and plays which had taken place in the Guildhall without a council representative in attendance. The motive behind issuing the ordinances in 1585 was also to avoid the ‘many great inconveniences and disorders that have heretofore happened [...] within this Cytie of Bristoll or the liberties thereof’. It seems that the mayor of Bristol had been denied his right to approve playing companies to play before the public without his presence. The fine for allowing unlicensed plays to take place in the municipal venue was forty shillings to be forfeited personally by the serving mayor, but it seems that this edict was promptly repealed. This action ‘indicates disagreement among members of the Common Council as to the efficacy of such restrictions’, but the anti-theatrical faction ‘won the day’ and another ‘almost identical’ ordinance was reissued on 21 June 1586, which this time made an order to prevent the law being revoked again.⁹⁵ The bulk of the text dealt again with the ‘unlawful games’ which had occasioned the orders in 1585 but again emphasised the responsibility of the Council in regard to theatrical displays:

Noe Mayor of this Cytie shall lycense or permytte any players whatsoever to play in the Guildhall of Bristoll at any tyme hereafter, vpon the like payne of xl s. to

⁹³ Leech, *Topography Part I*, p. 172.

⁹⁴ REED *Bristol*, p. 287, endnote to p. 128.

⁹⁵ Pilkington, ‘Playing at the Guildhall’, p. 18.

be payde by the Mayor [...] vnless such players doe playe there before the Mayor and his Bretherne.⁹⁶

Since there are so few entries between September 1584 and March 1586 it is difficult to judge if enforcement took effect. Perhaps the edict was issued as a directive to subsequent mayors not to permit playing in the Guildhall but to pass on the business to the Wine Street venue, which promoted Woolfe's property as a playing space and prevented further disorder in the Guildhall. David Bradley has investigated instances of such edicts being issued seemingly without due cause: 'ordinances against players in years when few or no companies appeared in those towns where records exist [...] are susceptible of other interpretations'.⁹⁷ I suggest that it was the threat of an alternative venue which prompted the ordinances in 1585-86.

The government of Bristol had 'always been firmly in the hands of the rich', although not as insular in their attitudes to strangers as Gloucester. In 1575, Bristol had gained absolute economic independence from Gloucester as the customs began to be treated separately, although the two cities had operated independently from one another since the fourteenth century.⁹⁸ Bristolians and surrounding landowners did not appear to dispute either the ruling elite or how the Corporation conducted its affairs, perhaps as a consequence of generous municipal gifts and entertainments throughout the year. Jonathan Barry has argued that the mercenary attitude of Bristolians ensured a cohesive working relationship between the government and the governed. This attitude was fostered early in life by the apprenticeship culture which provided 'social discipline' and a respect for master craftsmen, who principally comprised the Bristol

⁹⁶ 'Ordinances of the Common Council' 21 June 1586, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 128-29.

⁹⁷ David Bradley, *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 59.

⁹⁸ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 37; Smith and Ralph, *Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 37.

Corporation.⁹⁹ Barry notes that the Bristolian social structure was paradoxical as a ‘great premium was placed upon corporate unity’ yet the city was ‘highly inegalitarian’; one would expect the middle ground to be made up of merchants yet it was the merchant class who ruled the city, the middling group was represented by masters, apprentices and journeymen. The fact that the aldermanic bench was a meritocracy may have appeased these tradesmen. Barry concedes that the common council was ‘self-perpetuating’, but as there is little evidence of the nepotism which was in operation in oligarchic Gloucester; the middling merchants may have complied with the council as they had a genuine chance of becoming a member. These merchants on the Common Council may have been supportive of a colleague such as Woolfe taking on the responsibility of a provincial master of the revels, or even delegated this role to a burgess willing to cooperate with the patronised professional troupes. Barry has speculated that the continuance of civic ritual was a political choice to maintain order yet giving the impression of municipal benevolence which was designed to confirm their social identity as Bristolians. It is probable that the city subcontracted the organisation of city entertainment to Woolfe, and perhaps other creatively motivated individuals. This would therefore to allow the Corporation to concentrate on other more pressing matters, such as managing the increasing Atlantic markets, yet still maintaining the image of municipal benevolence and deference to the players’ patrons.

By the 1580s, Bristol increased its operations as a regional distribution centre which served to strengthen the local economy further and ‘became the foundation for extending trade’ into the Mediterranean and the Americas.¹⁰⁰ The pragmatic nature of

⁹⁹ Jonathan Barry, ‘Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century Bristol’, in Barry Reay, *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1988), 59-90, (p. 73).

¹⁰⁰ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 36.

Bristol's economics was once again evident in the marked difference between the regional markets and international imports and exports. Domestic imports from the north were dominated by wholesale cloth purchases and raw materials such as salt, iron and coal. The 'southern trades' as David Sacks labels them, were predominantly luxury imports of 'tropical and subtropical wares' such as oils, fruits, spices and dyes and the export of the textiles bought in from the north.¹⁰¹ The commercial strength of international trade increased confidence of English merchants to invest in the city and Bristol's reputation as a commodity hub improved. The increase in merchants and visitors who thronged the city and quay with time and money to spare may have been the motivation behind Woolfe's conversion of *No.X ch/7* Wine Street into a playhouse in the 1580s.

**Wine Street and Redcliffe Hill:
Bristol's Two Provincial 'Roses'**

In February 1595, the Bristol Common Council felt it necessary to reiterate the 1585-86 ordinances against playing, despite there being no recorded playing in the city since August 1594.¹⁰² Mark Pilkington states that the 'draconian' repetition of the municipal request against playing was 'an indication that the ordinance of 1586 did not ultimately achieve its intended goals'.¹⁰³ This later edict 'deleted the clause' set in 1586-86 relating to the legal permission granted to travelling players who performed in front of the mayor and aldermen and declared it illegal for any plays to take place within the Guildhall at all, lest the mayor should forfeit an 'exorbitant' fine of five pounds. A further stipulation in the ordinance called for plays to be banned 'within the liberties' and 'after Sunn sett', suggesting that this was a regular practice in Bristol, perhaps at

¹⁰¹ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 38.

¹⁰² REED *Bristol*, endnote to p. 148, p. 290.

¹⁰³ Pilkington, 'Playing in the Guildhall', pp. 18-19.

Wine Street.¹⁰⁴ The ordinance had to be repeated in February 1596, suggesting that the 1595 ‘met the same fate as the one of 1585’. The Guildhall was henceforth conserved as the ‘place of Justice’ for the city and players were to be refused an audience.¹⁰⁵ However, evidence in the Mayor’s Audits for the last years of the sixteenth century demonstrate that these prohibitions were ignored; Derby’s Men and the Queen’s players were rewarded by the city July and August 1596, just months after the last ordinance, and in 1597 the Mayor’s Audits specifically record that the Chamberlain’s and Queen’s Men had played ‘in’ the Guildhall.¹⁰⁶ Unusually, there were a number of entries into the Mayor’s Audits for rewards to players after ordinances were passed in 1595-96. I have argued that the sixteen civic-sponsored performances recorded, although without the mention of a venue, between July 1596 and September 1600 may have taken place within the Guildhall as a consequence of the Wine Street playhouse undergoing a complete renovation, and that this independent venue had been active since the 1580s; I wish to explore this possibility further by examining the evidence and the historians’ views of the trading period of *No.X ch/7*, the Wine Street playhouse.

The evidence for the operation of the Wine Street playhouse can be found in various legal documents and the bequests by Nicholas Woolfe in his will which are recorded in the account books of the St. John the Baptist churchwardens by the bursar of Queen Elizabeth’s Hospital and in the Mayor’s Audits. A complaint by one of Woolfe’s former tenants of *No.X ch/7* reveals that players were accommodated in the property as well as playing there; Woolfe had leased part of the property to a Richard Cooke on a short-term six-month lease for five pounds. Before the end of the

¹⁰⁴ Pilkington, ‘Playing in the Guildhall’, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ordinances of the Common Council, 3 February 1596, *REED Bristol*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁶ *REED Bristol*, pp. 147-51.

occupancy, Cooke decided to move out, and requested of the landlord that he sub-let to another. Woolfe wished to retain the space for himself and so denied Cooke's request, but did not refund the balance of the rent either. The statement of Richard Cooke relating to this objection, dated 7 July 1606, revealed that Woolfe and his wife Margaret were allegedly sub-letting rooms to individuals 'whom he suffered to act and playe within the said Roomes for which the said defendantes tooke moneye'; revenue they did not declare.¹⁰⁷ Pilkington has found evidence in the original lawsuit of May 1606 which recounts the renting of the rooms for eighteen months prior to that date suggesting that actors were lodging at Wine Street from 1604.¹⁰⁸ The will of Nicholas Woolfe, drawn up on 2 June 1614 and probated one month later, demonstrates the concerns of an early modern provincial impresario.¹⁰⁹ He granted multiple annuities 'out of my Playhouse in wynestreete' to various charitable causes in Bristol. The parish of Christ Church, St. Peter's, the Company of Cutlers and Smiths and the poor of Newgate jail were all to receive six shillings and eight pence each, whilst the poor children of Bristol Hospital were donated thirty shillings and the almshouses of St. John's and St. Michael's receive five shillings apiece.¹¹⁰ The tone of the will, almost threatening to remove the donations if his wishes were not adhered to, illustrates that the cutler was aware of the problems which faced his second industry, and it appears that he bribed his executors into continuing the theatrical legacy of his playhouse:

That all Thannuities and yeerely Rentes before mencioned and lymitted to bee paid out of my said playe house shall continewe due and payeable soe longe only as the same house shall continewe a playe house at that such playars as doe resorte to the said Cittie or inhabite within the same doe usually playe there and maye be permitted & suffered quietly to playe there.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Pilkington, 'New Information on the Playhouse in Wine Street', p. 73.

¹⁰⁸ Pilkington, 'Drama', p. xxxviii.

¹⁰⁹ Will of Nicholas Woolfe, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 195-99.

¹¹⁰ Will of Nicholas Woolfe, cited in *REED Bristol*, p. 196

¹¹¹ Will of Nicholas Woolfe, cited in *REED Bristol*, p. 197.

This passage reveals Woolfe's personal opinion of his venture and his assessment of the general reaction to players in Bristol. Keenan believes that this segment of the will 'anticipated the continued function of the playhouse after his death, although his final proviso made allowance for its closure at some point in the future'.¹¹² Conversely, I read this statement as a personal concern by Woolfe for the prospects of his business after his death. Ernest Honigman and Susan Brock have investigated the wills and inventories drawn up by metropolitan playhouse owners and investors, yet none of the documents they analysed was as detailed as Woolfe's in voicing a personal concern for the wellbeing of the players and the future of the business.¹¹³ This is perhaps indicative of Woolfe's affection for the venue and the playing culture of Bristol. The will was usually drafted just before death, 'the normal interval being less than a week'; therefore Woolfe was concerned about his theatre until his final days.¹¹⁴ The 'treue entente' of the will's instructions demonstrates that Woolfe was worried about the preservation of playing in the theatre, and was aware of prospective future threats against playing.¹¹⁵ He was advising his executors to maintain the property as a playhouse in order that the money goes to the charities that he had requested. Perhaps he was guaranteeing the existence of playing and using his benevolence to the poor as a security, a stipulation that the London impresarios did not feel necessary to make. The request for the quiet enjoyment of the players is indicative of the pressure on actors in the early modern period and identifies that the playhouse was in use by both travelling players and those from the local community. Evidence is still to be unearthed about the latter, but the fact that strollers were visiting up to 1614 goes some way to verifying the use of the Wine Street theatre as an alternative venue when the

¹¹² Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 146.

¹¹³ Honigman and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*. Even Henslowe, with his precise accounting procedures, does not feel that either the Boars Head or the Bear Garden would be threatened by detractors, pp. 101-5.

¹¹⁴ Honigman and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Will of Nicholas Woolfe, cited in *REED Bristol*, p. 196.

Guildhall denied access to the itinerants at the end of the sixteenth century. Richard Smith, the nineteenth-century surgeon and editor of the *Bristol Mirror* who compiled five volumes of handwritten notes, playbills, letters and plates relating to the theatre of Bristol, believed that strollers *were* visiting the city in 1613. In the introduction to his research, Smith asserts that the circumstances in Stuart London must have ‘driven a multitude of players into the provinces - yet all our records [are] *silent* upon such an event’.¹¹⁶ In respect of the Wine Street playhouse Smith is also silent, but a note in his collection states that he believed there to be a theatre in Broad Street in 1614, which he may have been confusing with the evidence for the playhouse at *No.X ch/7*.¹¹⁷

The records of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital School confirm that funds from the Woolfe legacy were received there, according to the instructions in his will. This institution was opened in 1589 and was originally in the south-west of the city, in the College Green district adjacent to the Cathedral.¹¹⁸ The rent money from the Wine Street playhouse initially passed from the Woolfe estate to Henry Yate, one of the overseers of Woolfe’s will and probably a relation of William Yate, soap-maker, who sanctioned the 1598 improvements to the property: ‘1617 Receyved of Mr. Henry Yate, for one years rent out of the Playhouse in Wyne Street, which was given by Nicholas Woolfe, cutler, to remain to the Hospital for ever. £1 10s 0d’.¹¹⁹ Henry Yate was also a soap maker, who ‘leased several properties in Wine Street’.¹²⁰ He was a Sheriff in 1616, had possibly noted the popularity of playing whilst involved in local affairs and may have wished to continue his friend’s theatrical legacy in the city. Three

¹¹⁶ Richard Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Note by Smith relating to the operating dates of Bristol’s theatres on page 14 of the facsimile copy in Volume I.

¹¹⁸ *William Adams’s Chronicle of Bristol* (1639), ed. by F. F. Fox (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1910), p. 138. The original Queen Elizabeth’s Hospital was opened on the site of Gaunt’s Hospital, which lies between College Green and Denmark Street, in the south west of the city.

¹¹⁹ Will of Nicholas Woolfe, cited in *REED Bristol*, p. 196.

¹²⁰ Jones, ‘An Early Theatre in Bristol’, p. 207.

further entries to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital records, in abbreviated form for 1616-17, 1617-18 and 1618-19, suggest that Yate continued his benevolence toward the institution on Woolfe's behalf.¹²¹

St. John the Baptist churchwardens' accounts also show evidence of the Woolfe bequest, the first of which is entered in 1614-5, 'probably on Christmas 1615'.¹²² The amount donated was 5s in accordance with the will. The Church of St. John the Baptist lies at the northern end of Broad Street, and the small parish encompassed the Guildhall and the White Hart, one of Woolfe's licensed properties. A second associated item into the account book of St. John the Baptist states that the 5s from the playhouse is given to 'the poore people of the almshouse as the guifte of Nicholas Woolfe'.¹²³ This dual entry is repeated annually until 1619-20.¹²⁴ The last date of payment to the church is dated as Michaelmas 1619.¹²⁵ The payments start again in 1623-4 but with only the 5s rent received 'of the playhouse' but the money is not returned to the parish.

Although there are a number of separate sources which indicate that Woolfe did in fact own a playhouse prior to his death in 1614, there are conflicting theories about when the business began and ceased trading. Kathleen Barker believed that the playhouse was 'erected' at some point between 1598 and 1602 and closed 'between September 1619 and April 1620'.¹²⁶ She suggested this date of 1620 for the closure as she discovered an endorsement on the 1598 lease on *No.X ch/7*, an 'assignment of interest in the premises' by Miles Woolfe, Nicholas Woolfe's eldest son, to Anthony

¹²¹ Notes of Queen Elizabeth Hospital Accounts in Richard Smith, *Bristol Theatre*, I, p. 95.

¹²² Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxix.

¹²³ 'St. John the Baptist Churchwardens' Accounts', *REED Bristol*, p. 202.

¹²⁴ 'St. John the Baptist Churchwardens' Accounts', *REED Bristol*, pp. 202-15.

¹²⁵ *REED Bristol*, p. 224.

¹²⁶ Barker, 'Early Provincial Playhouse' pp. 83-84.

Bassett a tailor'.¹²⁷ This memorandum was dated 12 April 1620, which Barker assumes means that the playhouse must have ceased operating.¹²⁸ She states that 'it is tempting to assume that the cessation of payments after 1619 reflects local action against the playhouse'.¹²⁹ It is true that the lease of *No.X ch/7* Wine Street was transferred to Bassett, but this only occurred in 1626.¹³⁰ However, by 1661 Bassett also had ownership of another Wine Street property, which Leech has identified as the tenement *No.X ch/1*. It was once a 'parcel of waste ground [...] at the W[est] end of the church at the corner turning into Wine Street'.¹³¹ Interestingly before Bassett acquired *No.X ch/1* it had been the property of Nicholas Woolfe, as set out in the 1598 lease renewal, who had a forty-one year lease on this land too: 'also that voide ground [...] sett lyinge and beinge at the upper end of Brodstreate in the said cittie adjoininge unto the wauall of Christ Church aforesaid [...] containing in lengthe sixtene foote or thereaboutes'.¹³² Woolfe was paying an annual rent of ten shillings to Christchurch for the rental of this land.¹³³ Barker is unsure as to whether the transfer of the tenure of *No.X ch/7* denoted a change of use for the property: 'without further evidence it is impossible to say whether this assignment was cause or effect of the Wine Street playhouse between September 1619 and April 1620'.¹³⁴ The only extant record pertaining to Christ Church which I have been able to find for 1620 is in William Adams's *Chronicle*, where he details a refurbishment: 'this year was the new walk made against Christ Church; and the lead and frame over it was set up to cover the walk'.¹³⁵ Bassett may have acquired ownership of the void ground to take advantage of the renovation of the area at corporate expense. Thus Bassett did obtain a property

¹²⁷ Barker, 'Early Provincial Playhouse', p. 84.

¹²⁸ Barker has appended this information to her typed copy of the 1598 lease, in KB/1/1.

¹²⁹ Barker, 'Early Provincial Playhouse', p. 84.

¹³⁰ Leech, *Topography I*, p. 172.

¹³¹ Leech, *Topography I*, p. 170.

¹³² 1598 Lease of *No.X ch/7* in the Barker Notes.

¹³³ Pilkington, 'The Playhouse in Wine Street', p. 15.

¹³⁴ Barker, 'Early Provincial Playhouse', p. 84.

¹³⁵ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 206. See Appendix, Plate XIV.

from Woolfe in 1620, but it was probably the waste ground on the corner, rather than the playhouse, which would explain why payments ‘from the playhouse’ were still being received by St John the Baptist in April 1620. The effect of passing the deeds to *No.X ch/1* may have been that the estate of Nicholas Woolfe was in possession of more liquid assets after ceasing the rentals on the void ground. Mark Pilkington has also drawn the conclusion that the playhouse operated only for a short time: ‘the surviving evidence suggests that the playhouse in Wine Street could have opened as early as 1604 and most probably closed in 1625’.¹³⁶ He has, however, left room for doubt. Pilkington states that if Woolfe was not ‘solely behind the playhouse from its inception’ then the theatre may have opened ‘as early as September 1603, perhaps earlier if ‘the playhouse existed either before Woolfe was involved in it or before he paid the rent on it’.¹³⁷ In his 1989 article, ‘Playing in the Guildhall, Bristol’ Pilkington also stated that the Wine Street playhouse was ‘clearly in operation by 1602’, as the renovations would have taken place by this point.¹³⁸ Siobhan Keenan believes that the venue was a relatively commercial success for a provincial business: ‘although the playhouse may not have functioned continuously during this period, twenty years represents a comparatively lengthy career for a playhouse outside Renaissance London’.¹³⁹ Undoubtedly, there remains a great deal of mystery surrounding this playhouse, especially as to when it may have ceased to be a business. The only period of trading which ‘is clear’ was from Christmas 1614 to 5 March 1621, when the churchwardens of St. John the Baptist received payments ‘in complete accordance with the Woolfe bequest’.¹⁴⁰ Pilkington suggests the modification in the accounting style in the St. John the Baptist churchwardens’ accounts identifies a variation in ownership of

¹³⁶ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xxxvii.

¹³⁷ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xxxix.

¹³⁸ Pilkington, ‘Playing in the Guildhall’, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁰ Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 19.

the Wine Street theatre after 1619: ‘a new pattern emerges [...] [which] clearly confirm[s] a change in function of the playhouse’, as for the first time the payments are marked ‘under the Wine Street heading’ until 1627-28. He offers an explanation that these receipts may have been recorded ‘in some other lost account’.¹⁴¹ However, it seems that there was no accounting done in the periods between 1619-20 and 1623-24 as the churchwardens’ records states that there were ‘three arerages’ which were ‘utterlie lost’. By this, the accounts seem to mean that the St. John the Baptist churchwardens were in ‘arrears’ [arerages] for the three ‘lost’ years of 1620-21, 1621-22 and 1622-23. Either the records cannot be traced, or the money had not been gathered, or stolen or misplaced. The latter suggestions may explain why for the next three years until 1625-26 the churchwardens receive the 5s rent ‘out of the playhouse’ but do not confer the money upon the poor, as they were recouping their losses.¹⁴² After this date the churchwardens stop receiving payments. Pilkington has suggested that the cessation of donations to St. John’s serves as the ‘strongest possibility’ to prove that the playhouse ceased to operate by 1625.¹⁴³

I have posited a theory above that the playhouse in Wine Street, whether under the management of Woolfe or another interested party, may have been used for performances during the 1580s, the main argument for which is the lack of recorded productions in the Mayor’s Audits, despite the evidence in vicinal towns that they were receiving strollers on an identified route. Regrettably, there is no proof that this happened in the 1580s. However a letter from Edward Alleyn to his wife may reveal that players of quality were visiting Bristol in the early 1590s, but they played at an alternative venue. This document is a testament to the lack of interest in the Bristol

¹⁴¹ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xl.

