

## A NOTE ON THE CHESTER PAGEANT ROUTE

*Elizabeth Baldwin*

Although, as a medieval dramatist, one knows that one is somehow different and given to behaviour that might be considered abnormal, the awareness of that fact is usually suppressed until some chance remark from a non-medievalist brings it home. This occurred to me after the Records of Early English Drama launch at Chester for the *Cheshire Including Chester* volume. I was attending with my mother and husband, both non-medievalists but staunch supporters of medieval drama, medievalists, REED, and all associated idiosyncrasies. One of the events of the day was a walk around the pageant route of Chester, led by David Mills and Larry Clopper. As they have differing opinions on the exact route, we were in effect simultaneously covering two slightly different routes, in the pouring rain, with stops at every station for explanation and polite debate. A few days afterwards, my mother asked, without any ironic intention, whether I had walked around Chester when Peter Meredith's festschrift was published. I was puzzled until I discovered that she had assumed that walking around a pageant route was simply part of the ceremony of launching any book on medieval drama. Which is indicative of something, although I'm not sure if it is the enduring nature of the medieval love of civic ceremonial (clearly my mother felt that there ought to be some ceremony to the event) or just that medieval dramatists are a bit weird.

As far as I can tell, the debate over the pageant route remains unresolved, with David and Larry sticking to their opinions, and everyone else sticking to their umbrellas. Having walked through part of the route many times (I discover) on my way to the Record Office, I'm slightly more inclined to favour David's argument that they would want to push the waggons up as few hills as possible. Especially if it rained. But what with the traffic noise and trying to keep dryish, I missed some of the commentary, and don't have a clear final sense of a single route. The maps provided returned to their essential mush fairly quickly in the rain, so I can't work from those. But in spite of all this, and inspired by the idea that as the third editor of the volume I ought to have *some* opinion on such

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an important matter, I wish to make my own small contribution to the debate.

Larry raised a new possibility near the end of the walk when he suggested that Duke Street, which runs past the Record Office off Bridge Street, was the St Tola's Lane mentioned in the records. As we walked down it my husband, who is an economist but has been reasonably well indoctrinated by me to the joys of saint-spotting, whispered, 'Who *was* St Toeless?' I had to admit ignorance, although I did come up with a brief possible *Vita* — the usual sort of thing, a riotous debauched youth for St Toeless, during which he was frequently legless, followed by conversion and martyrdom by having his toes cut off. Later, at the Cathedral, we were whiling away time in the bookshop, and I decided to look St Tola up in the *Dictionary of Saints*. There I found that Tola, Ola, and Olave are alternative names for the same saint. And that brings me to my contribution to the Chester pageant route: one street further up Bridge Street from Duke Street is St Olave Street. It is, if anything, less steep than Duke Street, it avoids the last bit of downhill on Bridge Street (both of which should appeal to David), and the name 'St Olave's' is the same as 'St Tola's' (which should appeal to Larry). I freely confess that I have no idea where exactly the waggon was coming from (other than Bridge Street), or where it ended up, but if it went down St Tola's Lane, then I say it was St Olave's Street rather than Duke Street.

And now I have an opinion on the Chester pageant route, and can feel that the ceremony of the launch, and the walk, and the rain, has been properly completed.

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