

THE KING'S PEACE AND THE PLAY: The York Corpus Christi Eve Proclamation

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The *Proclamacio ludi corporis christi facienda in vigilia corporis christi* recorded on fols 254^v–255^r of the A/Y Memorandum Book is one of the least altered of the set of pages which is our main evidence for the organisation of York's Corpus Christi Play.¹ Apart from the heading, which seems to have been written (later?) by Common Clerk Roger Burton; the addition about the exact amount of a fine; and of course the last paragraph,² it is all in the same hand and unaltered from 1415, or soon after. Here we have, then, a continuous tradition with one major adaptation, attached to but separate from the Play. I thought it might be illuminating to look at the original text as a whole, and then to contextualise it, using the good old legal questions, otherwise Kipling's six honest serving men: 'What and Why and When / And How and Where and Who', or, in the original Latin (where they are seven): *Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando?* — though not necessarily in that order.³

QUID? ('What?')

It takes the standard form of a proclamation⁴ (*see over page*):

1. *Call* for attention.
2. Here it launches straight into the meat of the matter: some proclamations start with a 'forasmuch as ...' explaining or even propagandising the context.⁵ 'We command' is a performative verb; the act of proclaiming is *performative* in the original Austinian sense.⁶
3. It states the *authority* on which these injunctions are made: essential because in this case proclaiming is effectively enacting. Here it is the King and the civic authority; and the sheriffs, the agents of both.
4. *Injunction* followed by *Penalty* – repeated if necessary, when directed to different specific groups of people. Some *Exceptions* may be made.

CUR? ('Why?')

It is clearly a public order directive. Like all public order directives, it largely tells you what not to do. But what is it for?

Cry	Oiez &c.
Performative Authority	We comand of þe kynges behalue and þe mair & þe shirefs of þis Citee
Article 1A	þ[at] no man go armed in þis Citee with swerdes ne with carli[l] axes ne none othir defences in distourbaunce of þe kinges pees & þe play or hyndering of þe processoun of Corpore christi
Article 1B <i>Exceptions</i> <i>Penalty</i>	And þat þai leue þare hernas in þare Ines saufand knyghtes [and] sqwyers of wirship þat awe haue swerdes borne eftir þ[ame] of payne of forfaiture of þaire Wapenn & inprisonment [of þaire] bodys
Article 2 <i>Injunction</i> <i>Penalty</i>	And þat men þat brynges furth ... page[n]tes þat þai play at the places þat is assigned þerfore & now[ere] elles of þe payne of forfaiture to be raysed þat is orday[ned] þerfore] [þ]at ys to say xl s [<i>later addition</i>]
Article 3 <i>Injunction</i>	And þat menn of craftes & all othir menn þat fy[n]des torche]s þat þai com furth in array & in þe manere as it [has been us]ed & custumed be fore þis tyme noght haueyng wape[n]

<i>Exceptions</i> <i>Penalties</i>	saveyin] keepers of þe pagentz And officers þat ar kepers of þe pees of [pay]ne of forfaiture of þaire fraunchis & þaire bodyes to prisoun
Article 4 <i>Injunction</i> <i>Penalty</i>	And þat ylk a player þat [shal] play þat he be redy in his pagent at [costum]able tyme of payne of inprisonment & þe forfaiture to be rayسد þat is ordand þer fore

FIG. 2: 1415: York City Archives, MS E20, fol. 254v.
Proclamacio ludi corporis christi facienda in vigilia corporis christi.
Heading in Roger Burton's writing

We tend to think of it as an advertisement. But this isn't a Banns – nor is it ever described as such. Chester had both Banns *and* proclamation (1531/2, 1539/40).⁷ The York Paternoster Play and the Creed Play had banns, presumably because they were departures from the norm:

CREDE PLAY

þat is to say þe furst bone to be cryed on Whissonmonday [8 June]
þe next at maudeleyn day [Wednesday 22 July] & þe play on seynt
bartylmewe Evyn [Sunday 23 August] &c ...