¹⁴² ‘St. John the Baptist Churchwardens’ Accounts’, *REED Bristol*, pp. 221-26.

¹⁴³ Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 19.

Corporation in rewarding the popular companies in the last years of the sixteenth century. The plague affected playing in London in early 1593 and Alleyn, of the Admiral's Men, with his colleagues from Lord Strange's company, Will Kemp, Thomas Pope, John Hemmings, Augustine Phillips and George Brian, were given leave to play 'comedies, tragedies and such like in any other cities, towns and corporations where the infection is not, so it be not within seven miles of London or of the Court'. The letter, after enquiring after the health of his family in London, specifies that the actor would leave Bristol 'this wensday after saynt Jams his day' [Wednesday 26 July 1593] on a northward route to 'shrowsbery or to west chester or to york'.¹⁴⁴ However, there are no entries in the Mayor's Audits of Bristol for any corporate performance in August 1593. Therefore there is evidence to prove that Alleyn and his men played Bristol, yet they are not registered as playing in the Guildhall; although it had been thought so by J. F. Nicholls and John Taylor in 1881, who suggested that Strange's men performed 'no doubt at the Guildhall'.¹⁴⁵ Bristol rewarded Strange's Men with thirty shillings in mid-August 1592, and the next reward to professional players was 30s to the Queen's Men in early August 1594.¹⁴⁶ The players of Strange and the Lord Admiral played Bath in this period; they were the last troupe recorded in 1592-3, and the first in 1593-4, which Andrew Gurr believes 'may have marked the end of that year's tour'.¹⁴⁷ Alleyn's letter stated that the troupe was on a 'long journey' in 1593 and would 'nott com hom till allholand tyd', at the end of October.¹⁴⁸ The Admiral's Men joined with the players of Lord Henry Norris, a landowner and High Steward of Oxfordshire and Berkshire.¹⁴⁹ It is likely that, being in Bath in any event,

¹⁴⁴ G. B. Harrison, *Elizabethan Plays and Players* (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1940), pp. 131-32.

¹⁴⁵ J. F. Nicholls and John Taylor, *Bristol: Past and Present*, I, p. 235.

¹⁴⁶ *REED Bristol*, pp. 142-43.

¹⁴⁷ *REED Bath*, p. 16-17; Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ Harrison, *Plays and Players*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁹ *REED Bath*, pp. 16-17.

the Admiral's Men would have travelled north to lucrative Bristol. In all probability, they would have played in a space worthy of a company of such calibre, like the Wine Street playhouse. The content of the letter states that Alleyn and his troupe had been in Bristol for at least a few days, as he was there long enough to receive mail. Although the letter does not mention whereabouts they played or lodged, an entry into the Wire drawers' and Pinmakers' Accounts of 1592-3 may identify a performance given by at least some of the troupe, as 'the strange ways' were paid 5s by the guild.¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately there is no evidence to suggest that this guild had their own hall, but may have subsidised the event at another venue; perhaps the metalworking fraternity had sponsored a performance in the Wine Street space and the players of Alleyn made up these 'strange' musicians.¹⁵¹

The Bristol Boys: Her Majesty's Servants of her Royal Chamber at Bristol

The request for a patent for a company of players on 10 July 1615 by John Daniel, brother of Samuel Daniel the London poet, is further confirmation that there was a flourishing dramatic culture in operation in Jacobean Bristol. Glynne Wickham claims that the city was unique: 'in the years between 1604 and the Civil War only two provincial companies were deemed worthy of the privilege of a resident company of actors, Bristol and York [...] the York proposals never materialised'.¹⁵² George Buc, Master of the Revels from 1610 to 1622, requested of the Lord Chamberlain that

¹⁵⁰ 'Wire drawers' and Pinmakers' Accounts', in *REED Bristol*, p. 143. Mark Pilkington has read this entry to mean 'foreign waits', as there is another instance of five 'strange' trumpeters visiting from Catalonia in 1577-8. He has conceded that 'references to visiting or 'strange' musicians are very rare in the records, unlike some other towns and cities', which may suggest that Bristol was unaccustomed to the terminology and 'strange waits' may have been a direct reference to Alleyn's musicians.

¹⁵¹ The accounts for the Wire drawers and Pinmakers record rental payments for a 'hall' of 3s 14d per annum, which suggests that they did not have their own space, *REED Bristol*, p. 16.

¹⁵² Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300-1660*, 4 Volumes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959-81), II:i, p. 142.

Samuel Daniel be able to establish and licence a company of boy and young actors in Bristol. Daniel had experience in the matter, as he had acted as Master of the Children of the Queens Revels in 1604 and the licenser of their plays.¹⁵³ Queen Anna had chosen him personally as an independent Master of the Revels to oversee the content of the boys' plays.¹⁵⁴ Andrew Gurr has suggested that Daniel's London boy company was a 'private' company, and therefore could circumvent many of the problems associated with the adult companies, which would have required a licence from the Master of the Revels, 'it is possible that the 'private' companies at the 'private' playhouses were left free of this control by the fiction that they were not a commercial operation'. Daniel had unfortunately 'lost the job' by composing *Philotas*, with its allusions to the 1601 Essex plot.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps the Bristol boys had also been created with special dispensation, given that the Master of the Revels would not be paying too many visits to Bristol. Thomas Baldwin has argued that 'the children's type of company naturally appealed to the financiers, since it took completely away all independence from the actors and reduced them simply to hired servants'.¹⁵⁶ What is interesting about the Bristol boys' company, in addition to its inception by royal command and management by a professional provincial manager, is that this company was not merely a reproduction of a London phenomenon; by the middle of James I's reign the fashion had changed in the capital, and 'a combination of political misjudgements on the part of those who managed the children's companies and the waning of the public appetite for such performances resulted in the disappearance of the companies of boy

¹⁵³ Michael Shapiro, *Children of the Revels: the Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and their Plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 26.

¹⁵⁴ Kathleen Barker, *Bristol At Play*, p. 3; John Pitcher, 'Samuel Daniel and the Authorities', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 10 (1998), 113-48 (p. 119).

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 53.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Baldwin, *The Organisation and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, p. 43.

players'.¹⁵⁷ The creation of this company demonstrated that Bristol's dramatic culture was not developing according to metropolitan tastes.

It was on the recommendation of Queen Anna that the Bristol company was formed, and her suggestion may have been that they operate out of the Wine Street playhouse. 'Her Majesty's Servants of her Royal Chamber at Bristol' was the only company 'specifically based upon a provincial city as opposed to London'.¹⁵⁸ The Queen's own adult players had visited Bristol in the last quarter of 1612 and had received £2 from the mayor for their performance, although it is not specified where the play took place.¹⁵⁹ Queen Anna's brother, the Duke of Brunswick, had visited Bristol on 9 May 1609 and had lodged in the White Hart on Broad Street, owned by cutler and impresario Nicholas Woolfe, 'where the mayor and many of the council supped with him [the Duke]'.¹⁶⁰ The Duke may have witnessed Bristol's dramatic culture for himself, and related the occurrence to his sister. Queen Anna visited Bristol on a progress in June 1613. John Latimer asserted: 'the Queen had been informed during her visit by local entertainers that by ancient custom [this company of] the city was entitled to be styled the "Queen's Chamber", just as [London] was called the King's Chamber'.¹⁶¹ Naile also referred to this title in his poem celebrating Queen Anna's 1603 sojourn into the city:

This done, Bristol, which to our joy and great content hath been
For evermore accounted still the Chamber of the Queene
Of England is, and ever will, as yet hath been to fore,
Unto Queen An our gracious queen much bound for evermore.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ William Ingram, 'Players and Playing', p. 155.

¹⁵⁸ Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II:i, p. 92.

¹⁵⁹ *REED Bristol*, p. 173.

¹⁶⁰ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 186.

¹⁶¹ John Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 56.

¹⁶² Naile, cited in *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 190.

This ‘chamber’ appears to be a reference to Bristol as the second city of England, and that the Queen assumed responsibility for the administration. Adams refers to this in his *Chronicle* for 1634 and echoes Naile: ‘like London is accounted the kinges chamber, so Bristol is our Queene’s chamber, and maintaineth the state of government here at their own charge’.¹⁶³

Daniel’s boy company requested royal patronage as ‘the Youths of hir majesties royall chambre of Bristowe’ with the right to play in Bristol and elsewhere. George Buc even offered his support for the project.¹⁶⁴ Such an endorsement ensured that James I granted the licence on 17 July 1615.¹⁶⁵ Buc had agreed to approve the company as the formation of the royally-patronised troupe was ‘without prejudice to the rights of his office’.¹⁶⁶ Thus the company was not perceived as genuine competition against the actors in London. The patent was confirmed in April 1618 and the boys were permitted to play ‘in all Playhowses Townehalls, Schoolehowses and other places convenient for yat purpose’. The company was assigned to John Daniel, Samuel’s brother, and was permitted to act publicly for ‘the recreation of our loving Subiectes [...] in such usual houses as themselves shall provide’ and in any other city that would welcome them.¹⁶⁷ Perhaps the ‘usual houses’ were the playhouses of Woolfe and Barker in Wine Street and Redcliffe Hill. P.M.E. Jones believes that the company used the Wine Street playhouse as their headquarters, as they toured during the summer months.¹⁶⁸ Siobhan Keenan also believes that the Wine Street premises ‘would have lent itself to use as a theatrical base’, and that the clause relating to the

¹⁶³ Adams’s *Chronicle*, p. 241.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from Sir George Buc to the Lord Chamberlain, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 202-3.

¹⁶⁵ Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II:i, p. 92.

¹⁶⁶ Murray, *English Dramatic Companies*, II, p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ Patent to John Daniel to Form a Company of Players, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 203-4.

¹⁶⁸ Jones, ‘An Early Theatre in Bristol’ p. 208.

troupe's permission to play in all venues available may have 'had the Wine Street playhouse in mind'.¹⁶⁹

John Payne Collier thought that this Bristol Company 'of remarkable name', 'probably had a very brief existence', possibly as a boy's career would be shortened by the onset of adolescence.¹⁷⁰ The letter confirming Daniel's patent in 1618 describes John Daniel as 'the Prince his servant'.¹⁷¹ Thus the Prince's Men that performed twice in Bristol in the financial year 1617-18 may have been John Daniel's Bristol boy company too. John Tucker Murray states that Daniel was a musician in the service of Prince Charles, which would technically make him one of the Prince's men.¹⁷² Whitehall had given the Bristol boy company 'harty Commendations' and Letters of Assistance in the King's name for the company to perform. The letter names three managers of Her Majesty's Servants, Martin Slater, John Edmonds and Nathaniel Clay.¹⁷³ The only proviso was that Children of Bristol were not to play on Sundays or for more than fourteen days in any one session.¹⁷⁴ Slater, like Samuel Daniel, had experience of provincial and boy companies; he was 'involved in the enterprise' of building the Red Bull in 1604, had been 'associated with a provincial company in 1606' and acted as 'a kind of manager' of Master of the Children of the Kings Revels in 1608.¹⁷⁵ Slater had 'made something of a success out of touring companies under exemplification', where a company had a single licence but with a dual role, one for

¹⁶⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁰ John Payne Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry from the time of Shakespeare and Annals of the Stage to the Restoration*, 3 Volumes (London: John Murray, 1831), I, p. 396.

¹⁷¹ Patent to John Daniel to Form a Company of Players, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 203-4.

¹⁷² Murray, *English Dramatic Companies*, II pp. 14-15.

¹⁷³ Letter Patent to John Daniel, in *REED Bristol*, pp. 207-8.

¹⁷⁴ Letter Confirming John Daniel's Patent to Form a Company of Players, cited in *REED Bristol*, pp. 209-10.

¹⁷⁵ Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 152; *REED Bristol*, endnote to pp. 209-10, p. 296; Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, p. 379.

London playing and the other for the provincial itineraries. It appears that Slater was renowned for operating two companies simultaneously, each sharing this licence.¹⁷⁶

The patent for the Children of Bristol was not sufficient for the ‘puritanical’ Mayor of Exeter, who refused entry for the company in 1618.¹⁷⁷ On 25 May, ‘martyn Slader’ was forbidden to play with ‘his majesties players’, but they were nonetheless rewarded with £2 4s. Six days later, Mayor Ignatius Jurdain penned a letter to Sir Thomas Lake, Under Secretary to King James, defending his decision to refuse them a performance.¹⁷⁸ This letter illustrates that a company’s licence was an important document in facilitating the players’ safe passage en route around the kingdom, but that the personal preference of the mayor remained an important factor in the response of local authorities to travelling companies. Mr. Jurdain had ‘perused the patent’ with some care as he had observed the company were only licensed ‘for children and youthes’. Out of the fifteen-strong troupe, only five of them were youths, ‘the rest ar men som about 30 and 40 and 50 yeares as they hav confessed unto me’.¹⁷⁹ It is probable that Slater had applied his exemplification duplicity to the boys’ company, and was operating an adult company on the same licence, and expected that city officials would accept the document. The mayor and his aldermen felt that they had made the correct decision to refuse their audience, and although stating that the move was ‘bold’ on the part of the Common Council, their decision was made to protect the poor of the city from spending all of their ‘mony and tyme to those playes’.¹⁸⁰ The fact that the Exeter council felt that this defence plea was necessary also indicates that

¹⁷⁶ Jane Milling, ‘The Development of a Professional Theatre, 1540 to 1660’ in *Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. by Milling and Thomson, 139-77, (p. 154).

¹⁷⁷ Jones, ‘An Early Theatre in Bristol’, p. 208.

¹⁷⁸ Letter from Ignatius Jurdain, Mayor of Exeter, to Sir Thomas Lake, Principal Secretary to King James, June 1618, cited in *REED Devon*, pp. 188-89.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Ignatius Jurdain, Mayor of Exeter, to Sir Thomas Lake, cited in *REED Devon*, p. 188.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from Ignatius Jurdain, Mayor of Exeter, to Sir Thomas Lake, cited in *REED Devon*, p. 189.

provincial leaders continued to be conscious of the patronage network. Although it was no longer the responsibility of the mayor to grant an audience to strolling players, Jurdain still deemed it necessary to inspect the licence, and perhaps this was another reason to compose the letter to Lake, justifying his actions. Slater had told Jurdain that he would be reporting the incident to the Privy Council, and the mayor decided to plead his case: ‘that they may not think I hav don any thing of Contempt, but to keep my self within the compasse of the statutes [...] I have sent your honour the copy of their warrant that you may see the wordes of it’.¹⁸¹ The mayor was genuinely concerned that he has offended the actors, yet this document also reveals that Jurdain was apprehensive about his ‘boldness’ in refusing them to play. Slater felt he could threaten civic authorities who did not allow his men and boys to perform. It also demonstrates the importance of precisely worded patents, as Jurdain quite literally obeyed the order to the letter. However, other companies were met with the same rebuke in 1617-8. The players of Princess Elizabeth were paid £1 2s to remove themselves at Christmas time, and another unnamed band of ‘Certen players’ were sent away with 3s 4d for their pains.¹⁸² Perhaps these companies did not threaten the council with legal action. A letter of July 1616 from Lord Chamberlain Pembroke to the Mayor of Norwich warned of the dissembling of the men. Swinnerton and Slater, formerly of the Queen’s Men, had taken charge of two bogus troupes, ‘with vagabonds and such like idle persons’. Gilbert Reason, a former Prince’s Servant, had been playing around the kingdom under a duplicate licence.¹⁸³ The culprits became wanted men. Perhaps Jurdain was aware of the reputation of these particular travelling players

¹⁸¹ Letter from Ignatius Jurdain, Mayor of Exeter, to Sir Thomas Lake, cited in *REED Devon*, p. 188.

¹⁸² *REED Devon*, p. 188.

¹⁸³ Letter from Lord Chamberlain Pembroke to the Mayor of Norwich, July 1616, cited in Evelyn May Albright, *Dramatic Publication in England, 1580-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 18-19.

which is why he declined to grant the Bristol boy company an audience in 1618, despite the Queen serving as their patron.

John Tucker Murray regards the 1618 refusal by Exeter as indicative that Slater had joined his players of the Queen's Company with the Children of Bristol.¹⁸⁴ He also believes that the Bristol youth company broke up 'in all probability' in 1618, while Slater and his men 'reappeared under their old title of Queen Anne's [*sic*] Players' suggesting that a local company was again active during the Jacobean period.¹⁸⁵ It has also been suggested that the Bristol company seemed 'to have been taken under the king's patronage' when Slater joined the Queen's Men as their leader.¹⁸⁶ The death of Queen Anna in 1619 may also have been a contributing factor in the break up of the company. As the Queen had died in debt, due in part to her conspicuous consumption of public entertainments, the troupe may have been disbanded to save money. Murray does admit that the players of Bristol, of whatever origin, went on tour three times from their formation until the death of James I although he denotes them as two separate companies. The Children of Bristol, before the Slater break up, toured Norwich in 1616-17, and they remained in the city in 1622-23 before venturing to Nottingham in 1623-24 and Leicester on 22 October 1624.¹⁸⁷ This last entry was made to William Daniel, who had the patent, who was 'perhaps kin to John Daniel leading the Bristol youths in 1624'.¹⁸⁸ This was probably the same William Daniel who was refused his suit to play by the Gloucester Corporation due to the effects of the plague.¹⁸⁹ Andrew Gurr believes the youth company entered in these records to have

¹⁸⁴ Murray, *English Dramatic Companies*, I, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁵ Murray, *English Dramatic Companies*, I, p. 15.

¹⁸⁶ Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1929), p. 330.

¹⁸⁷ Murray, *Provincial Companies*, p. 15. Again, the company is referred to in Leicester as the 'Prince's Servants going by the name of the Youths of Bristow' suggesting that they were the same company.

¹⁸⁸ Andrew Gurr, *Shakespearean Company*, p. 65, n. 35.

¹⁸⁹ REED *Glos.*, p. 326.

been ‘possibly a choir school [who] used the royal name’ as an entry into the Coventry Chamberlains’ Accounts of 26 September 1623 records a payment to the King’s players ‘for bringing xx Bristowe youths in Musick’. They were later recorded as appearing in Nottingham in 1626-7 and 1629-30.¹⁹⁰

1620s **Further Independent Playing in Stuart Bristol**

I believe that the playhouse at *No.X ch/7* Wine Street did cease to operate in 1626 once the lease was taken over by Anthony Bassett, and suppose that the theatre traded in the short-term as a corporate-sponsored venue on the opposite side of the thoroughfare, at No. 1 High Street. Curious items which appear in the Mayor’s Audits of Bristol from the fiscal years 1625-26 to 1630-31 may offer an explanation as to the continuance of playing after 1625. In the rental receipts for Wine Street, there are entries of five shillings for items for ‘quit rents’ which were ‘out of a tenement sometimes a play house paide by the heires of Nicholas Woolfe’.¹⁹¹ Mark Pilkington discussed these entries with Bristol City Archivist Mary E. Williams in the 1980s and she stated that Bristol could not claim a quit rent unless the Corporation ‘had some legal title in the property’, as a quit rent was a tax levied on a property in order that the tenant or owner did not have to perform duties for the manorial lord.¹⁹² *No.X ch/7* was owned by the feoffees of the parish of Christchurch until it was rebuilt in 1790, therefore the ‘quit rent’ paid into the Mayor’s Audits could not have been taken from *No.X ch.7*, but

¹⁹⁰ Gurr, *Shakespearean Company*, p. 65.

¹⁹¹ *REED Bristol*, pp. 224-33.

¹⁹² Pilkington, ‘The Playhouse in Wine Street’, p. 21, n. 12.

another property.¹⁹³ I propose that another neighbouring venue was available, and chosen, close to *No.X ch/7* Wine Street.

No. 1 High Street lay directly opposite Christ Church to the south, the Tolsey to the west and diagonally opposite the Council House on the corner of Broad Street and Corn Street, making it another ideal alternative venue adjacent to the High Cross market place.¹⁹⁴ It is possible that the Mayor's Audits record payments from the Wine Street playhouse. If, as the ordinance of 1596 proposed, the Guildhall had been converted into a space solely for the purpose of administering justice, the Corporation may have conceivably adopted, even sporadically, a different performance space for entertainment. In 1614, the year of Nicholas Woolfe's death his son Miles Woolfe began to lease the eastern tenement on the corner of High Street and Wine Street [No. 1 High Street]. The rent was given in trust by the landlord, Alderman John Whitson, and was to be donated 'for various charitable uses'. Whitson, in addition to being a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers, also served as its Master in 1606 and 1611 and was prominent in the government of Stuart Bristol, as he twice served as mayor of Bristol in 1604 and 1615 and as the city's MP in 1605, 1620 and 1625-6.¹⁹⁵ Whitson's name was attached an entry in the Mayor's Audits relating to entertainments as he had paid £2 to Palsgrave's Men in 1617-18 out of his own pocket, and was later reimbursed for the full amount 'by Master Mayors order'.¹⁹⁶ Pilkington has offered no explanation for this entry, but Whitson may have commissioned a private performance and presented the city with a voucher for the balance. Whitson would have been aware

¹⁹³ The current Christ Church was rebuilt when Wine Street was widened, and was completed in 1790 [Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol* (Bath: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 73]; Leech, *Topography Part I*, p. 173.

¹⁹⁴ See Appendix, Map IV.

¹⁹⁵ Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 197; *REED Bristol*, endnote to p. 200, p. 295.

¹⁹⁶ *REED Bristol*, p. 207.

of the popularity of the Wine Street playhouse, perhaps even hosting the Palsgrave company there, and may have granted Miles Woolfe leave to use No. 1 High Street as another venue.

By 1627-28 the five shilling rent for No. 1 High Street was also being paid by ‘the heirs of Nicholas Woulfe’, echoing the description in rental receipts for the ‘playhouse’, also paid ‘by the heirs of Nicholas Woolfe’ entered into the Mayor’s Audits. This suggests that the family continued the tenancy with the theatre impresario in mind and that a playhouse may have once again been contributing to Bristol alms after 1626 when all other records stop.¹⁹⁷ This property was opposite *Nos.X chs/1-8*, thus another ideal central location for strolling players who may only have visited once a year and have been expecting to play in Wine Street. It was not Miles Woolfe who had personally acquired the tenement, as he was a minor in 1614.¹⁹⁸ Miles was likely to have been named in the rolls as he was named official executor of his father’s will, with Joseph Rattle and Henry Yate as overseers.¹⁹⁹ Yate had also overseen the payments from the playhouse go to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 1617-19. Henry Yate may have chosen the tenement for Miles Woolfe as it was adjacent to the Meal Market owned by William Yate, at 65-66 Wine Street.²⁰⁰ Yate had also been nominated by the Trustees of Queen Elizabeth’s Hospital to be their Treasurer in 1630 and served as mayor in 1630-31.²⁰¹ The rental payments for the ‘playhouse’ also ended in 1630-31, and perhaps the business was once again managed by a private

¹⁹⁷ Leech, *Topography Part I*, p. 72. Initially, No. 1 High Street was divided into two tenements.

¹⁹⁸ The records denote that No. 1 High Street was leased from 1627-28 by the heirs of Nicholas Woolfe, but was rented by Miles Woolfe in 1614; by 1664 the property was referred to as having been ‘Miles Woolfe, his tenement’, Leech, *Topography Part I*, pp. 72-73. Pilkington states that Miles Woolfe was still minor in 1619, which would suggest he was born in 1602. His mother, Joyce Woolfe, was buried on 12 July 1602, according to the Christ Church register, endnote to p. 212, p. 297.

¹⁹⁹ *REED Bristol*, endnote to p. 212, p. 296.

²⁰⁰ Leech, *Topography Part I*, p. 72. Nos. 65-66 Wine Street were adjacent to No. 1 High Street.

²⁰¹ Jones, ‘Early Theatre in Bristol’, p. 208; Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 498.

entrepreneur, perhaps Miles Woolfe himself to rid the venue of Common Council associations. It appears from surviving legal proceedings that Woolfe did not trust Henry Yate with the management of his father's estate and in 1619 entered into litigation with Yate and his stepmother Margaret Woolfe, accusing the pair of 'diverting rents and other profits to their own use and making false accounts to conceal the fact'.²⁰² Mrs Woolfe had been accused in 1606 of obtaining money by deception by the tenant of *No.X ch/7* Richard Cooke, by whose allegation we know that she and Nicholas Woolfe were harbouring actors under her roof. What is interesting about Woolfe's will is that he did not name his wife as executrix, which was the usual practice.²⁰³ Perhaps he favoured Yate given his political affiliations and who was more likely to protect the business interests of the playhouse.

In addition to the Wine Street playhouse there was another one in operation in Jacobean Bristol, which makes this period of the city's theatre history 'unique in the provinces'.²⁰⁴ This playhouse was definitely constructed for the purpose, although that it possibly the only certainty about this second venue. The evidence for the existence of this suburban performance space is contained within a will, compiled by Sarah Barker, who died in 1637-38, and bequeathed her son the property 'which my late husband built for a playhouse'.²⁰⁵ Mark Pilkington believes that:

it is unclear at this time what role the playhouse in Redcliffe Hill, purpose built by Richard Barker, played in the history of dramatic activity in Bristol [...] [It] is known only through its inclusion in the will of Sarah Barker in 1637-8 but must have been in operation before that date.²⁰⁶

²⁰² REED *Bristol*, endnote to p. 212, p. 296.

²⁰³ Honigman and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, p. 24, 'a study of probate accounts from the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century finds that married men named their wife as executrix'.

²⁰⁴ Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xl.

²⁰⁵ Will of Sarah Barker, REED *Bristol*, p. 242.

²⁰⁶ Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxvii.

Pilkington imagines that the reason for the construction of the Barker playhouse was to provide an alternative playing space for the players away from the Guildhall, in a similar manner to Woolfe's venture in the centre of town. Siobhan Keenan speculates that 'the success of Woolfe's theatre may have inspired Barker to build his suburban playhouse as a rival venue'.²⁰⁷ Sarah Barker's reference to the playhouse in her will certainly suggests that her husband had made a conscious choice to build the venue in Redcliffe Hill. One can only suppose why; because he had other property in the area, or rentals were cheaper, or Woolfe may have made it difficult for rivals to establish a playing place in the city centre.²⁰⁸ Keenan has traced Richard Barker to the parish of Redcliffe; so he may have set up his playhouse near to his home, as Sarah Barker's will identifies other premises in the family estate which were contained within Redcliffe parish.²⁰⁹ The merchant Richard Barker died in 1614, the same year as Nicholas Woolfe, which strongly suggests that the playhouses were in direct competition with one another.²¹⁰

For a provincial city to be able to maintain two independent playhouses and a unique private company there must have been a great deal of support for the players amongst the population. The fact that the Wine Street and Barker playhouses were functioning alongside the corporate-endorsed plays noted in the Mayor's Audits certainly suggests that there were sufficient visits by strolling players and local troupes to Bristol and that there were enthusiastic, paying spectators available outside of the usual civic audience. However, if one were to base a supposition of the popularity of

²⁰⁷ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 161.

²⁰⁸ Douglas Bruster, 'The Birth of an Industry', in *Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. by Milling and Thomson, 224-241 (p. 226). Bruster has suggested that London impresarios established theatres in the liberties, especially in Bankside, south of the Thames, as these districts were in 'liminal positions' away from the City Fathers, with cheaper rents. This argument could also be applied to the Barker playhouse in Redcliffe Hill.

²⁰⁹ Sarah Barker's will states that she bequeathed a further five properties in Redcliffe Hill, *REED Bristol*, p. 242.

²¹⁰ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 161.

playing in Bristol purely on the instances of rewarded playing in the Mayor's Audits, the figures would not advocate such a market. This table of sanctioned performances certainly indicates a decline:

1600s	2 Companies
1610s	3 Companies
1620s	3 Companies
1630s	2 Companies
1640-2	0 Companies

Table 10: Performances by Named Professional Players in Bristol, 1600-1642 [*REED Bristol*, p. xxxv].

However, as I have demonstrated with the evidence regarding the independent playhouses in the city, Bristol was conceivably hosting many more performances than the eight registered in the annals between 1600 and 1642. It is regrettable that the Mayor's Audits are missing for 1601-3 but one supposes, from a reading of the numbers of visiting companies in subsequent decades, that there was unlikely to have been a great upsurge in performances in the two fiscal years for which the records are lost. Mark Pilkington identified a noticeable change in the Mayor's Audits in the first years of the seventeenth century, remarking that it was unusual that there was a significant break between Cromwell's Men visiting in mid-September 1600 and Sussex's Men celebrating Christmas at corporate expense in 1608, given that there were five rewards given to players, not all professional, in the fiscal year 1599-1600. Equally evident is the change in the way the payments to players are noted, which 'resumed in 1608-9 on a somewhat irregular, infrequent basis only to drop out of sight completely from Christmas 1621 to Midsummer 1629'.²¹¹ Equally frustrating is the change in the noting of the dates, as rather than weekly financial transactions, the entries into the Mayor's Audits from 1608 are divided by financial quarter. The

²¹¹ Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxv.

payments in the 1630s are categorised by the instruction to send the players ‘out of the city’.

A main theme of Siobhan Keenan’s argument for the ‘decline’ in travelling players in Jacobean and Caroline England has its roots in the lack of payments to patronised troupes and in the instances, such as occurred in Bristol in the 1630s when companies were paid ‘to leave’. It is unfortunate that these ‘players’ are rarely identified, another consequence of the change in attitude of the chamberlain’s scribe.

FISCAL YEAR	COMPANY PERFORMING	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS
1629-30	King’s Men Players	£2 £1 to leave
1630-31	A Player King’s Men Palsgrave’s Men	£1 £2 to leave £2
1631-32		
1632-33	A Company of Players A Company of Players	20s 20s to leave
1633-34	A Company of Players	£1 10s to leave
1634-35	Players ‘as per note approacheth’ A Company of Players Perrie	£2 £2 not to play £2 not to play
1635-36	A Licensed Tumbler King’s Revels	2s 4d £1

Table 11: Payments to Performers in Bristol, 1629-1636

There is a most extraordinary paradox about the data which supposes a ‘decline’ in Bristol. These players, some of whom were not even of enough esteem to warrant mention in the records, were actually paid for the privilege of being refused an audience. There is no economic sense in squandering money on a product when goods will not be exchanged; as there is no value in such transactions. Evelyn Albright has offered some explanations for this ‘significant’ practice; she ventures that the mayor felt obliged to ‘compensate in part for the loss of fees to be collected from the

audience' and has supposed that the tradition of patronage remained in a regional mayor's consciousness, 'the desire to avoid antagonising the patrons was no doubt the real reason for apparent generosity to the players when they were sent away'.²¹² After 1597 no Corporation in England was obliged to offer hospitality to patronised players, with the exception of the three companies representing the Royal Household. There were, however, licensed players on the road in Caroline England. A licence granted by Master of the Revels Henry Herbert in 1631 details the protocol for local authorities in accepting and rejecting itinerant entertainers in pre-Civil War England. Although the document was discovered in the Shropshire archives, it does not appear to be county specific. This licence was for Sisley and Thomas Peadle, their son Elias Grundling and three others to tumble and play music. The order details that they should be able to perform 'without any of your Lettes or molestacion within any of your Liberties and places of Jurisdiction [...] wheresoever within the Realme of England'.²¹³ The remainder of the document reiterates that any unlicensed stage-players be apprehended and reported, confirming that peripatetic entertainers remained in the provinces. The edict, probably a generic template issued by the Revels' Office, specifies that each licence must be validated on a yearly basis, which confirms that the framework continued to exist for strolling players, both legitimate and illegal.

Bristol, by this time, 'benefited from a well-organised carrier system which operated from the inns, where fly wagons [...] left daily for London, Birmingham and the Midland towns'; she could also boast forty-eight ships, which may have also been reflected in the increase in either domestic or metropolitan-imported drama.²¹⁴ By the beginning of the Caroline era the fortunes of the city were increasing, its association

²¹² Albright, *Organisation and Control of Dramatic Companies*, p. 15.

²¹³ REED *Worcs.*, pp. 539-40: Appendix 2, SHRO: BA 4935/xxxiv, 29 August 1631.

²¹⁴ Smith and Ralph, *History of Bristol and Gloucestershire*, pp. 51-52; Little, *The City and County of Bristol*, p. 114.

with the North American markets was cemented in the creation of the Newfoundland Company in 1610; the Bristol merchants had created a colony, but the principal goal was to have a base for North Atlantic fishing.²¹⁵ Another change in Bristol's trade is that the city modified its markets from distributing expensive and rare goods to dealing in staple goods.²¹⁶ The city also began to feature in mainstream manufacture as a base for sugar refining, an industry which later dwarfed Temple parish south of the Avon, as Bristol could boast twenty refineries after the first was established in 1612.²¹⁷ The city had established itself as a centre for manufacture and a market for these goods as well as merchandise and services from the hinterlands. The economic dominance of Bristol established the city as the principal seat for national and international trade, and perhaps as a focal point for local, regional and metropolitan drama.

²¹⁵ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 50.

²¹⁶ Sacks, *Widening Gate*, p. 53.

²¹⁷ Smith and Ralph, *History of Bristol and Gloucestershire*, p. 66.

CONCLUSION

“The actors are come hither, my lord”:¹

Comparative Analysis of Playing in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol

The principal research question that this thesis wished to answer was whether the authorities were receptive to players in early modern Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol and to examine what factors dictated the response of the towns, was is an obligation to legislation and/or adherence the patronage network, economic factors or simply communal appreciation of drama. In short, the question is did Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol welcome players because they had to or because they wanted to. There is regrettably little extant evidence to gauge the personal opinions of the early modern authorities, although the student of Gloucester is fortunate in the existence of the eye-witness account of Willis in *Mount Tabor* and the 1580 Ordinance for material whereby one may assume that the city was ‘notably co-operative’, at least in the mid-Elizabethan period.² Tewkesbury is notable in its active encouragement and funding of public entertainment, and the Common Council of Bristol saw no problems in allowing local entrepreneurs to establish independent playhouses, and seemed comfortable in relinquishing control of public gatherings to the merchant community, possibly from the middle of Elizabeth’s reign.

A general overview of the information catalogued in REED from the Corporation Chamberlains’ Accounts of Gloucester, the churchwardens’ accounts of Tewkesbury Abbey and the Mayor’s Audits of Bristol suggests that Tewkesbury’s drama was parochial and amateur, therefore not economically comparable with the larger urban centres, and that Bristol eclipsed Gloucester in its rewards to professional acting

¹ *Hamlet*, II:ii, 372.

² Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages* II:i, p. 147.

companies. If one examines the cumulative statistics of the raw data in REED it appears that Bristol was more generous than Gloucester to professional players, but that Gloucester hosted a greater number of itinerant companies than her neighbour. However, a precise examination of comparative data for the same patronised troupes reveals that the towns were almost identical in their rewards, with Gloucester often surpassing Bristol in hospitality. I have argued that Tewkesbury hosted professional players on at least two occasions, and in both instances probably rewarded the players with larger payments than either city; in 1584 Tewkesbury could have conceivably paid 40s to the market players, and T.B. received 30s in 1600 for three plays, which was a common fee paid by Bristol and Gloucester on numerous occasions to players of quality.

An examination of the payments to the players in Bristol and Gloucester during the 1560s and 1570s reveals how the two towns reacted economically to the phenomenon of the travelling company; this section will analyse the financial transactions of the towns to determine which factors were influencing the mayors in their rewards to travelling players. The presence of the Earl of Leicester was felt in all three towns in the Elizabethan era, especially the 1580s; the influence of the Queen's favourite will be examined in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol to discover how far he used his players to influence local opinion and how the towns reacted to his interference by proxy. The regular payments to travelling players, so prevalent in the civic accounts of the sixteenth century, virtually disappear from the Bristol Mayor's Audits after 1600 and, although the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts for Gloucester cannot confirm the pattern, it is possible that the legislation introduced by Elizabeth I in 1597 restricting the patronage of strolling companies was used by local

authorities to rein in the instances of playing. It is likely that Gloucester used the ruling to protect her insular politics from further intrusion and Bristol was happy to confer responsibility for public entertainments to private entrepreneurs; however the evidence for the 1600 Tewkesbury fundraiser clearly shows that some communities in the region were still responding positively to itinerant players.

In the absence of journal or diary entries, playtexts or other evidence which may relate how the towns reacted to players in early modern England, the scholars of the subject have relied solely upon the economic data entered into civic and ecclesiastical logs by the urban elites as a marker of how their towns responded to players. I shall present much of the economic data in tabular form for ease of reference. In accordance with this framework I have examined the financial statistics of Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol in REED in an attempt to evaluate the attitude of the respective ruling elites, whether receptive or hostile. The main section of this chapter will compare and contrast the economic evidence contained in the REED volumes for Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol, supplemented by data from Bath and Worcester, to establish whether the economic circumstances of the towns in any way dictated their reception of players. The final section will enquire as to the motives of the urban authorities in granting or refusing players an audience and whether legal or social obligation, financial concerns or personal opinions were involved in the decision to allow the companies to play.

1560 - 1580
Early Economic Trends in Bristol and Gloucestershire Playing

Almost immediately after Elizabeth ascended the throne, one can identify an itinerary between Bristol and Gloucester which one supposes continued throughout the whole early modern period, ‘the direct route to Bristol via Bath, and often including Gloucester along the road northwest of Bristol, was very popular’.³ This first correlation between Bristol and Gloucester can be seen in 1560-1. This itinerary was noteworthy for two reasons; that from this and later information one can trace a geographical pattern of payments to players, therefore being able to identify any competition between the centres and gauge the reaction of the cities’ mayors, but also because the patrons who were being represented by these strolling companies were the Dudleys. The family had a significant interest in Gloucestershire and may have pioneered the route which led directly from the ports of Exeter and Bristol northwards through a county in which they owned vast lands, conveniently to their lands in Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

If one examines all of the records of payments made to professional players in Bristol and Gloucester during the 1560s, it is initially apparent that Bristol was paying more for plays:

1560s	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER
3s 4d		1
4s		1
5s		1
6s 8d	7	1
8s 4d	1	
10s	9	8
12s 8d		1
13s 4d	8	4
15s	2	

³ Sally-Beth MacLean, ‘At the End of the Road: An Overview of Southwestern Touring Circuits’, p. 23.

	16s 8d		1
	20s	3	
	12s 6d		[total inc. extras] 1
	16s 12d		[total inc. extras] 1
PLAYS		30	18
SPENT		£17 1s 8d	£10 11s 2d

Table 12: Total of Payments made to Professional Travelling Players in the 1560s

It is obvious that even as early as the 1560s, Bristol was offering larger payments to more players, with the most common reward being 6s 8d, 10s or 13d 4d. The above data indicates that the smaller payments rewarded by Gloucester, 3s 4d, 4s and 5s, were either discretionary or reflect the inexperience of the city's mayors in subscribing to the common payments donated by provincial authorities to these companies. This standard 'tariff' seems to have been generally paid in increments of 6s 8d or 10s, and later in the century at 13s 4d, as these were the most common amounts rewarded to travelling players throughout early modern England:

x1	x2	x3	x4
6s 8d	13s 4d	20s	26s 8d
10s	20s	30s	40s
13s 4d	26s 8d	40s	n/a

Table 13: The Tariff System in Operation in Early Modern Bristol and Gloucestershire

It is probable that, as Bristol has been hosting noblemen's players since before the Reformation, the chamberlains were familiar with the protocols of paying professional itinerants the market rate. In the first recorded instance of playing in Bristol in 1532, there were three payments to companies.⁴ Lord Lisle's Men received 10s, the players of the Lady Prince were awarded 6s 8d, and the servants of the Duke of Richmond received 7s 4d. Two of these tariffs appear to be standard rewards, as the amounts of 6s 8d and 10s are recorded most often in the years between 1530 and 1560. The tariff was also adhered to in Henrician Norwich; the fee of 6s 8d was given three times to the

⁴ Given the lack of comparative evidence for Gloucester in the 1530s and 1540s, the records of Norwich have been applied.

King's Men, the players of the Duke of Norfolk and the retainers of Arundel. Sussex's Men and the Queen's players received the premium payment of 10s in the early 1540s. The first payment of 13s 4d was paid at Norwich on 25 November 1546 to the Prince's Men, although the accounts only specify a reward for 'an interlude'.⁵ The first payment of this amount took place in Bristol on 20 October 1548 and was given to the Queen's Men. A 1548 payment by the Norwich authorities to the King's Men of 20s for three performances on a Sunday, Monday and Tuesday in December indicates that the standard fee for one play was 6s 8d.⁶ Even churchwardens in Tavistock, Devon, were familiar with the regular rate and rewarded the Queen's Men with 13s 4d in 1561-2.⁷ The extant records of drama in Bath suggest that Gloucester was not alone in not having fully grasped the tariff system in the first decades of Elizabeth's reign. Bath often paid less than its neighbours, with 'some minor fluctuations'.⁸ In 1568-9, Worcester's Men were rewarded by Bath with a mere 3s.⁹ Bristol had paid the company 10s in November 1567 and 8s 4d in September 1569 and the players had received 12s 6d for performances and drinks in Gloucester in 1567-8.¹⁰ By 1572-3 Worcester's Men were earning 6s 9d from Bath and Essex's Men had been given 10s, suggesting that the city had aligned itself more in the theatrical marketplace. Bath rewarded Sussex's Men with 4s 2d, when in the same year the company had earned 13s 4d from both Bristol and Gloucester.¹¹

⁵ *REED Norwich*, p. 20.

⁶ *REED Norwich*, pp. 24-25.

⁷ J. Charles Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts: From the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, p. 277.

⁸ MacLean, 'At the End of the Road', p. 23.

⁹ *REED Bath*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *REED Bristol*, p. 75; *REED Glos.*, p. 300.

¹¹ *REED Bath*, p. 10; *REED Glos.*, p. 302; *REED Bristol*, p. 83.

Although the general pattern of payments, as indicated by Table 12, indicates that Bristol was paying much more to players and welcoming them with greater frequency, with Bristol welcoming thirty itinerant troupes to Gloucester's eighteen, an examination of the payments to the companies who had established an itinerary in the 1560s demonstrates that there was more of a correlation between the two cities than can be determined from the general trend of the decade:

FISCAL YEAR	PATRON	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER
1559-60	Andrew Dudley Queen	6s 8d 15s	6s 8d 10s
1560-61	Robert Dudley	10s	6s 8d
1561-62	Queen Warwick Robert Dudley	15s 10s 13s 4d	10s 10s 13s 4d
1562-63	Duchess of Suffolk	13s 4d	10s
1563-64			
1564-65	Strange	10s	10s
1565-66	Hunsdon Queen	13s 4d 20s	12s 8d 13s 4d
1566-67			
1567-68	Worcester	10s	12s 6d [total inc extras]
1568-69			
1569-70	Leicester Sussex	13s 4d 13s 4d	13s 4d 10s

Table 14: Payments to Performers by Bristol and Gloucester, 1559-60 to 1569-70

Bristol paid more than Gloucester on six out of thirteen occasions from 1559-60 to 1569-70, showing that the two cities were not dissimilar in their rewards and that the importance of patron appeared to have been a crucial motive in rewarding players. It cannot be determined whether Gloucester was aware of how much Bristol paid to the players who performed in the Guildhall, but perhaps the bonus payments were of wine and banquets were intended to compensate for smaller cash rewards. Indeed, if one includes the extra expenses that the Gloucester Corporation donated to the playing

companies at ‘the tavern’ or at the Swordbearer’s House, the number of occasions when Bristol paid more lessens to probably three out of thirteen:

FISCAL YEAR	PATRON	BRISTOL	EXTRAS AT GLOUC.	TOTAL GLOUC.
1561-62	Warwick Robert Dudley	10s 13s 4d	4s 2d 4s 8d	14s 2d 18s
1562-63	Duchess of Suffolk	13s 4d	20d	11s 8d
1565-66	Hunsdon Queen	13s 4d 20s	Not specified 2s 4d	12s 8d + 15s 8d
1567-68	Worcester	10s	Not specified	12s 6d
1569-70	Sussex	13s 4d	2s 6d	12s 6d

Table 15: Extra Payments to Professional Players by Gloucester Corporation in the 1560s.

It is more than likely that these very similar payments reflect a general trend in playing in Bristol and Gloucester, as the two towns were paying the same troupes comparable amounts. The involvement of Robert Ingram in the Boothall Inn may have contributed to these extra payments from the corporate purse to the players for post-play entertainment. The Gloucester Corporation was willing to spend money on these players, perhaps as an incentive to report back to their patrons about the hospitable welcome they had received from the city burgesses. It is probably not a coincidence that the companies who had been treated equally in Gloucester as Bristol represented many important courtiers, such as Sussex, the Lord Chamberlain, Hunsdon, the Earl of Nottingham, the Queen and, of course, the Dudleys.

By the 1570s, Bristol and Gloucester were welcoming an equal number of players, and Gloucester appeared to be recognised the tariff system. That the Gloucester Corporation continued to present the players with extra entertainments is probably indicative of a good relationship between the strolling companies and the city authorities. However, Bristol was still edging ahead in its general payments, preferring to award the 13s 4d sum, more than Gloucester’s favoured award of 10s:

	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER
1570s		
3s 4d		1
5s		1
6s 8d	1	4
10s	9	13
13s 4d	13	8
15s 6d		1
20s	6	2
22s	1	
23s 4d		1
PLAYS	30	31
SPENT	£20 12s	£17 12s 2d

Table 16: Payments to Performers by Bristol and Gloucester, 1570-71 to 1579-80

It is also feasible that the rare noting of exact dates into the Gloucester accounts in 1572-73 may have been a consequence of the need to please the patron and the potential of an audit by the Queen's household during her visit in 1574. From the inclusion of dates in the Gloucester records, one can deduce that the players did in fact arrange their routes with both Bristol and Gloucester in mind. On 1 December 1572, Worcester's Men appeared in Gloucester, and by late January 1573 they were in Bristol.¹² Sussex's Men played at Gloucester on 3 April 1573 and by the week of 5 to 11 April were performing in Bristol Guildhall, indicating that Bristol was the next stop on the itinerary after Gloucester.¹³ Conversely, Essex's Men chose a northerly route in the summer of 1573, playing at Bristol between 31 May and 6 June, and appearing in Gloucester on 10 July.¹⁴ The few years preceding the royal progress also saw an increase in the number of supplementary rewards to companies, for either scaffolds built at corporate expense, or for banquets and drinks in local hostelries. Another comparison with payments for the Mayor's play in Bristol suggests that Gloucester would have been the preferred destination on the south west circuit:

¹² *REED Glos.*, p. 302; *REED Bristol* p. 82.

¹³ *REED Glos.*, p. 302.

¹⁴ *REED Glos.*, p. 302; *REED Bristol*, p. 83.

FISCAL YEAR	PATRON	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER TOTAL [extras]
1570-71	Worcester Hopton	13s 4d 10s	10s [+ 2s] 10s
1571-72	Queen	20	10s [+ 3s 6d]
1572-73	Worcester Sussex Essex	10 13s 4d 13s 4d	10s [+ 3s 4d] 13s 4d [+ 5s] 13s 4d [+4s 6d]
1573-74			
1574-75			
1575-76			
1576-77			
1577-78			
1578-79	Derby Berkeley Sheffield	13s 4d 13s 4d 13s 4d	5s 13s 4d 6s 8d
1579-80			

Table 17: Payments and Extra Rewards to Professional Players, 1570-71 to 1579-80

What is immediately evident from the data contained in this Table 17 is that the correlation between Bristol and Gloucester is severed in the year before the Queen's visit, with the last playing company following the itinerary, Essex's Men, ceasing operations on the circuit in Gloucester on 10 July 1573.¹⁵ Playing continues both in Gloucester and Bristol after 1573 but there is, as evidenced in Table 17, no identifiable itinerary in place until 1578-79 and this is a single year when playing in the cities can be compared; subsequent to 1578-79, there are no correlative appearances by itinerant troupes for a whole decade until 1589-90, after the death of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

¹⁵ REED *Glos.*, p. 302.

1580 - 1588 The Dudley Family Influence

Sally-Beth Maclean, in her examination of Leicester's patronage, believes that his players served an important purpose in his 'twin instincts for self-promotion and tradition' before he gained his estates and titles.¹⁶ The early evidence contained in his household books suggests that 'the players were paid primarily not for entertainment at home, but rather for promotional purposes across the country'.¹⁷ However, once Dudley had secured the earldom of Leicester in 1564, he continued to use his company to affect his ambitious ends. J. R. Mulryne has examined the influence of the Dudley family and their players in Stratford-upon-Avon as they had become the 'leading landed interest' in the region, 'ensuring a respectful reception for their servants when they chose to visit the Midlands'. Mulryne also draws similar conclusions about the avaricious strategies of Leicester, who exercised 'an extraordinary influence' both from court and from his seat in Kenilworth, Warwickshire.¹⁸ Bristol, Gloucester and perhaps, as I have argued with reference to the 1584 market play and the 1600 Whitsun fundraiser, Tewkesbury felt the effects of Leicester's influence and/or sought to court his favour during the 1580s. Maclean considers that the restoring of 'the Dudley estate' was one of his 'more under-appreciated ambitions', although I am certain that the south-west region was all too aware of this particular quest.¹⁹ His hold in the county stemmed from land disputes over the Berkeley estate in southern Gloucestershire in the 1570s, and by his death on 4 September 1588 he had probably as many enemies as friends. Leicester was chosen as High Steward of Bristol and Gloucestershire on 20

¹⁶ Sally-Beth Maclean, 'Tracking Leicester's Men: the patronage of a performance troupe', in *Shakespeare and Theatrical Patronage in Early Modern England* ed. by Paul Whitfield White and Suzanne Westfall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 246-71 (p. 251).

¹⁷ Maclean, 'Tracking Leicester's Men', p. 252.

¹⁸ J. R. Mulryne, 'Professional Players in the Guild Hall, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1568-1597', p. 4.

¹⁹ Maclean, 'Tracking Leicester's Men', p. 249.

April 1570, appointments he retained until his death.²⁰ Leicester was chosen to represent the people of Tewkesbury as High Steward of the town in 1575 in gratitude for his influence in helping the town and its surrounding area achieve borough status in the same year. Although this was a sinecure position, and did not require residence in the region, it would have benefited Leicester politically; therefore, his players would have been especially welcome in the municipal halls of the region.²¹ Andrew Gurr suggests that there would have been a close relationship between Leicester and his players and that the chosen material may have been reflective of his personal convictions: ‘it is almost inconceivable that the players themselves would not have known what their patron stood for, and supported it in their plays’.²² Perhaps the content of the plays performed in Gloucester in 1580 and 1584 were engineered to influence the electorate to vote for Leicester’s choice of candidate. Siobhan Keenan notes that ‘in Gloucester, as in other towns [...] the treatment extended to other players was politically determined, indicating the pragmatic nature of the ruling elite in the provinces’.²³ However, Gloucester stood firm against Leicester’s temerity as, unlike other parliamentary boroughs ‘which surrendered to the blandishments of pushing patrons’, the city stood asserted its electoral independence.²⁴ An analysis of these payments to itinerant troupes in the years 1580 to 1590 demonstrates that the strolling companies of the Dudley family were well represented in the region, especially in the latter half of the decade after the second refusal of Leicester’s suit in Gloucester:

²⁰ ‘Patrons and Companies’, *REED Glos.*, p. 448.

²¹ William Bradford Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government 1590-1640*, p. 207

²² Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*, p. 192.

²³ Siobhan Keenan, *Travelling Players in Shakespeare’s England*, p. 174.

²⁴ J. K. Gruenfelder, ‘Gloucester’s Parliamentary Elections, 1604-1640’, p. 59.

FISCAL YEAR	DATE	PATRON	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS
1579-80	28 ? 20 Jun	Derby Berkeley Sheffield	5s 13s 4d 6s 8d
1580-1		Strange Berkeley	14s 4d 6s 8d
1581-2	28 Jul	Berkeley Morley Stafford Lord [Blank] Hunsdon	13s 4d 6s 8d 6s 8d 6s 8d 13s 4d
1582-3	7 Nov 30 Nov 26 May	Chandos Berkeley Stafford Oxford Queen	20s 13s 4d 10s 16s 8d 30s
1583-4	22 Dec 6 Jan 2 May 5 Oct	Master of the Revels Worcester Chandos Oxford Stafford Essex	13s 4d 6s 8d 10s 6s 8d 6s 8d 6s 8d
1584-5		Berkeley Lord (Blank) Essex Stafford Oxford Sussex Leicester	10s 6s 8d 13s 4d 6s 8d 10s 13s 4d 20s
1585-6		Essex's Men Sussex's Men	5s 5s
1586-7		Essex Queen Leicester Essex	15s 30s 20s 13s 4d
1587-8	27 Jun	Leicester Queen Sussex	20s 33s 6d 6s 9d
1588-9	27 Apr 2 Sep	Queen Sussex	20s 20s
1589-90	28 Dec 6 Apr 27 Sep	Chandos Beacham Queen [in College Church Yard] Lord Admiral	20s 20s 30s 20s

Table 18: Payment to Players in Gloucester, 1579-1590

FISCAL YEAR	DATE	PATRON	PAYMENTS TO PLAYERS
1579-80	8-14 Nov 26 Jun-2 Jul	Berkeley Sheffield	13s 4d 13s 4d
1580-81	26-26 Nov 26 Mar - 2 Apr 17-23 Sep	Strange Strange Oxford's Boys	13s 4d 13s 4d 20s
1581-82			
1582-3	20 May 8 June 24 July	Oxford Morley & Hunsdon Queen	£1 13s 4d 40s
1583-84	20 Aug – 6 Sep	Essex	20s
1584-85			
1585-86	26 Mar – 2 Apr 17-23 July	Essex Queen	26s 8d 20
1586-87	9-15 Apr 15-16 Apr 23-29 Jul 13-19 Aug	Leicester Dudley Visit Queen Sussex	26s 8d £28 10s 4d £2 20s
1587-88	9-15 Jun	Leicester	26s 8d
1588-89			
1589-90	5-11 Oct 5-11 Jul 2-8 Aug 9-15 Aug	Queen Essex Queen's Men [at the Free School] Lord Admiral	£2 30s 32s 30s

Table 19: Payment to Players in Bristol, 1579-1590

Of the seventeen recorded productions sponsored by Bristol Corporation in the 1580s, five were performed by the Queen's Men, three by the Earl of Essex, step-son of Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, two by Leicester's Men and a major outlay was expended on the visit to the city by Leicester and Warwick, Ambrose Dudley, in 1587. This pattern is also reflected in Gloucester, where representatives of the Dudleys played eight times to the five performances of the Queen's Men in the same decade.

Perhaps Gloucester was frugal in its five shilling payments to the travelling players of Sussex and Essex to reflect the mayor's personal attitude towards playing. These two small payments were certainly uncharacteristic. Perhaps the Gloucester

officials in 1585-6 hoped that the failure of Leicester to manipulate the elections in 1580 and 1584 may have precluded further inroads by aggressive patrons to influence the city. The players of Essex and Sussex may have been rewarded with a token amount to show gratitude to the strollers for visiting the city, and also as a manifestation of mayoral authority as evidenced in the 1580 Ordinance. It is also possible that the reduction in payment was a consequence of the temporary economic depression resulting from harvest failure and the slump in the cloth trade reported in 1586-7, but these low payments are so uncharacteristic that they are worthy of question. However, by the following year the mayor seems to have regained his control over the players, as he felt it appropriate to award Essex's men with fifteen shillings in 1586-7.

It also appears from the payments to players in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts that the representatives of the Gloucestershire magnates, Berkeley and Chandos, continued to be handsomely rewarded by the mayor whenever they presented themselves to play at the Boothall in the 1580s. The players of Henry Berkeley earned a total of 15s 6d for their performances and rewards in Gloucester in 1577-8.²⁵ The alliance between Berkeley's actors and the city appeared to be so strong that the company performed in Gloucester annually for the next consecutive seven years. Perhaps this was due to the fact that both Bath and Bristol had previously paid them much less than Gloucester. The itinerary of July 1578 indicates that Berkeley's Men were touring the southwest loop, and also that they were less popular in these locations than in Gloucester. *What Mischief Worketh in the Mind of Man* earned them 10s from Bristol between 6 and 12 July, and the performance in Bath of 11 July secured them a reward of 4s 3d. The company visited Bath again in 1578-9, but did not fare much

²⁵ REED *Glos.*, pp. 305-6.

better, amassing a mere 7s 2d for their efforts; however, Bristol had seen fit to reward them with 13s 4d in November 1579.²⁶

By the close of the sixteenth century, rewards to the Chandos company had altered, perhaps due to a change in the head of the family. Giles Brydges had served as Lord Chandos and Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire until his death in February 1594. His company earned 20s in November 1582, 10s for what was probably a production for Twelfth Night 1584 and another reward of 20s for Christmas festivities in 1589.²⁷ When Queen Elizabeth visited the family seat, Sudeley Castle, in 1592 the Corporation saw fit to contribute £6 13s 4d to the funds which was granted out of the ‘gifts and rewards’ account as other entertainment expense receipts had been.²⁸ William Brydges, brother to Giles, succeeded to both Lord Chandos and Lord Lieutenant in 1595; subsequent visits to Gloucester by his strolling company dwindle, suggesting that the Corporation did not favour William as well as his late brother Giles.²⁹ The Corporation paid five shillings ‘to the Lord Chandois man that brought venison’ in 1594-5, perhaps as a welcome gift from the new incumbent and in the following year the company played, but there is no record of how much they received. Chandos’ Men, under William Brydges, do not appear in Bristol until September 1600, although it is of course possible that they visited Bristol but played in alternative venues.³⁰ The most consistent itinerant companies visit Gloucester were the Queen’s Men and the players representing Lord Ogle, a member of the Council of the North. They both visited in consecutive years during the 1590s, 1593-4, 1594-5 and 1595-6, and perhaps again, but without the records it is impossible to tell. It is possible that these strollers were

²⁶ *REED Bristol*, pp. 116-17; *REED Bath*, p. 12.

²⁷ *REED Glos.*, pp. 308-09; p. 311.

²⁸ *REED Glos.*, p. 312.

²⁹ Anon., ‘Lords Lieutenant of Glos’, *TBGAS*, 71 (1952), p. 174.

³⁰ *REED Bristol*, p. 155.

favourites and playing by invitation as opposed to the city merely indulging the players who represented noblemen.

Queen Elizabeth had recognised the importance of a travelling troupe as a propaganda tool in the provinces, and the danger of one which may be out of control, such as Leicester's. She established her own company in 1583 to combat the ambitions of some of her more ruthless courtiers: 'the great lords such as Leicester and Oxford were using their playing companies in the Christmas festivities at Court as emblems of their own power'. The formation of the Queen's Men 'checked the rivalry among the great nobles'.³¹ Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels from 1579 to 1610, had been charged by the Queen to create a personal playing company from the best candidates out of the existing troupes, choices which 'plundered Leicester's more deeply than the others', putting the company 'into eclipse'. The Master of the Revels was related to 'all the chief company patrons except Leicester' and may have used the Queen's patent to exercise some control over the ostentatious court favourite, especially considering his temerity in attempting to manipulate the Gloucester elections. The 1574 royal decree for Leicester's troupe had set out the regulations for a travelling troupe 'in unambiguous terms', yet Leicester sought to defy these rules.³² The patent had stressed that a patron could only command one itinerant troupe in the kingdom. Yet in autumn 1585, after the furore over the Gloucester elections, Leicester had sent a second strolling company, numbering fifteen men, to Europe under his sign who joined the 'quasi-regal train of courtiers and entertainers'.³³

³¹ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 28.

³² Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 30.

³³ Gurr, *Playing Companies*, p. 191.

The greatest extravagance laid out by the Corporation of Bristol, with the exception of royal progresses, was the almost twenty nine pounds expended on the visit to the city by the Dudley brothers, the Earls of Leicester and Warwick, on 15 and 16 April 1587.³⁴ Leicester's Men were also paid 26s 8d for performances between 9-15 April, suggesting that Robert Dudley was joined by his company on his visit to the city.³⁵ Gurr states that the coupling of the players and their patron in Bristol 'was probably at the city's initiative, though it is unlikely to have been an utter coincidence that the players were in the vicinity at just the right time'.³⁶ The Dudley brothers were accommodated in the house of Mr Kitchin when they 'came from Bath to Bristol' on 15 April 1587, which William Adams identified as Easter Sunday.³⁷ The Corporation had awarded £28 10s 4d for entertainments for the two lords, which included a payment of 4d for two labourers to deliver a ceremonial staff to them at 'mr Kitchins howse' and a further fee of 12d 'paid to a footposte for bringing a letter from mr Kitchin, to master mayor, concerning the same'.³⁸ Mr. Kitchin 'was obviously a member of the prominent family of that name and was probably Robert Kitchen who was mayor in 1589'.³⁹ Robert Kitchen lived on Small Street, directly behind the Guildhall.⁴⁰ Abel Kitchen may also have been a relation to Robert. Abel Kitchen, as a feoffee of Christ Church, was a signatory on Woolfe's 1598 lease on *No.X ch/7*; he was influential in local affairs, as Warden of the Society of Merchant Venturers in 1607, as Master in 1610 and

³⁴ *REED Bristol*, p. 130.

³⁵ *REED Bristol*, p. 129.

³⁶ Gurr, *Playing Companies*, p. 187.

³⁷ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 121.

³⁸ 'Account of expenses for receiving and entertaining the earls of Leicester and Warwick', *REED Bristol*, p. 130.

³⁹ *REED Bristol*, endnote to pp. 129-31, p. 288.

⁴⁰ Leech's map 3 of Broad Street in *Topography Part I*, identifies Robert Kitchen's house as a large property, 19-25 Small Street, with its north wall connecting to the south-eastern part of the Guildhall.

he was mayor in 1613 when Queen Anna visited the city and commissioned the Bristol boys' company.⁴¹

From the description in the Mayor's Audits it appears that Leicester and Warwick were in Bristol to rally men for the inevitable war against the Spanish. Warwick was serving as England's general.⁴² It seems that the city was to produce a spectacular display of military might in the Marsh district south of the Cathedral; there was to be canon fire and organised skirmishes in addition to trumpeters, drummers and 'ii fifth players for v days apiece for warninge the Citizens for the Mosteringe'.⁴³ These men may have been Bristol's wait players, who were recorded in Bath, along with Leicester's Men, at some point after 14 June 1587. The waits were noted as playing 'at my lords (Warwicks) coming', when it is probable he was raising more men and funds for the war.⁴⁴ Another recipient of the corporate funding for the Dudley muster in Bristol was Woolfe's next-door neighbour who provided ordnance: 'Item paide to Humphrey Clovell for ii Berrells of Gonnepowder wayinge neete two hundred one quarterne and xvii ponde at xii d. per li. mounttes to xiii li. and for xxviii ponde of matche vii. s vi d'.⁴⁵ Adams stated that at some point on Easter Sunday 'the Earle of Leicester and the council were assembled together about some secret business in the Council House', thus the visit may not have been exclusively to audit the ordnance and availability of men in Bristol, but to secure the mayor's consent in other matters.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 183.

⁴² Gurr, *Playing Companies*, p. 187.

⁴³ 'Account of expenses for receiving and entertaining the earls of Leicester and Warwick', *REED Bristol*, p. 131.

⁴⁴ *REED Bath*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ 'Account of expenses for receiving and entertaining the earls of Leicester and Warwick', *REED Bristol*, p. 130.

⁴⁶ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 121

Sally-Beth Maclean has noted that by the 1580s, Bristol was ‘pulling ahead in what it offered, usually giving twice the amount’ to the larger companies on the circuit, such as the Queen’s Men.⁴⁷ Yet, the general evidence for Bristol in the 1580s shows that the city was rewarding significantly fewer troupes in this decade than it has ever done during Elizabeth’s reign:

	BRISTOL		GLOUCESTER	
	PLAYS	SPENT	PLAYS	SPENT
1550s	6	£2 16s 8d	9	£3 15s
1560s	30	£17 1s 8d	20	£10 11s 2d
1570s	30	£20 12s	31	£17 12s 2d
1580s	17	£21 12s	40	£28 9s 8d
1590s	23	£32 6s 8d	20	£18 11s 8d

Table 20: Total Payments to Players in Bristol and Gloucester, 1550-1600

1580s	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER
5s		2
6s 8d		11
10s		4
13s 4d	3	7
14s 4d		1
15s		1
20s	5	10
26s 8d	3	
30s	2	3
32s	1	
33s 6d		1
40s	3	
PLAYS	17	40
SPENT	£21 12s	£28 9s 8d

Table 21: Payments to Professional Players, 1580-81 to 1589-90

There are a number of suggestions for this reduction in the mayor’s plays in Bristol during the 1580s. It is possible that the city had set a budget for playing at around

⁴⁷ MacLean, ‘At the End of the Road’, p. 23.

twenty-two pounds. Bristol was rewarding strolling companies with larger payments than other provincial towns, and therefore could only afford to present seventeen troupes. However, a more likely scenario is that itinerant players were visiting Bristol in the 1580s, but were playing at a venue other than the Guildhall and were receiving private money as opposed to corporate rewards. There are only seventeen occasions when professional players were welcomed at Bristol in comparison with the forty at Gloucester, thus it does though seem more likely that the strollers were playing in Bristol's new 'performance facility' in Wine Street which had supplanted the Guildhall as a venue where 'troupes could both perform and reside'.⁴⁸

1590-1605 The Emergence of Private Theatre in Bristol

After the political turbulence of the 1580s, patterns of playing in Bristol and Gloucester re-established themselves, and can draw comparisons with the playing trends of the 1560s and 1570s, further demonstrating that the dramatic history of the region changed in the 1580s. It is in the first fiscal year after the death of Leicester when one can once again trace similar numbers of strolling players visiting Bristol and Gloucester, but with a significant deficit between how much Bristol was paying in total in the 1590s:

1590s	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER
3s 4d		1
5s		2
6s 8d		2
8s 4d		1
10s	4	2
12s 8d		
13s 4d		2
20s	2	2
22s		
23s 4d		
	26s 8d	1

⁴⁸ Mark Pilkington, 'Playing in the Guildhall', p. 19.

	30s	10	7
	40s	6	1
PLAYS		23	20
SPENT		£32 6s 8d	£18 11s 8d

Table 22: Payments to Professional Players, 1590-91 to 1599-1600

Although in previous years Gloucester had rewarded the majority of the strolling companies with a reward akin to the tariff, this is not the case in the 1590s. The differing number and amounts of reward prices is again indicative of a change in the attitude of the Gloucester authorities. However, the data for Bristol and Gloucester here is not strictly comparable year on year, as fifteen of the twenty-three Bristol performances recorded in Table 22 occurred after the Gloucester Corporation Chamberlain Accounts are lost, from 1596-7. The analogous data that exists states that the two cities were still donating similar rewards to certain kinds of company:

FISCAL YEAR	PATRON	BRISTOL	GLOUCESTER
1589-90	Queen Lord Admiral	[Free School] 32s 30s	[Churchyard] 30s 20s
1590-91	Queen/Sussex Queen	40s 30s	30s 30s
1591-92			
1592-93			
1593-94	Queen	30s	40s
1594-95			
1595-96	Derby	30s	30s

Table 23: Payments to Patrons by Bristol and Gloucester, 1589-90 to 1595-96

Yet unlike the 1560s and 1570s, there are fewer extra rewards donated by Gloucester Corporation, such as wine at the tavern, which were only recorded three times in the 1590s; a gift of sugar and a bottle of wine were given to Lord Morley's players in June 1593, Anthony Cooke, probably a local gentleman, and his players received a gallon of wine and sugar in June 1595 and the mayor spent an extra 3s 2d on wine and sugar for

the Queen's Men on an unspecified date in 1595-6.⁴⁹ It seems from the lack of money spent by Gloucester on professional players that there was a change in the attitude by the Corporation towards players, although the mayors of the 1590s were conscious to reward the larger companies, especially the Queen's players, with the largest 30s reward whenever they arrived in the city, even paying a record 40s in 1593-4. As I have argued, it is possible that the Corporation felt obliged to pay these men as they had come to Bristol specifically to play and, in the absence of the Wine Street playhouse which was undergoing an extensive refurbishment, the mayor was under pressure to provide an alternative venue. This may have also been the impetus for Barker to build his playhouse in Redcliffe. Due to the city's trade infrastructure, Mark Pilkington suggests that the city would have been a 'Mecca for entertainers'.⁵⁰ Andrew Gurr states that the government of Bristol echoed London in administering a censorship body for plays, but concedes that 'the will to see plays was always likely to override official constraints'.⁵¹ William Ingram suggested that 'in their own quest for a continuing audience' playing companies 'were often forced to become itinerant'.⁵² I would suggest that, after the establishment of the Wine Street venue and the subsequent existence of the Redcliffe playhouse, this theory was completely reversed, and that strollers were forced to choose a permanent base, such as one of Bristol's two venues. Some of the troupes which appeared in Bristol in the last years of the sixteenth century were the major London companies, representing the Queen and her intimate circle, which would explain why the Corporation would completely disregard previous statutes, paying the premium tariff to all the companies:

⁴⁹ *REED Glos.*, pp. 312-13.

⁵⁰ Mark Pilkington, 'Drama, Music and Ceremony', p. xxxiv.

⁵¹ Andrew Gurr, *Playing Companies*, p. 39.

⁵² William Ingram, 'Players and Playing', in *English Professional Theatre 1530-1660*, p. 153.

FISCAL YEAR	DATE	PATRON	PAYMENT
1595-96	11-24 July	Derby	30s
	8-21 Aug	Queen	40s
1596-97	24 Apr – 14 May	Derby	10s
	17 Jul – 13 Aug	Queen	40s
	28 Aug – 10 Sep	Pembroke	40s
	11 – 17 Sep	Lord Chamberlain	30s
1597-98	6 Nov – 25 Dec	Queen	40s
	25 Jun – 8 Jul	Pembroke	30s
	17 – 29 Sep	Worcester	26s 8d
1598-99	20 May – 24 Jun	Stafford	20s
	2 – 15 Sep	Pembroke	30s
1599-1600	30 Sep – 25 Dec	Howard [Admiral]	30s
	10 Feb – 25 Mar	Morley	10s
	26 Mar – 17 May	Pembroke	30s
	25 Jun – 19 Jul	Huntingdon	30s
	7 – 13 Sep	Chandos	10s
	14 – 20 Sep	Cromwell	20s

Table 24: Payments to Professional Players in Bristol, 1596-1600

One basic factor of economics is competition, and the existence of two independent playhouses in Bristol before 1614 again makes the city unique in the dramatic history of provincial theatre, and would have been a further draw for itinerant players to visit. Bristol was obviously still a popular destination for strolling companies, as evidenced by the premier companies who were visiting in the later 1590s after the local and national legislation was issued. There must have been a significant audience of playgoers in Stuart Bristol to warrant the existence of the Wine Street playhouse as a business venture, and there may have been even more profits to be made from the spectators, which motivated the erection of a second independent playhouse. Douglas Bruster has examined the ‘market’ for drama in the early modern period and although his research is principally based on London, some of his conclusions are equally applicable in Bristol. There was a proliferation of metropolitan playhouses being built at the turn of the seventeenth century, with nine out of the twelve theatres erected between 1595 and 1616, the period in which Woolfe and Barker would have

built theirs in Bristol. Bruster argues that these twelve playhouses in the capital must have been supported by an audience who was willing to maintain the businesses, ‘in no way of course could so many theatres have existed in and around London without the financial support of a continually-expanding playgoing populace’.⁵³ This may also pertain to Bristol’s two independent playhouses. Bristol’s population in 1600 stood at 12,000 against London’s 200,000, so the cities’ playhouses were relative in representing the community.⁵⁴ Bruster suggests that the majority of metropolitan venues were built in the liberties for a number of reasons, that the location in the suburbs ‘circumvented the City Fathers and Puritan detractors’ and that ‘demographic pressure rendered the relatively open land of the Fields and Liberties [...] more attractive areas on which to construct new places of business’.⁵⁵ These reasons may also have been relevant to Barker when he decided to compete with his rival north of the Avon, further increasing the novelty factor for players and audiences alike. That the 1598 lease for *No.X ch/7* was evidence of a rebuild may be disputed, but it is generally agreed that the Barker playhouse was ‘built from the ground up’.⁵⁶ Keenan believes that as a business venture a provincial playhouse ‘was likely to be a less lucrative enterprise than a theatre in the capital’ due to a smaller population and therefore less disposable income. She also questions the possibility of encouraging and acquiring investment in a new build playhouse or even a conversion of an existing building, both of which occurred in Bristol.⁵⁷ Yet, aware all of the potential pitfalls, Barker consciously decided to build a second playhouse in a sparsely populated area of town.⁵⁸

⁵³ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 26.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Barry, ‘Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century Bristol’, p. 59; Peter Clark, ‘Introduction’ in *Transformation of English Provincial Towns*, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Bruster, *Drama and the Market*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xl.

⁵⁷ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 144.

⁵⁸ Speed’s 1610 plan of Bristol does not depict Redcliffe as having many dwellings, therefore possibly a business district.

Keenan presumes that Barker was making a ‘shrewd investment’ in the Redcliffe property as he ‘perhaps suspected that the area would become more populous and property more valuable as Bristol expanded’.⁵⁹ There must have been sufficient strolling players active in the region, or a good number of local troupes, a ‘diverse and competitive theatrical vitality in Bristol in the Jacobean/Caroline period’ to merit the building of a second playhouse in Bristol.⁶⁰ There was a significant theatrical culture present in the city at the end of Elizabeth’s reign, which was representative of the reception of Bristolians to the travelling players, or troupes who had settled in the city. Sally-Beth MacLean proposes this factor would have been a significant draw to travelling players: ‘the size and relative affluence of the potential audience for performances [...] probably persuaded troupes to stay for longer and return more often to Bristol than to other locations in the region’.⁶¹

The ordinances presented by Bristol and Gloucester in the 1580s and 1590s sought to manage the cultural output in the city in the municipal spaces, private houses, after dark, on Sundays and by companies representing over-ambitious patrons. These statutes were not adhered to, which suggests that the civic authorities were receptive to players even after their peers had attempted to control dramatic entertainment. Gloucester was the first to issue an act against playing in 1580, but as I have stated, this appears to be more an assertion of mayoral control over ambitious patrons as opposed to a prohibition on playing. The later edict of 1591 merely reiterates the previous order, with an extra provision against Sunday playing. Neither Gloucester statute imposes a financial penalty on the mayor or burgesses for allowing unlicensed plays, rather advising that this behaviour is unacceptable. These statutes suggest that Gloucester

⁵⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 162.

⁶⁰ Pilkington, ‘Drama, Music and Ceremony’, p. xl.

⁶¹ MacLean, ‘End of the Road’, p. 22.

continued to be receptive to players, but only those whose patrons were aware of their place in the hierarchy. The Bristol ordinances were more specific about fining mayors for their involvement in unregulated theatre, suggesting that there were certain personalities on the Common Council who were more sympathetic to players than others. The penalty for unlicensed players performing in the Guildhall was fixed at 40s in 1586, increasing to £5 in 1596 when the Corporation banned all productions occurring within the municipal space. J. R. Mulryne has examined a similar ordinance in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1612, where the Council banned plays in the Guild Hall, possibly as 'plays are not appropriate to the decorum and dignity of the town's civic buildings'.⁶² However, none of the Bristol ordinances appeared to have been adhered to, given the payments to players in the years following the edicts, suggesting that the power of the patrons and/or the preferences of the mayors succeeded over local legislation.

The national legislation issued from 1597-8 to 1604 altered the cultural production of the provinces. A Poor Law passed in 1597-98 withdrew any previous privileges for gentlemen to operate a playing company conferring this honour only upon barons and other men of higher degree, Gloucester's middle-rank of patrons according to the 1580 hierarchy.⁶³ With the accession of James I there was a considerable upheaval in the theatrical history of the provinces. The death of Elizabeth rendered all previously licensed travelling companies illegal, due to the annulling of all laws made in her reign. On 7 May 1603 King James declared all previous grants void, confirming the withdrawal of privileges to companies granted by Elizabeth and reduced the number of licensed companies, with the 'so-called royal monopoly' which saw the

⁶² Mulryne, 'Professional Players in Stratford', p. 3.

⁶³ 39 Elizabeth, cap 4, cited in Virginia Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama*, p. 12.

dissolution of all noblemen's companies except three; the players representing the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Admiral and the Earl of Worcester became the King's Men, Prince Henry's Men and Queen Anne's Men respectively.⁶⁴ This statute declared that no other noblemen should attempt to sponsor a playing company:

Henceforth, no authority [was] to be given or made by any baron of this realm, or any other honourable personage of greater degree, shall be free and discharge the said persons, or any of them, from the pains and punishments [inflicted on vagabonds].⁶⁵

The consequences of contravening these statutes would have been severe, including whipping and branding, thus the pragmatic players may have associated themselves with permanent headquarters, such as the Bristol playhouses, to evade such punishments. Glynne Wickham suggests that this early Jacobean proclamation restricted other itinerant troupes was a deliberate attack on regional playing: 'the effect of this act could only be to deprive the provinces of their remaining local acting companies and to strengthen still further the London companies'.⁶⁶ It may have also have strengthened the independent provincial playhouses where they existed. In respect of church playing, Canon 88 of 1604 was a similar attempt by the ecclesiastical establishment to curb any dramatic or communal activity on church lands. It is possible that Tewkesbury Abbey was continuing to sponsor or promote playing either in the Abbey precinct or in venues within the town, and that the four requests for information on such acts, epitomised in the four Visitation Articles from 1607 to 1624, were a warning to the churchwardens to control such events.

⁶⁴ Peter Greenfield, 'Drama Outside London After 1540', p. 198.

⁶⁵ 1 James I, cap. 7, cited in Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of Elizabethan Drama*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Wickam, *Early English Stages*, II:i, p. 91.

1605-1642
Stuart Drama and the ‘Decline’ of Travelling Players in Bristol and Gloucestershire

Siobhan Keenan has identified a ‘decline of professional touring theatre’ in Stuart and Caroline England. She offers a range of explanations for the phenomenon, such as the appeal of London as a permanent and financially secure base as opposed to the perambulatory life in the provinces, instances of the plague and commercial obstructions as deterrents, fears of public disorder and changes in legislation which targeted players on the road. Sally-Beth Maclean identified such a change in the area, ‘the southwestern circuit, so well-established and popular for medieval and Renaissance performers, became one of the least rewarding in the early seventeenth century’.⁶⁷ I shall examine the evidence for Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol to establish whether these towns were affected by this ‘decline’.

Keenan has proposed that the increasing stability of the London scene provided little incentive for companies to go into the country; the players were eager to tour in the 1610s as the tradition was strong, but as the availability of indoor metropolitan venues in the capital increased in the seventeenth century, annual tours out of London were less economically attractive. She suggests that players declined to leave the capital as the troupes had acquired ‘fixed performance bases’ in London. The reasons behind attaining a ‘foothold’ in the capital were the benefits of a regular theatre: ‘in London playing companies had access to larger audiences, while the use of dedicated playing spaces provided an opportunity to tailor spaces for performance and to accumulate larger stocks of playing gear’.⁶⁸ This populace also included a ‘large middle ground of

⁶⁷ Maclean, ‘At the End of the Road’, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 182.

masters, apprentices and journeymen' whose disposable income would have been ideally suited to the playhouse.⁶⁹ The benefits of an enclosed playing space are also offered by Keenan as an explanation for players deciding to remain in the metropolis: 'the early part of James' reign also witnessed the popularisation of indoor hall playhouses, with the King's Men becoming the first adult company to acquire and perform in an indoor theatre in 1608'.⁷⁰ Andrew Gurr, in attempting to ascertain the business motives of Shakespeare's company, believes that touring was necessary in the early years of the profession, but the players would have preferred to remain in London even though it was 'more demanding' in terms of repertory as the company played twice as many plays in one week as they would have done in one year on the road.⁷¹ Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa argue that the evidence for acting companies remaining in London is to be found in the increasing use of stage machinery in the texts; devices such as the balcony and the stage trapdoor feature more prominently in the stage directions of seventeenth-century plays, therefore must have been written for the purpose of being staged in a permanent metropolitan playhouse: 'conceivably Shakespeare kept his mind on the limitations of venues available when the company went on travels'.⁷²

It is also possible that certain companies were attracted to, and remained in, Bristol because they could establish their own headquarters there either in Wine Street, the Barker playhouse in Redcliffe Hill or even another venue of which we have no knowledge. These purpose-built, or at the very least specifically-renovated, premises would have been ideal as a permanent home for a regionally-based company, or as the

⁶⁹ Barry, 'Seventeenth-Century Bristol', p. 61.

⁷⁰ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 183.

⁷¹ Andrew Gurr, *Shakespearean Company*, p. 54.

⁷² Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*, p. 46.

summer headquarters of a metropolitan-based troupe. We do not have access to the data regarding potential audience size in Bristol, but with a population of 12,000 in 1600, not including the visiting merchants and sailors, there would certainly have been a significant audience in the city to meet Woolfe and Barker's audience expectations.⁷³ In respect of London being able to offer a greater number of bases for playing companies, it has been stated above in Chapter Four that Bristol may have boasted three indoor playhouses in the late sixteenth century, with Alleyn's men playing at an undisclosed venue in 1593, and Daniel's Bristol Children's company probably adopting the Wine Street playhouse as their own. Surely the precedent of a royally-endorsed company in Bristol, even if it was a boys' company, would have been a great encouragement for other acting troupes to choose Bristol for their headquarters. Perhaps some companies or individual players had grown disaffected by the patronage system during their career and decided to work for a different style of manager. It is also possible that, after Canon 88 was issued in 1604, the churchwardens of Tewkesbury simply moved operations out of the Abbey House and into other properties in the ancient monastic precinct in St. Mary's Lane, such as the residence and barn belonging to the Millicheapes; plays may have also been produced in the market places in High Street, Church Street and Barton Street or in local inns. The declaration by the Master of the Revels in 1633 that all revivals must be re-censored through his office probably meant that many companies avoided playing in municipal spaces at all, lest they be reported to the Revels Office and charged for their repertoire.⁷⁴

Another reason cited by Keenan for the decline of professional players in the Jacobean provinces may have been a concern about public health: 'one of the most

⁷³ Barry, 'Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century Bristol', p. 59.

⁷⁴ Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, p. 82.

common reasons for curbing plays was to prevent the spread of plague'.⁷⁵ The plague in its various visitations in England during the early modern period may have had a profound effect on playing, yet Gurr states that 'there is surprisingly little correlation between the plague closures (of the London playhouses) and the records of touring'.⁷⁶ Pheobe Sheavyn states: 'there were always sufficient plagues or threats of plagues to hit the players hard', suggesting that an epidemic was not regarded as a genuine threat to their livelihood in the provinces.⁷⁷ Evelyn Albright believes that it was 'a wonder that the [provinces] welcomed [players] as often as they did in times of plague'.⁷⁸ The plague visitations in Gloucester, in the years 1565, 1573, 1575-6, 1577-8, 1580 and 1593-4 did not deter the professional companies travelling to the city.⁷⁹ The Gloucester Chamberlains' Accounts for 1564-5 reveal that the Queen's Men and Strange's Men played, with the former allowed a scaffold in the Boothall. In 1565-6, the players of Lord Hunsdon appeared on a scaffold, and the Queen's Men were hosted at the Swordbearer's house.⁸⁰ When next the contagion visited in 1573, the accounts record the dates of the performances by the players of Sussex and Essex.⁸¹ Sussex's Men returned in the next year when plague threatened, along with Compton's Men.⁸² The Common Council ordinance of 3 November 1580 did not use the visitation of the plague that year as an excuse to prohibit playing.⁸³ This would have been the most valid reason of all to put an end to the practice, but the council declined. It appears that playing remained important to the people of Gloucester, and perhaps to Thomas Machen, who had served as mayor until 29 September 1580. Two companies visited

⁷⁵ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 177.

⁷⁶ Gurr, *Playing Companies* p. 53.

⁷⁷ Pheobe Sheavyn, *The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age*, rev. by J. W. Saunders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 54.

⁷⁸ Evelyn Albright, *Dramatic Publication in England 1580-1640*, pp. 15-16.

⁷⁹ Peter Clark, 'Early Modern Gloucester' *VCH IV*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ *REED Glos.*, p. 300.

⁸¹ *REED Glos.*, p. 302.

⁸² *REED Glos.*, p. 305.

⁸³ *REED Glos.*, pp. 306-7.

Gloucester during the last visitation of the epidemic in 1593-4, representing Lord Ogle and Queen Elizabeth.⁸⁴ There were fewer instances of plague in Bristol, but according to seventeenth-century chronicler William Adams, each visitation was serious. The first major outbreak occurred in 1564 and lasted for a year.⁸⁵ In that period Bristol was visited by the players of Worcester in January, Lord Latimer in April and Lord Strange's in November.⁸⁶ The average frequency of visits was four per year in this period, so three in one year does not seem abnormal. The plague of 1574-5 was equally severe, as the loss of life surpassed two thousand.⁸⁷ Yet in 1574, Bristol was visited by Queen Elizabeth and the city was host to at least five playing companies.⁸⁸ The records for the Guildhall do not record any plays during the next outbreak of July 1603 to Lent 1604 when 2956 Bristolians died, but there would probably have been a similar resilience by the companies to play.⁸⁹ Although there were fewer companies visiting the city during times of plague, the fact that troupes remained on the road is a testament to the tradition.

By the 1630s however, the Gloucester justices were using the visitation of the plague as an excuse to rid the town of unwanted players, once the necessity of pleasing the monarch had diminished. William Daniel was refused entry to Gloucester in 1636-37, 'because he should not playe being in the contagious tyme' and an entertainer named 'Vincent' was also denied due to the risk of 'contagious sicknes'.⁹⁰ The Gloucester authorities were anxious enough to issue a statement to the travelling players who were targeting the area: 'Item to the stage players by the appoyntment of

⁸⁴ *REED Glos.*, p. 313.

⁸⁵ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 108.

⁸⁶ *REED Bristol*, pp. 70-71.

⁸⁷ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 114.

⁸⁸ *REED Bristol*, p. 85; pp. 110-11.

⁸⁹ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 171; p. 178.

⁹⁰ *REED Glos.*, p. 326.

Mr mayor and the Justices in regard they should not acte any play at that tyem in the city'. The Bristol Corporation was also concerned by the outbreak of smallpox in 1635 when two troupes, that of William Perry and another anonymous band, were paid handsomely to leave.⁹¹

Peter Greenfield feels that a change in authoritarian attitudes after the 'riotous behaviour' associated with playing in the latter part of the sixteenth century was also to blame for a decline in the 1620s.⁹² Keenan suggests that as 'town halls became increasingly lavish' there was 'a desire to avoid the damage and/or disorder potentially attendant on large gatherings of the kind attracted to plays' and these threats may have 'underpinned many of the dramatic regulations'.⁹³ No incidents of social disorder were ever reported in the Gloucester Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts about damage at the Boothall or the private residences which may have hosted performances and neither did the ordinances, suggesting this was not a concern to Gloucester officials. The broken seat detailed in the Tewkesbury Abbey churchwardens' accounts in 1575-6 did not deter the parish from hiring out the wardrobe, the Abbey House or the churchyard in ensuing years. The Guildhall at Bristol suffered some damage, to the benches and the front door, but again this did not stop players from being welcomed in the municipal hall or merit a mention in either the ordinances of 1585-6 or the repeats of the order in 1595 and 1596. Although we cannot determine the use of the Guildhall with regard to playing post-1597 it is unlikely that merchants such as Barker or Woolfe would have invested so much of their personal reputation or finances in opening playhouses in Bristol if the cost of repairing damage done to the properties by the public would have outweighed the potential profits. The Corporation of Bath had intended their new

⁹¹ *Adams's Chronicle*, p. 242; *REED Bristol*, p. 239.

⁹² Greenfield, 'Medieval and Renaissance Drama', p. 138.

⁹³ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 178.

municipal building to be both lavish and tailored toward drama as they [allegedly] commissioned Inigo Jones, royal masque creator and court architect, to design the new Guildhall. The building was completed in 1626, in the middle of the very decade which boasts the ‘decline’. After its completion the Bath hall ‘provided a venue for dramatic performances’ and this seems to have been a principal motive behind the construction: ‘throughout most of the seventeenth century, the Guildhall continued to furnish a stage for touring companies performing within the city’s precincts’.⁹⁴ The Corporation of Worcester were also not particularly concerned about riotous audiences, although they did pass an edict in 1622 to limit the number of venues that were available to travelling players. There are no clear records in the Worcester City Accounts to demonstrate which companies were visiting the city in the 1620s, and with what frequency, but committing so many public venues to the acting companies suggests that there may have been productions in the city in different arenas. Visits of strolling players to Worcester seem to have reached a peak in the 1620s, and the Council felt that it should restrict the hitherto generous venues offered to the actors. It was:

ordered that noe players bee had or made in the upper end of the Twonehall (*sic.*) of this Cytie nor Councell Chamber used by anie players whatsoever, And that noe players bee had or made in Yeald by nyght time, And if anie players bee admytted to play in the Yeald hall to bee admytted to play in the lower end onlie uppon paine of xls to be payd by Master Mayor.⁹⁵

This did not necessarily admonish itinerant troupes, but merely instructed them as to where and when they could play, revealing an attitude similar to that of Gloucester Corporation in 1580. Worcester had previously offered the town hall, the council chambers, and both the upper and lower end of the Guildhall to itinerant players who had chosen to perform in Worcester. The choice of four civic venues for performance

⁹⁴ William Lowndes, *The Theatre Royal at Bath* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd., 1982), p. 10.

⁹⁵ *REED Worcs.*, pp. 453-54. Civic Miscellany 2, Council Order p. 28.

must have been a lucrative option for the players. The years 1623-5 were relatively busy for Worcester playgoers, as the King's players visited three times, earning up to 15s; the Prince's Men visited, as did the players of Princess Elizabeth.⁹⁶ Worcester Council was forced to take action against players in 1636, when the windows of the Council Chamber were destroyed by drunken spectators, but they only resolved to prohibit 'Tiplinge and Drinkinge' in the building whilst plays were performed, not the act of playing itself. Clearly either the revenue - or public support for a drama-loving government - precluded any serious legislation against itinerant actors. Interestingly, the travelling players had previously had access to the keys to the Chamber, implying the trust that the Mayor had in such companies, despite the loutish behaviour of some of the spectators.⁹⁷ Worcester may have been the exception, but I doubt that such an inherent part of English culture as the strolling players would be wiped out generically in a single decade.

It is the reduction in payments to players which is a crucial factor in Keenan's theory on a 'decline' in travelling players.⁹⁸ Her argument lies with the theory that a lack of payments is likely to equal a lack of instances of playing, although she concedes that 'the dwindling evidence of professional travelling players in the Stuart provinces is not in itself proof that touring theatre was in decline'. She does note that it appears to have become a nationwide trend by the 1630s.⁹⁹ Sally-Beth Maclean also believes that 'the gradual decrease in rewards to touring players [...] may be a corresponding clue of changing attitudes and even civic discouragement of public theatrical entertainment'.¹⁰⁰ It is a regrettable fact of provincial theatre history that the records dwindle at the end of

⁹⁶ REED *Worcs.*, Chamberlains' Accounts, p. 454.

⁹⁷ REED *Worcs.*, p. 457, 'Civic Miscellany 2, Council Order', 9 May 1636.

⁹⁸ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 166.

⁹⁹ Keenan, *Travelling Players*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁰ Maclean, 'At the End of the Road', p. 24.

the sixteenth century, and unfortunate for this study the only satisfactory records after 1600 are for Bristol. However, it has been clarified that the changes in account keeping do not necessarily translate into a reduction in visits by players, only that the chamberlain was no longer obligated to welcome the players, nor record them in his account books. The simple explanation for Bristol is that players had at least one other venue which had been specially-adapted, probably acoustically given Woolfe's request for the roof of *No.X ch/7* to be raised, a few dozen yards away in Wine Street. The establishment of the Barker playhouse in Redcliffe Hill further attests to the idea of a private playing culture in Bristol exempt from civic interference. Suzanne Westfall also proposes that a lack of reward does not mean a non-appearance by travelling troupes: 'the absence of payment does not automatically connote the absence of players, for in times of financial hardship, players may have depended on the townspeople's donations rather than on municipal expenditure for their reward'.¹⁰¹

The practice of paying players to leave took place in Bristol in the 1630s, yet for the six troupes who were paid to depart, there were seven who were granted leave to play.¹⁰² The Mayor's Audits in the 1600s are not as clear as those in the sixteenth century and the way in which the players were recorded also changed; there are a number of entries wherein the companies are anonymous, with entries such as 'a company of players' or merely 'a company', which suggests that the chamberlain had exploited the opportunity to reduce their corporate bureaucracy. Andrew Gurr has acknowledged that 'by the 1630s the majorities of entries [...] take the form of notes about payments to leave without playing'.¹⁰³ However, he cannot correlate these

¹⁰¹ Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 124.

¹⁰² *REED Bristol*, pp. 233-43.

¹⁰³ Andrew Gurr, 'The loss of records for travelling companies in Stuart times', p. 5.

refusals with a change in attitude by the authorities, as the civic records are not adequate enough to judge whether or not mayors were particularly hostile to professional companies in Stuart England.¹⁰⁴ Yet it is this phenomenon which demonstrates that the provinces were still feeling the effects of the Elizabethan ‘patronage mania’ and considered a reward to players was appropriate. I believe that the ‘chamberlain’s fancy’ was dictated less by the personal opinions of the chamberlains than their duty to obey their superiors.¹⁰⁵ Towns and cities had been, up until 1597, obliged to welcome noblemen’s players into their communities not just to prevent the actors from being flogged as vagrants, but to court the favour of the patrons whom they represented. Adherence to his culture remained in the consciousness of the Bristol mayors, who appeared to maintain the tradition until the Civil War.

**Playing By The Rules?:
Reactions to Players in Early Modern Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol**

All of the data for the region confirms Greenfield and Pilkington’s declaration that the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I marked a ‘watershed’ in the history of the professional playing company in Gloucestershire and Bristol. The evidence for Tewkesbury suggests that the church was a little slower in subscribing to civic drama, but all three towns at the very least tolerated drama by 1570 and were hosting public performances by the 1580s. It is inconvenient, although a reality due to sheer lack of proof, that any reduction in playing in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol cannot be so clearly defined. The national legislation against playing from 1597 to 1604 severely disrupted the playing culture of England and appears to have either stunted the development of

¹⁰⁴ Gurr, ‘The loss of records’, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, p. 333.

the playing company, or driven it underground. I will examine the response of Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol to dramatic events and venues during Elizabeth's reign to conclude whether the towns' reactions to drama were dictated by adherence to royal legislation, patronage protocols, the economic climate or merely the personal preferences of the urban authorities, and whether the dramatic culture fostered in the sixteenth century would have continued into the seventeenth century.

Gloucester was fiercely independent and protective of her oligarchic governance of the county inshire and appeared to view the arrival of noblemen's players with suspicion. The county capital was reticent in subscribing to a patron's players and his values. The evidence for Gloucester depicts a city cautious of outside influence and a corporation which sponsored visiting players merely out of obligation to Elizabeth's courtiers as opposed to a general appreciation of the actors' trade. Peter Ripley commented upon the task of attempting to gauge the opinions of the Gloucester citizens from the 'impersonal flavour' of the civic and ecclesiastical records, 'the problem facing the student of the history of the city of Gloucester is that almost all of the available resources reveal little about the behaviour and mentality of individuals'.¹⁰⁶ The ordinances of 1580 and 1591 are the best examples of the attitude of the mayor which I read as favourable to playing as an art, but that the political obligation to appease the patron made the city ill at ease. Gloucester was forced to accept noblemen's companies by the Act of 1559 yet may have seized upon the decree of 1597 to legitimately cease this practice. James I's reduction of the number of licensed companies to three in 1603, in the guise of the King's Men, Queen's Men and Prince's Men, gave Gloucester 'legal justification' to prevent performances by any other patron

¹⁰⁶ Peter Ripley, 'A Seventeenth Century Consistory Court Case', *TBGAS*, 100 (1982), 211-20 (p. 211).

and finally permitted the city to bring to an end such potential dangers such as the influence of Leicester and his players.¹⁰⁷

It is regrettable that there is no evidence after 1597 to state whether the late sixteenth and early seventeenth legislation was adhered to, but considering the city's reactions to patrons in its own statutes, one would estimate that Gloucester was content to refuse any more outsiders, although it is impossible to judge whether this would have been due to hostility to players or just a precaution to prevent further interference by outside agencies. The attempt by Leicester to control the city's parliamentary candidates in 1580 and 1584 must have alarmed the Corporation, as this incident probably represented the worst fear of the council in allowing the representatives of influential strangers into the city. Despite the deference that the provinces ought to have shown to the Queen's courtiers, Gloucester was defiant in refusing Leicester his wishes; the 1580 challenge probably occasioned the first ordinance. The legislation issued by the Corporation reveals that the city was concerned with the practice of playing, but more with the conduct of the patrons rather than the behaviour of the players or the spectators. Even though Berkeley's Men had brought shame upon themselves by quarrelling with law students in London in 1581, Gloucester still welcomed them into the city for a number of consecutive years for the remainder of the decade. The three-tier hierarchy of patrons stated in the 1580 Ordinance was a conscious instruction to these noblemen to consider the importance of the mayor in the playing process. This did not appear to have been adhered to, as in 1591 the Corporation reaffirmed 'that one former ordinance' should 'stande in force'. The royal proclamation of 1597 would, I

¹⁰⁷ Greenfield. 'Drama Outside London After 1540', p. 198.

believe, have delighted the insular Gloucester Corporation as they could have claimed independence by royal warrant.

The state of the economy does not seem to have affected the city's acceptance of players in any way, which strengthens the theory that drama in the city was patronage-driven. Gloucester's economy was unstable at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign but the city chamberlains still paid traveling companies the same as Bristol and even surpassing the larger city by rewarding some players with extra entertainments at the tavern or burgess' house, a practice which was not mandatory. Gloucester, with her suspicion of outside interests, may have begrudged these expenses to the companies but felt obliged to forfeit them for political measures. It is likely that Gloucester felt the approval of itinerant companies necessary to maintain Elizabeth's favour, especially after she awarded the city port status in 1580. Unlike Tewkesbury and Bristol, there are no leads on any independent playing spaces in Gloucester. There may have been performances at the Swordbearers' houses, and the 1580 ordinance does stipulate that playing was forbidden in private property, but there is simply no evidence. As most business conducted in the city retreated into the privacy of the inns in early Stuart Gloucester, so may have the dramatic performances. Playing places may have evolved in the suburbs, such as Barton Street, but the destruction of the city's outskirts during and after the Civil War has prevented any evidence from being discovered. Any unused property in Westgate Street, given its proximity to the Severn quay, was converted into warehouses or retail premises, rather than those dedicated to leisure or recreation. Gloucester was famed as a distribution centre rather than a manufacturing town, and perhaps this attitude was reflected in the city's cultural production, that it was a market for playing but did not create any of its own.

I would suggest that there were certain families, such as the Ingrams and Machens, who had a personal interest in drama and whose favour was fundamental to the success of playing in Gloucester. Robert Ingram was the tenant of the Boothall and Inn in 1558 and may have been influential in persuading the mayor to entertain the players at his hostelry. Perhaps Ingram's involvement with these affairs compelled the Corporation to send players to other places for their entertainment such as the Swordbearers' houses. When Robert Ingram, junior, renewed his father's lease on the property, the Corporation stipulated that only the inn was to be included in the tenancy, which may have been another method of control employed by the city government over the private use of civic premises. The strolling companies possibly enjoyed further support from Henry and Thomas Machen, as when either of these men were serving in positions of authority there were significant developments in drama in the city. Henry Machen was sheriff in 1550 when the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts began recording municipally-sponsored performances in the city and was mayor in 1558, the 'watershed' year of professional playing in Gloucester; Thomas Machen was mayor in 1579, and his name was mentioned specifically in the financial accounts when he personally awarded 13s 4d to Berkeley's Men, he served as mayor in 1588 when the Corporation rewarded the Queen's Men a record 33s 6d and also in 1601-2 when John Wylmott stormed the stage. However, once the puritan element had gained a hold in the Corporation in the early seventeenth century there were no more supporters on the aldermanic bench and, although the records do not survive to attest to this, the rewards to itinerant playing companies probably ceased. The single instance of licensed players in Gloucester, when Henry Sandes and his company of three attempted to play on 25 October 1624, demonstrates that travelling players were still active in the provinces, but

not welcome at Gloucester.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately the Corporation Clerks' Memoranda Book, where this incident was noted, did not disclose whether this small troupe had been granted an audience before the mayor. This volume records 'arrests and punishments for vagabondage and bindings over to quarter sessions for more serious crimes' demonstrating how serious the Corporation viewed Sandes' attempt, despite his legitimate 'commission' from the Master of the Revels.¹⁰⁹

As there is no extant data for playing in Tewkesbury in the seventeenth century it is impossible to deduce whether the national legislation of 1597 to 1603 against travelling players was felt in the town. However, the Abbey would have definitely been affected by the Church Canons Order 88 of 1604 forbidding any public entertainments, games, ales or festivities to take place in or on church property. Due to the popularity of playing in Elizabethan Tewkesbury and the approval of the churchwardens, it is likely that the clergy continued to support drama in the parish after 1604. The four Visitation Articles issued by the Gloucester Diocese between 1607 and 1624 certainly suggest that playing and other community events were among the 'profane' uses of church precincts in Stuart Gloucestershire. The existence of these Visitation Articles, provisos against playing but pardons for any which had taken place, implies that the church remained loosely tolerant of the practice of playing. The two latter edicts of 1622 and 1624 are stringent in their prohibition of playing on a Sunday, yet disclose that licences had been granted to players for previous performances, again evidence of the acceptance of acting by the Stuart clergy in Gloucestershire.

¹⁰⁸ Corporation Clerks' Memoranda Book, *REED Glos.*, pp. 319-20.

¹⁰⁹ 'The Documents', *REED Glos.*, p. 263.

Although there is no confirmation that the players which visited Tewkesbury in 1584, 1600 and perhaps other instances in the Elizabethan reign when the gear was hired, were professional strollers, the influence of Leicester as patron of the town cannot be denied. James Bennett and F. B. Bradley-Birt questioned Leicester's intentions with regards to his interest in Tewkesbury but could not find an answer - I am certain that Leicester was aware of his reputation as Elizabeth's favoured courtier and was exploiting this role and allowing provincial towns to fawn upon him to secure personal advancement. Yet he was also aware of the offence he had caused in Gloucester and decided to influence the next largest town. Tewkesbury owed an extraordinary debt of gratitude to Leicester as it was he who had interceded on the town's behalf and secured an incorporation of the borough and charter from the Queen. It is not unlikely that, after the refusal of his suit to select a parliamentary candidate for Gloucester in 1580, Leicester used the solid relationship with Tewkesbury that he had fostered in the 1570s as a secondary base from which to approach in the next round of parliamentary elections.

Tewkesbury was economically subordinate to Bristol and Gloucester, yet there are no instances of hostility towards players in any of the surviving early modern records, unlike in the Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts or the Mayor's Audits. Despite being granted a Charter in 1575 with rights to fairs and markets independent of Gloucester, the town was not strong enough to manage the quay away from the other Severn ports and her customs privileges were revoked. The shipping markets and boat building supported Tewkesbury but the topography of the town, the flood plain and other geographical confines such as the Abbey precinct and the five rivers surrounding her, prevented any further growth. Despite these restrictions, the extant financial reports

for the two instances of playing of which we have knowledge states that this smaller town was paying comparable amounts for playing to Bristol and Gloucester. The rare entry into the Borough Minute Book describing the play or plays of 3 November 1584 reveals that the Tewkesbury Council was comfortable in spending almost half of the £6 15s 4d sum 'received into their hands' on players, wine for the JPs and on market expenses. The large outlay of nearly four pounds on this event is indicative of a positive reception to the players by the bailiffs, whether Leicester's Men or another troupe. The most striking response to the plays came from the churchwardens in 1600 who were happy to sacrifice £11 12s 9d of the money gathered from the Whitsun plays which could have been spent on the roof repairs on players and their entertainment. This expensive and elaborate three-day event was, in the eyes of Frederick Boas, a good effort but nonetheless a disaster, 'the spirited adventure was [...] commercially a failure'. Peter Greenfield saw these productions merely as the entertainment provided for consumers at a grain sale, rather than as the principal reason for people to have attended the event.¹¹⁰ The cash book for the fundraiser was noted, as Greenfield acknowledges, 'in a separate section of accounts, following the ordinary accounts for 1600'.¹¹¹ Surely, the placing of the accounts outside of the normal day-to-day expenses of the Abbey attests to the event being an extraordinary episode in the history of Tewkesbury. Although the grain sale was also a fundraising event, it was the costs 'laid out about the playes' which were entered into the accounts; the precise itemising of all the relevant expenditure certainly gives the impression that the churchwardens, John Cooke and Thomas Deacons, were primarily concerned with the performances. The balance sheet for the Tewkesbury Whitsun plays 'are the most detailed records of a single instance of a play production in Gloucestershire', yet previous studies have

¹¹⁰ Greenfield, 'Parish Drama in Four Counties Bordering the Thames Watershed', p. 108.

¹¹¹ 'The Documents', *REED Glos.*, p. 269.

attributed these plays to local amateurs; the idea that the Tewkesbury churchwardens were receiving and rewarding a professional touring troupe does not appear to have been considered.¹¹²

Boas noted that ‘the gains from the sales of wheat and malt and from admission to the plays were almost exactly equal’.¹¹³ It cannot be doubted that total profits of 14s 5d were poor, the plays earned £12 7s 2d whilst the churchwardens spent £11 12s 9d, but I would argue that the plays were put on for the sake of the community and for the delight of the crowd, as opposed to a mercenary tactic to boost church coffers.¹¹⁴ The lack of a profit attests to this - if they had wished to make a better return, they would not have spent so much on the treatment of the players. They would also have claimed dues on the sale of the goods over the year, but did not see fit, rather ‘contracting martes without any common charge’.¹¹⁵ The Tewkesbury churchwardens had spent a number of months, from October 1599 to May 1600, organising the plays and the associated sales and markets. The physical coordination of the plays had begun ‘in lent before’ and both the committee and community would have been aware at all times that the profit margin was closing, and therefore would have changed the forecast. In any case, the churchwardens had not been driven by profit in previous theatrical endeavours. The rental costs for items of players gear charged from 1567-68 to 1584-5 were small compared to the market value which Coldewey has identified in his scholarship, suggesting that the fees charged to Tewkesbury locals and players from surrounding parishes were token contributions to cover costs such as laundering and repairs to wear and tear.

¹¹² Greenfield, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Drama’, p. 81.

¹¹³ Boas, ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

¹¹⁴ *REED Glos.*, pp. 340-41.

¹¹⁵ Borough Minute Book, *REED Glos.*, p. 340.

In presenting the 1600 Whitsun plays, Tewkesbury Abbey achieved most of the money required to purchase materials for the battlements, which was the goal of the exercise. It seems, therefore, that the principal aims of this endeavour were to raise enough funds for the repairs and to have fun. Greenfield proposes that ‘the contribution of the plays was undoubtedly to create a festive atmosphere in which grain [...] could be sold’.¹¹⁶ I believe that, to paraphrase Hamlet, the plays were the thing. The event was organised by the community, as ‘meetings’ were had with the townsfolk where their ‘helpe’ was donated in the ‘setting furthe’ of the ‘iii several stage plays’ for the benefit of the parish. The Abbey incumbents had ‘adventured upon themselves’ the idea to raise money to fix the battlements and it is probable that they wished for the community to be rewarded for all of their hard work with three days of quality entertainment. Any players who could command wine and food, a wardrobe, attendants and musicians must have been worth the expenses. I am still not convinced that a group of local amateur players would allow the community to spend all of the profits on the plays. Greenfield has stated that the expenditure ‘suggests the plays were produced far more lavishly than any that had previously been in Tewkesbury’, yet still believes they were amateur plays with a biblical theme.¹¹⁷ I accept that the references to playing ‘in the Abbey’ certainly suggest religious matter, but as the Abbey was community property it may not have had such an association with the drama enacted on its grounds. My main argument for the plays being performed by a nobleman’s company lies with the expense accounts for the 1600 Whitsun plays; surely, if these were amateurs, they would have played for free without accepting such lavish gifts. Most notable of these entries is the first item, whereby T.B. was rewarded with 30s for his charges. It has

¹¹⁶ REED *Glos.*, endnote to pp. 340-42, p. 429.

¹¹⁷ Greenfield, ‘Parish Plays in Four Counties’, p. 108.

been established that these charges were exclusive of venue, attendants, costumes, music, food, drink and ‘other things’ which opens up the question of what these costs would have covered. I propose that such the thirty shilling charge was for the actors’ wages, which identifies these players as professionals.

The costs were not entirely covered by the revenue gained at Whitsun, as the Borough Minute Book states that there would be a further fundraiser, a ‘reformed’ church ale, taking place in summer 1600 to recoup the balance of the £66 bill for the new battlement.¹¹⁸ This was, of course, another opportunity for the parishioners to enjoy themselves, but would have been negated should the players not have accepted the £11 12s 9d worth of rewards. There are unfortunately no further references in the Tewkesbury churchwardens’ accounts to corroborate a summer fête in 1600, nor any other instances relating to plays or the playing gear into the early seventeenth century. Frederick Boas explains this as a consequence of the insufficient profits delivered by the Whitsun plays, ‘the loss at the performances appears to have discouraged later churchwardens from attempting to present plays in the Abbey’.¹¹⁹ It is just as possible that the keen supporters of theatre, such as the Wyatts, succeeded the churchwardens as private theatrical patrons in Tewkesbury after Canon 88 forbade the use of the church precinct as a venue, which would explain why there are no records after, what I would deem, a successful event in the town.

The 1600 Whitsun plays, communal recreational events, were supported by both the Borough Council and the churchwardens. The reaction of the civic authorities to

¹¹⁸ Borough Minute Book, *REED Glos.*, p. 340. It seems that there was also a planned church ale to take place at Whitsun 1600, but there had been some ‘abuses’ relating to this project, thus it was postponed until midsummer. There is no clear reasoning in the Minute Book as to why the ale was cancelled. Perhaps there was too much danger of public disorder with plays and too much drinking.

¹¹⁹ Boas, ‘Tuesday’s Productions at Tewkesbury’, *The Observer*.

these plays is evident in the Minute Book; the entry does not object to the plays for raising funds towards the new battlement, only the idea of the accompanying church-ale which was considered to be a problem as there were 'customary abuses' attached to such a festival. This does not appear to have affected the amount of alcohol consumed at the event, as the expense account has shown monies spent on brewing. The Minute Book entry states that the year-long markets which were raising money for the replacement battlements should take place 'without any common charge', which suggests that the clerk of the market would surrender his commission for the year in order to raise more money. It is likely and therefore ever more frustrating, that the private endorsement of playing in Tewkesbury is actually responsible for the lack of data in our possession about the continuation of drama in the town. A single passing reference to Margery Cooke's indiscretion allows one a rare insight into the playing culture of early seventeenth-century Tewkesbury; that the constables and other officials was not in the audience at a Christmas play but Robert Jeynes, a serving churchwarden, was. It is not the most convincing piece of evidence but at least demonstrates that there was some continuity in the championing of drama by the Abbey staff. It is this relationship between the churchwardens and theatrical performances in the latter sixteenth century which tentatively suggests that the properties belonging to another churchwarden family, the Millicheapes, may have served as theatrical venues in Jacobean and Caroline Tewkesbury. That both of the Millicheape properties evolved into seventeenth-century meeting houses may be coincidental but I believe that the Non-conformists chose these premises for their congregations with good reason – that they were former places of large public gatherings such as plays. There is also the possibility that publican families such as the Underhills of The Wheatsheaf and the

Crumps of the Star and Garter may have supported playing into the seventeenth century.

Bristol, as originally envisaged, as it was the largest urban centre and therefore could boast more theatrical venues than Gloucester and Tewkesbury in the early modern period. It is the survival of the theatrical culture after the death of Elizabeth and the development of at least two successful private playhouses which marks Bristol out as the most culturally productive of the three settlements. Although, with the exception of 1601-1603, the Mayors' Audits for Bristol survive into the Caroline period, these records still do not present one with a complete picture of playing in the city after the legislation of 1597 to 1603. Andrew Gurr has suggested that 'on the whole the banning of plays from guildhalls seems to chiefly to have been produced by animosity'.¹²⁰ However this is not the case in early modern Bristol. Of all the ordinances issued against playing in the 1580s and 1590s, none of the statutes have cited examples of public disorder or plague as motives for ensuring extra control over plays. The Bristol ordinance of 1586 was principally concerned with 'unlawful games', with playing as a secondary matter and although the 1595/6 statutes were more severe, playing was not prohibited, just driven out of the Guildhall and forbidden after dark. The last reference to playing 'in the Guildhall' was recorded in 1597; this was doubtless a consequence of Elizabeth's revocation of mayoral privileges to license plays, but I am not sure that this is evidence that playing ceased in the municipal venue. As I have argued, the Guildhall may have been employed as a temporary alternative space to the Wine Street playhouse after 1597, as *No.X ch/7* was undergoing significant refurbishment between 1598 and 1602. The self-imposed interdictions against playing in the Guildhall, the last edict of

¹²⁰ Gurr, 'Loss of Records', p. 7.

many being issued on 3 February 1596, ordered that the property was to be reserved purely as a place of justice, with any mayor who sanctioned playing in the premises was personally liable to forfeit five pounds. The patronised companies who arrived in Bristol expected an audience and a reward, and they probably played in the Guildhall if it was the only central venue available to them. However, as the mayor did not want to hold himself financially accountable for these plays, the chamberlains neglected to mention a venue, only noting the amount paid. This ensured that the itinerant players gained their reward, but the mayor was not penalised for obeying previously-held protocols. The fact that the Common Council felt obliged to pay travelling players, and probably tender the Guildhall as a playing place in spite of local statutes, is a testament to the survival of the patronage 'mania' so prevalent in sixteenth century England. The tradition of compensating these strollers superseded the 1597 legislation which gave the mayors legitimate grounds to refuse them an audience.

The impact of Leicester's aggressive provincial campaign was felt less in Bristol than in Tewkesbury and Gloucester, but the effect of patronage was still an issue in the south west's largest city. The fact that Bristol was the most generous stop on the southwestern loop suggests that the city was aware of the competition from surrounding towns, and the reception of Gloucester in occasionally providing extra entertainments to the premier companies may have motivated Bristol to increase its basic tariff. The rivalry, had there been one, seems to have been checked by Gloucester as the two cities were paying the same companies comparable amounts for most of the Elizabethan era. Leicester's influence in Bristol was purely military in that he and his brother, the General of the English army, were accommodated at civic expense whilst mustering troops for the Spanish war. It appears that Bristol, with all her experience in dealing

with wealthy and powerful merchants, settlers and colonialists, were not intimidated by men of status and fortune like the smaller regional centres of Gloucester and Tewkesbury.

The Bristol authorities seemed to be content to subcontract their recreational responsibilities to private enterprises in the middle of Elizabeth's reign; whether this decision was a consequence of fifty years' experience in welcoming players or a natural progression in the mercenary attitude of the Corporation, the handover to Woolfe and/or Barker does appear to have affected the dramatic consumption of the city. The 1580s, as has been noted, record 17 instances of playing in Bristol compared to the average of 26 in the 1560s, 1570s and 1590s. The private playhouses must have had a sound financial foundation on which to build, else they would not have been constructed. The 'divers good and reasonable causes' presented to the feoffees of Christchurch by Nicholas Woolfe for permission to rebuild *No.X ch/7* in 1598 may have been made on behalf of the players too; the entreaty had, as is specified in the 1598 lease document, been 'speciallye movinge'. Despite the dearth of corporate rewards in the 1580s, the city was still luring the premier outfits on the touring circuit, such as the Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men. This suggests that these itinerant companies had come to Bristol with either a renewed hope that the mayor would be more receptive than in previous years, or that they had expected to play on Woolfe's stage but were forced to accept the Guildhall for which the mayor had no option but to pay. The request of Woolfe to rebuild his Wine Street premises, with a view to extending the building upwards, was made in 1598. This application was subsequent to the local and national legislation against playing, which certainly suggests that he was taking advantage of the situation for his own benefit; the numerous

visits of metropolitan players into this theatre may have prompted the renovations. The mayor may also have been supportive of a private playhouse in the early seventeenth century as it meant that he could appease the patrons without paying the forfeit for permitting Guildhall plays. Certainly, there was some impetus behind the ‘reasonable causes’ Woolfe had given to the feoffees for permission to remodel *No.X ch/7*, and given his status as a merchant, these reasons were probably motivated by the need to make more money out of the project. Susan Cerasano has categorised the 1590s as ‘an auspicious decade for playhouse owners’ and that it ‘has become commonplace to speak of the 1590s as a time when the capitalist playhouse had become a relatively stable economic institution’.¹²¹ This theory is based upon London playhouses in Cerasano’s investigation, but can be equally applied to Bristol. I believe that Woolfe was reacting to the frequency of visits by noblemen’s players who had played in Bristol throughout the sixteenth century and was exploiting the dramatic culture of the city in his establishment of the Wine Street playhouse, possibly in conjunction with the support of the aldermanic bench. The audiences at the Blackfriars theatre were willing to pay more for the ‘exclusivity’ of watching a play indoors, and perhaps Woolfe was capitalising on such a marketing strategy; if he could house all of his discerning customers in one controlled space then he could guarantee revenue from each spectator: ‘the economics of theatre made it imperative to include as wide a paying audience as possible’.¹²² Woolfe sought profit from the enterprise as with any other investment and may have used the ‘celebrity’ factor associated with Alleyn’s visit in 1593 as a further advertising strategy to draw in audiences.¹²³

¹²¹ S. P. Cerasano, ‘Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor and the Rise of Celebrity in the 1590s’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 18 (2005), 47-58 (p. 47).

¹²² Kathleen McLuskie and Felicity Dunsworth, ‘Patronage and the Economics of Theatre’, p. 426.

¹²³ Cerasano, ‘New Model Actor’, p. 49. Alleyn was renowned for his ‘two signature roles’ of Barabus and Tamburlaine by the 1590s.

That Woolfe was conscious of potential future constraints against playing in Bristol at his death in 1614 is suggestive that the drama was under threat from some form of authority earlier in the period, although he was not specific. This could in fact be a reference to a rival impresario, perhaps the other private patron Richard Barker, or by one of the signatories on his will who may have benefited from a forfeit on the lease. The payments from the Wine Street playhouse dry up in 1625-6, but rent is paid by Woolfe's family for a property directly opposite.

The available data for the Caroline period suggest that a decline in corporate rewards did take place in the city, although considering the choice of two other venues, it is not surprising that the Bristol Corporation paid less to players. Entries into the Mayor's Audits for summer 1631 record two visits by travelling players, although the location is not specified. The King's Men were dismissed with a reward of £2, and the Palsgrave's Players received the same for an actual performance, although again the venue is not specified.¹²⁴ This vague recording of these civic events may be indicative of the Chamberlains losing their 'fancy' for the patrons of troupes which were not the royally-endorsed companies, or were intentionally vague in their phrasing to disguise where the plays were taking place.¹²⁵ Glynne Wickham suggests that civic dignitaries may have been hosting the players in their private houses, to circumvent such rules: 'a discovery was made in mayor's parlours up and down the country that means existed to defy the spirit of the law without breaking the letter; to pay those actors licensed in their profession a gratuity to refrain from performing in the town'.¹²⁶ The refusal by the Corporation in 1635 for 'Perry not to play' may have had more to do with the actor than

¹²⁴ REED *Bristol*, p. 234. Both troupes are recorded as visiting between 25 June and 29 September 1631.

¹²⁵ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, I, p. 333.

¹²⁶ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages* II:ii, p. 106, cited in the Barker notes.

what he represented.¹²⁷ William Perry was a notorious itinerant who had aroused the authorities' attention as early as 1616 when he was castigated in writing, alongside Martin Slater, manager of the Children of Bristol:

And whereas William Perrie haveinge likewise gotten a warrant whereby he and a certain Company of idle p[er]sons with him doe travel and play under the name and title of the Children of his Ma^{ty}s Revels, to the great abuse of his Ma^{ty}s service.¹²⁸

Perry had, unsuccessfully, applied to be the manager of a provincial company in September 1629 who were to be called 'His Majesty's servants for the city of York' but after receiving a licence to run the Red Bull decided to remain in north London.¹²⁹ He may have taken his metropolitan company on the road in 1635, but his prior reputation prohibited his welcome in Bristol. These entries into the Mayor's Audits do, however, tell us something about positive mayoral attitudes to traveling players, that they were willing to pay the strollers, even if they didn't play either in deference to their patron, or that the mayor felt the need to compensate the players for their trouble. Andrew Gurr has argued that the entries into the municipal account books in the early seventeenth century are not an accurate depiction of dramatic activity:

the use of civic records as the basic evidence for the spread and frequency of visits by professional playing companies under the Stuarts ignores a long-running contest between the players and the civic authorities.¹³⁰

This contest was won in Bristol, by the players and their supporters in the merchant community, with the establishment of the independent playing places. It is unfortunate that there is simply not the evidence to state for certain whether the players or the civic authorities were victorious in Stuart Gloucester and Tewkesbury. Thus the 'dramatic jigsaw puzzle' of early modern playing cannot be totally completed for the region.

¹²⁷ REED *Bristol*, p. 239.

¹²⁸ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, p. 75.

¹²⁹ Wickham, *Early English Stages* I:i, p. 142.

¹³⁰ Gurr, 'Loss of records', p. 2.

However, I hope that this thesis has examined the ‘central issue’ of the reception to players by municipal and ecclesiastical officials. The findings from the extant evidence testify that economic determinants had no impact on the reactions of Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bristol to travelling players as the actors were usually paid according to the tariff system, even when the region was suffering from slumps in trade. The importance of the patron was the strongest motive in welcoming the strollers, which explains the detailed records from 1559, when the mayor was required to welcome noblemen’s companies, to 1597 when the privilege was revoked. Despite such obligation to receive travelling players, each town reacted in differing ways to drama as a cultural phenomenon. Gloucester appeared to indulge the travelling players so long as it was politically expedient but making certain to control the output when it was necessary, such as after the challenges in the 1580s by Leicester on her electoral independence. Both the church and council of Tewkesbury welcomed drama as purely a form of communal entertainment, desiring to make little or no profit from the enterprise. The Common Council of Bristol obviously supported playing in the city during Elizabeth’s reign, as the Mayor’s Audits are meticulously detailed with dates, patrons’ names and occasionally play titles, and the city could legitimately comply with any seventeenth century legislation against playing as the responsibility to welcome itinerant entertainers had already been conferred upon the merchant community and their independent playhouses. That such a small region could boast three towns with entirely different attitudes to drama demonstrates the range of provincial playing in early modern England, the importance of examining towns on the data available rather than presuming that every one reacted in a similar way to London and the essential

work that the REED project has undertaken in preparing the evidence, enabling theatrical micro-histories such as this one to be completed.

APPENDIX:

Plates, Maps and
Plans of Playing
Places in
Gloucester,
Tewkesbury and
Bristol



**Plate I:
Elizabethan tenement of John Taylor, Swordbearer of Gloucester,
100 Westgate Street**



**Plate II:
Eighteenth century fascia of The Dick Whittington,
100 Westgate Street**

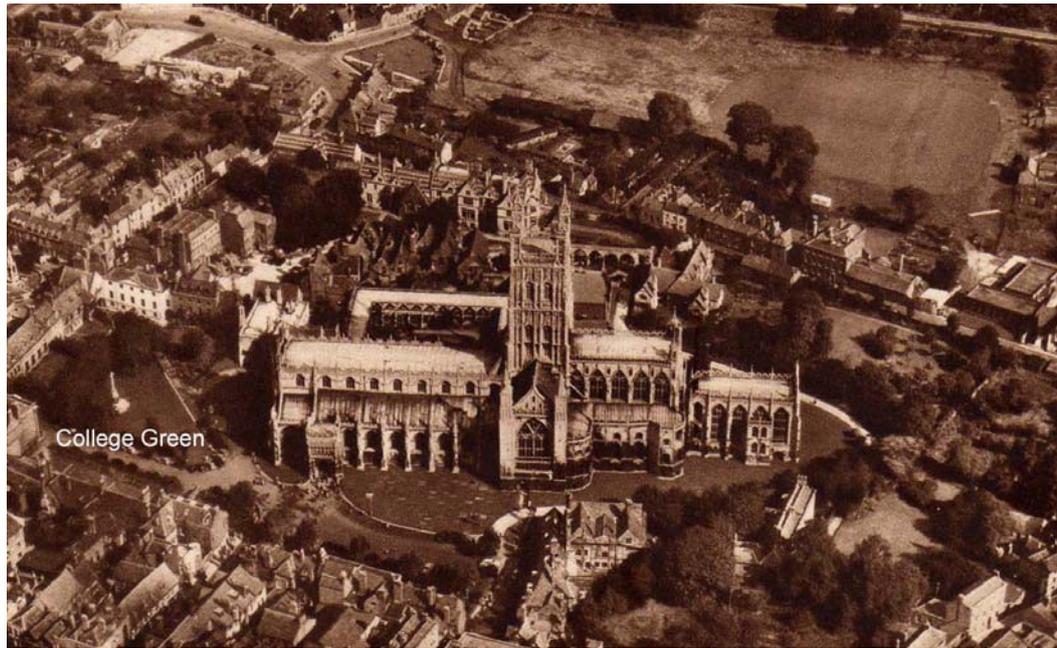


Plate III:
Gloucester Cathedral and College Green



Plate IV:
The galleried courtyard of The New Inn, Northgate Street, Gloucester,
which is often identified as an Elizabethan playing place, although evidence for
this is lacking.

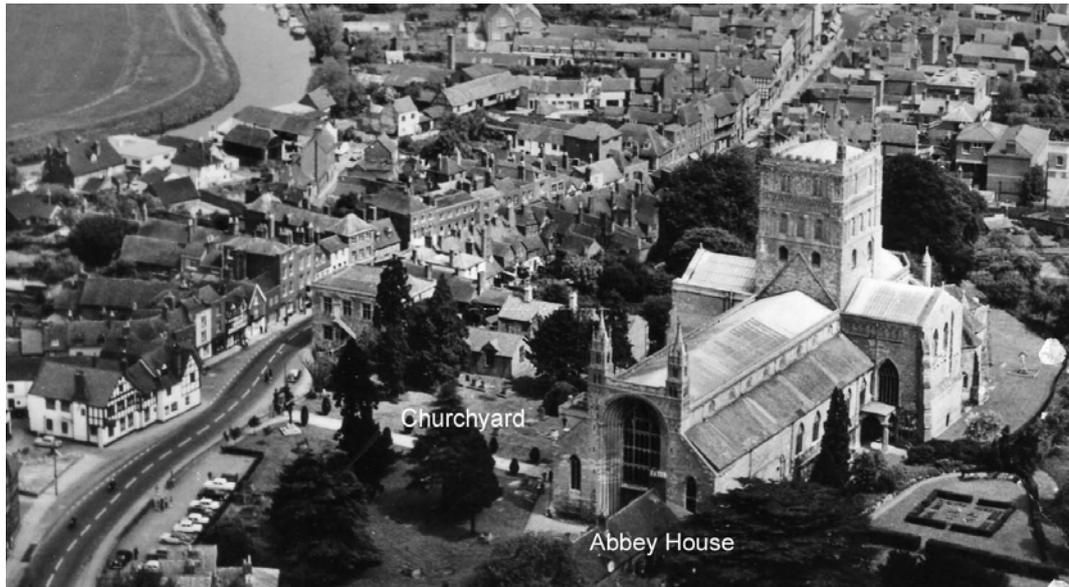


Plate V:
Tewkesbury Abbey Precinct
 The churchyard and Abbey House were rented privately by parishioners



Plate VI:
Millicheape's Alley, Tewkesbury
 [Now Old Baptist Chapel Court]
 The timber building was Edward Millicheape's house until its sale in 1620
 and is now known as the Old Baptist Chapel



Plate VII:
Ground floor of Old Baptist Chapel, with an open gallery above the pulpit

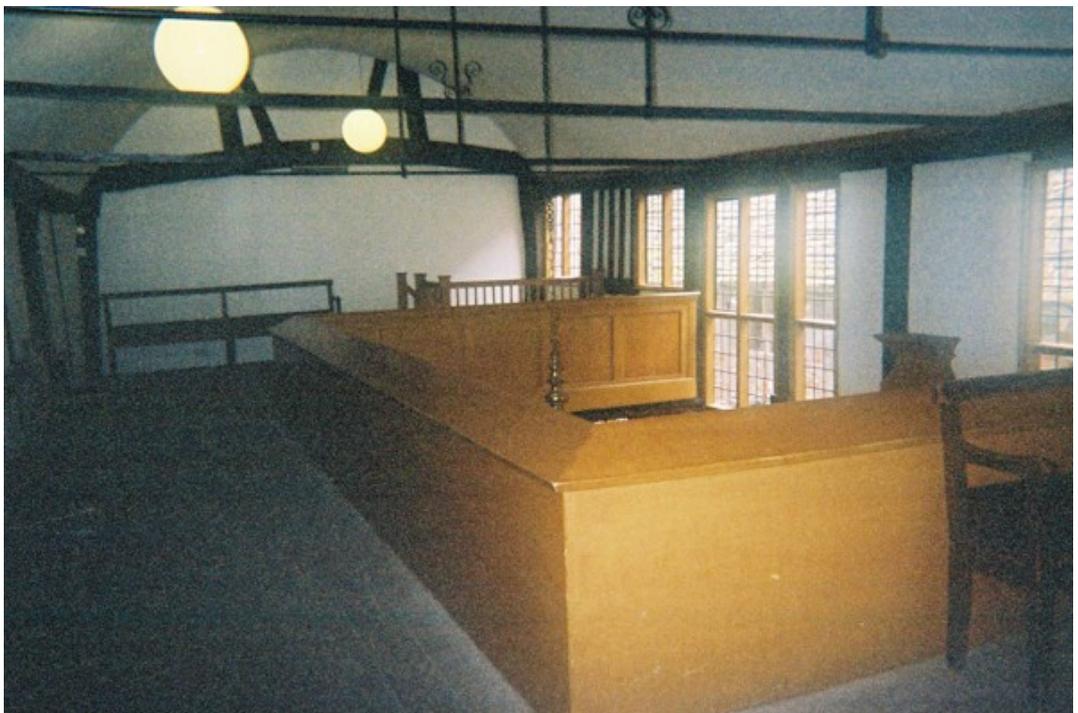


Plate VIII:
Upper Floor of Old Baptist Chapel, with gallery



Plate IX:
View from gallery in Old Baptist Chapel



Plate X:
Nos. 16 and 18 St. Mary's Lane, Tewkesbury
These buildings served as a Quaker meeting house



Plate XI:
The site of the Quaker burial ground where Millicheape's barn once stood



Plate XII:
The view from St. Mary's Lane, demonstrating how close the Quaker meeting house is to the Abbey

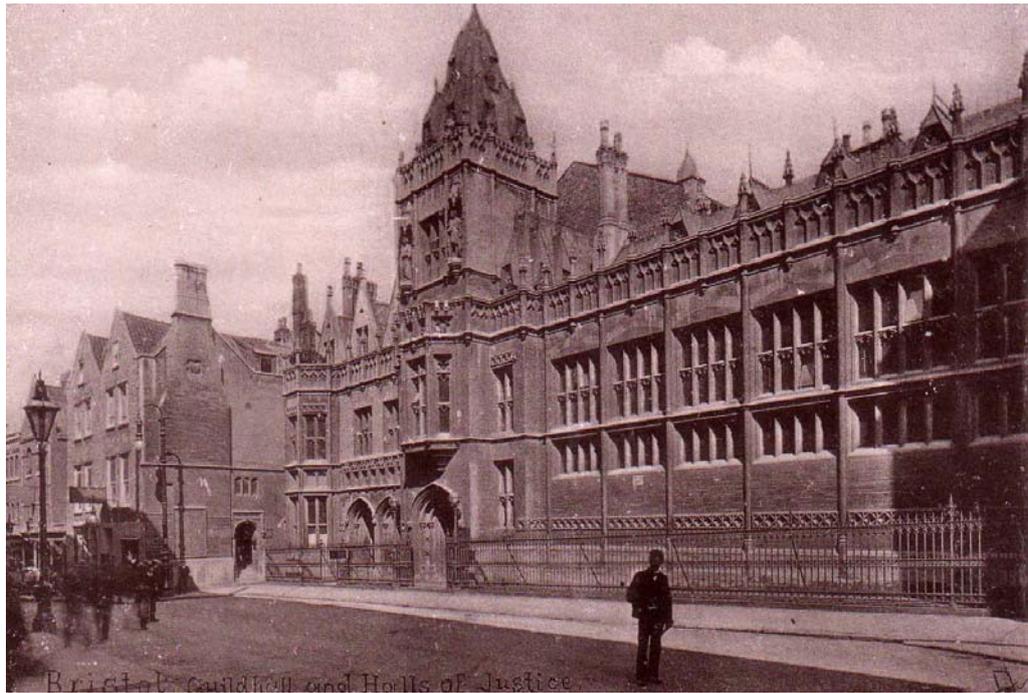


Plate XIII:
Bristol Guildhall, Broad Street, after the 1843 renovations



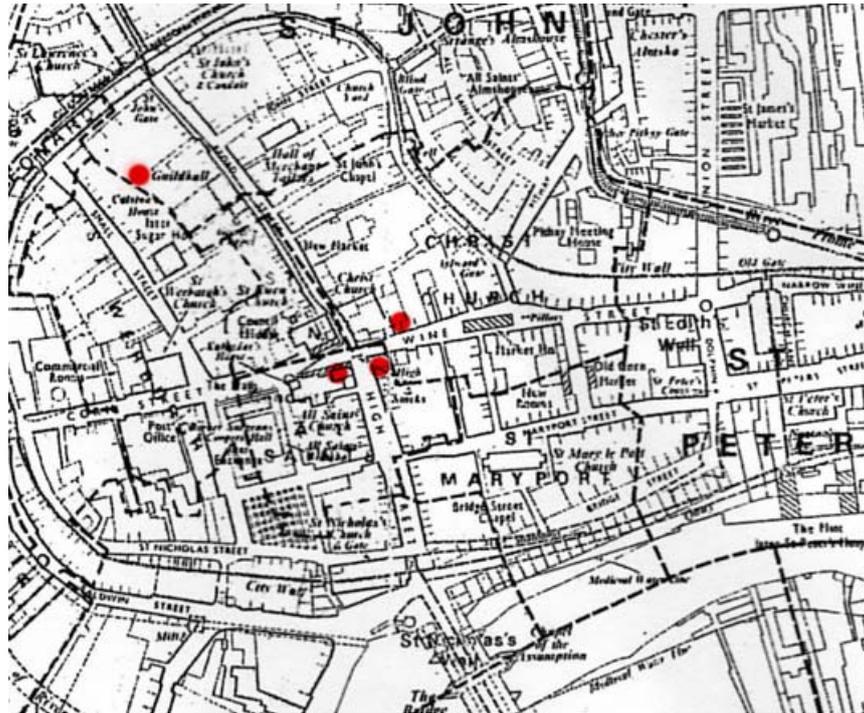
Plate XIV:
The corner of Wine Street and Broad Street, Bristol
The Reed building is built on or close to the plot of No.X ch/1



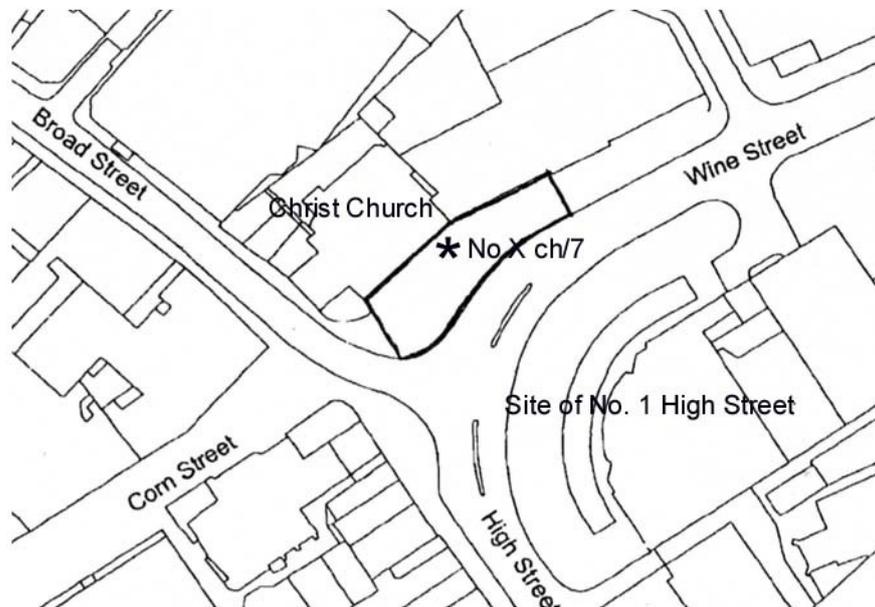
Plate XV:
Wine Street, leading to High Cross
The Prudential Buildings in the foreground now number 11-19 Wine Street



Plate XVI:
St. James's Churchyard, Horsefair.
Many plays probably took place in this area, although there are no entries in the parish accounts to corroborate this



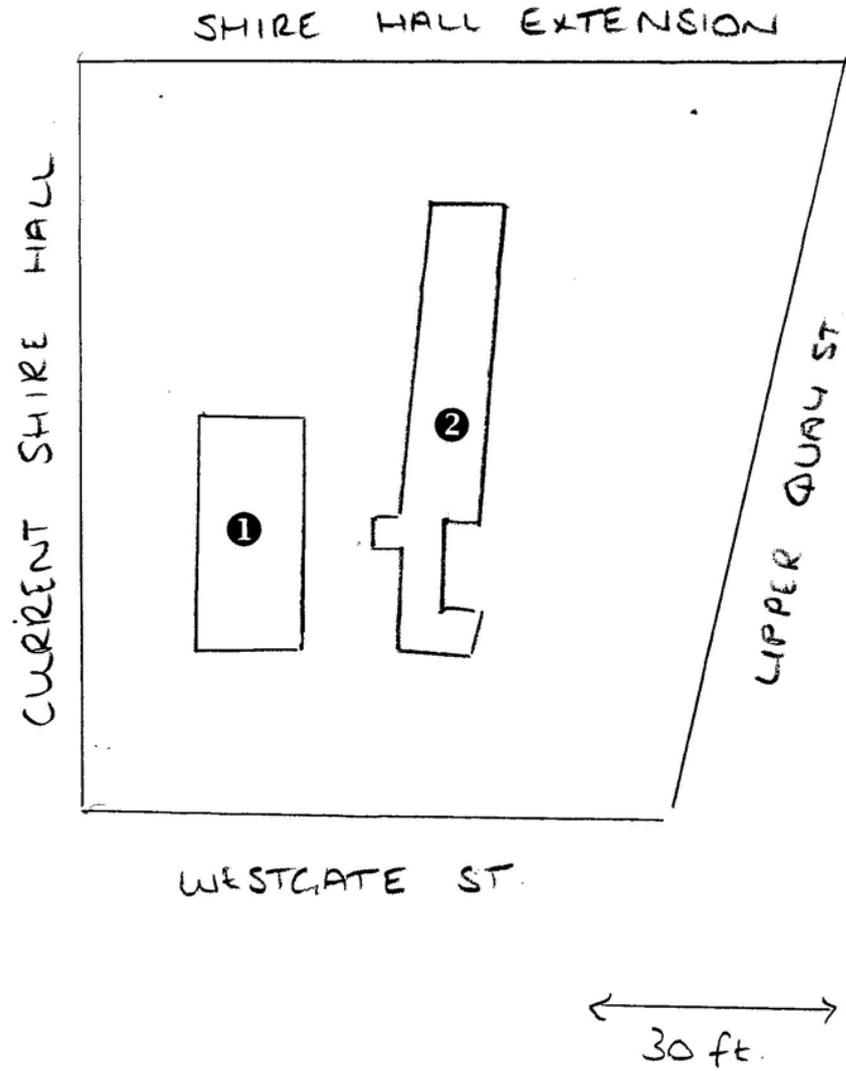
**Map III:
Bristol Central Parishes and Early Modern Playing Places
[Water Supply Plan, c. 1820, Courtesy of BRO]**



**Map IV:
The High Cross Area and the site of the Woolfe Playhouse[s]
[Courtesy of Bristol Council Planning Department]**

Gloucester Boothall and Inn

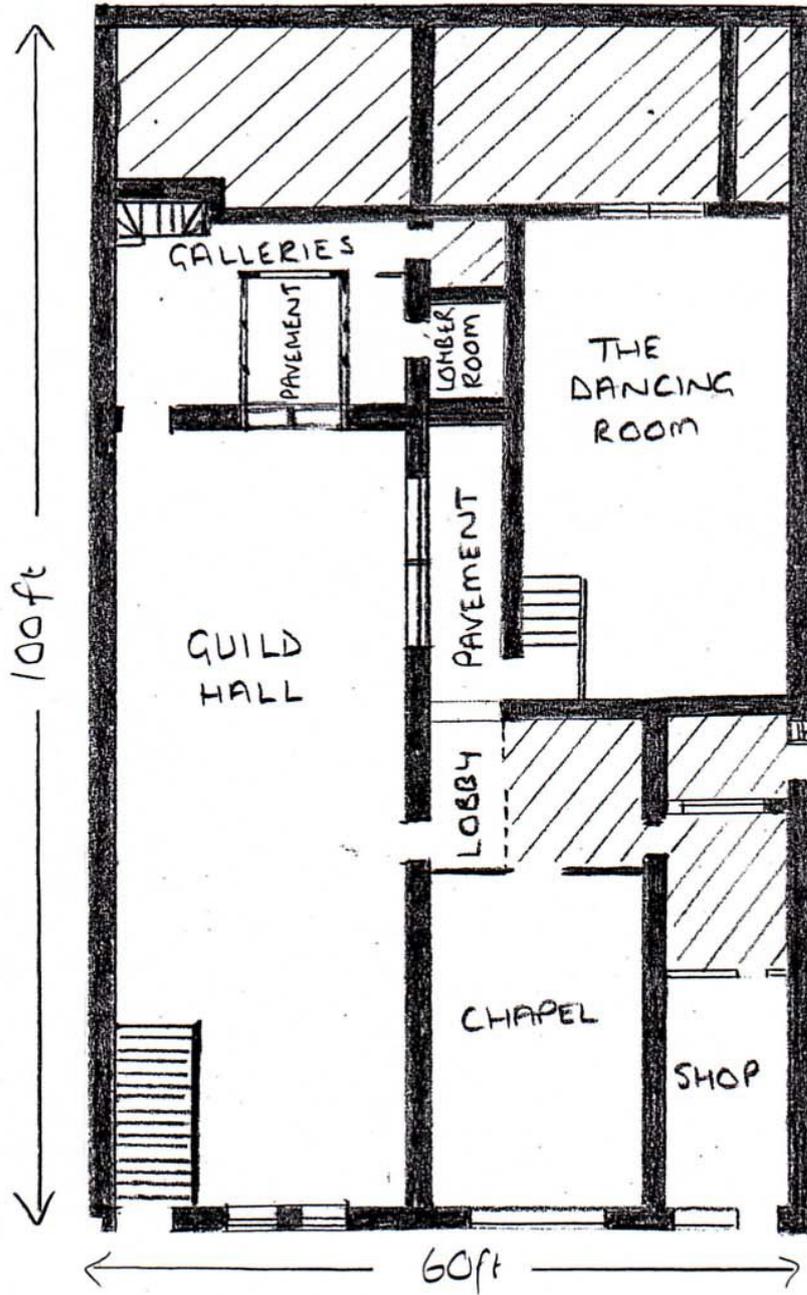
(c. 1499, from a sketch in Abbott, 'Excavations at Shire Hall', p. 96)



- ① BOOTHALL
- ② THE BOOTHALL INN

Plan of Bristol Guildhall c. 1755

(Based on the first floor plan in Dermott Harding, facing p. 228)



 = PRIVATE PROPERTY

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