12 May 1495: House Book 7 fol. 135^r; REED 177

PATER NOSTER PLAY

and that the furst bayn or messynger shall Ryde in dyver Streetes
within this Citie appon St George day [Saturday 23 April] next and
the other messynger to Ryde in like manner vppon Whitson
Monday [30 May] to thentent that the Contry may have knowlege
that the head [*sic*: said?] play shalbe playd appon Corpus Christi day
next [9 June] /

20 April 1558: HB 22 fol. 125^v: YCR 5 181–2; REED 327

The Corpus Christi Play, it seems, didn't. The Proclamation indubitably served as an advert, if one were needed, but it had another more serious purpose, which also explains WHO and WHEN.

Corpus Christi Eve was one of the four occasions in the year when the Sheriffs were statutorily obliged to ride and proclaim the King's Peace. This seems originally to have taken the form of drawing public attention to the Statute of Winchester (1285), the *locus classicus* of provisions for the maintenance of public order.⁸ This statute was invoked several times during our period. The nearest in time to the Corpus Christi Proclamation was the statute of 7 Richard II (1383), a follow-up to a writ of the previous year in response to the uprising popularly known as 'the Peasants' Revolt'. It calls on the Sheriffs throughout England to make proclamation of the Statute of Winchester, or at least its tenor, with a comprehensive summary of its main heads.

... & au fyn qe homme ne se purra desore excuser par ignorance de mesme lestatut, est auxint assentuz qe chescun Viscont Dengleterre soit tenuz decy en avant en propre persone de faire proclamacion de mesme lestatut quatre foitz lan en chescun hundred de sa baillie & par ses bailiffs en chescune ville marchee sibien deinz franchises come dehors.

... and to the Intent that no Man shall excuse himself by Ignorance of the same Statute, it is also assented, That every Sheriff of England shall be bound from henceforth in proper Person to make Proclamation of the same Statute four Times in the Year in every Hundred of his Bailiwick, and by his Bailiffs in every Market Town, as well within Liberties as without.

Statutes of the Realm 2 33

It was, in turn, reinforced in 5 Henry VI (12.10.1426) by a writ commanding the sheriffs 'to cause proclamation to be made in every hundred [court], and in markets, fairs, and all other places where a company or assembly of people shall be' of the Statute of Winchester, and the statute of 7 Richard II, 'the tenor whereof the king is sending in form of patent, to the end that no man may excuse him by ignorance thereof'. The sheriff is then to deliver this writ to his successor at the end of his term, so that 'proclamation thereof may be made four times a year'.⁹

The King's (or Queen's) Peace is an ideal state more noted in the breach than the observance. The statute of 5 Edward II (1311/1312) comes nearest to a definition:¹⁰

Derechef ordeine est qe la pees le Roi soit fermement gardie per tute le Realme issint qe chesqun puisse sauvement aler, venir, & demorrer solom la lei & lusage du Realme.

MOREOVER, It is Ordained, That the Peace of the King be firmly kept throughout the Realm, so that every one may safely go, come, and tarry, according to the Law & Usage of the Realm.

It is about safeguarding person and property: not exactly the concept of a naked virgin being able to travel unmolested from one end of the kingdom to the other carrying a sackful of gold, but as the traditional motif has it:

God man he wes 7 micel æ wes of him: durste nan man misdō wið oðer on his time. Pais he makede men 7 dær. Wua sua bare his byrthen gold 7 sylure, durste nan man sei to him naht bute god.¹¹

He was a good man, and held in great dread: no-one dared to offend against another in his time. He made peace for [protected?] men and animals. If someone were to be carrying a pack of gold or silver, no-one would dare to speak him other than fair.

Note how this peace depends on a proper fear of the man himself. It was vested in the person of the king. When a king died, his peace died with him, and it was understood that you could take advantage of this. It was therefore crucial that his successor should proclaim his or her peace as soon as possible. Fortunately the lag in communications usually meant that the death of the old incumbent was announced by the new.¹²

In York the Sheriffs' Riding was known as 'making the King's proclamation'.

... Robert ffous & Iohn Gegges sheriffes of the City of york accordyng to auncyent & laudable Custome of the seid City vsyd withoute tyme of memory to ye contrary & also accordyng to the worshipfull ordynance of the same Citie shall solemply ryde with per mynysters & officers betwixt the feastes of seynt Mighell archangell & the Natyuyte of our lorde & **make the kynges proclamacion** accordyng to the auncyent Custome of the forseid Citie ffor the honour & worship of the same Citie ...

28 November 1521: HB 10 fol 19v: YCR 3 75: REED 223–4

In 1551, this was described as 'to see the **kynges peace** kept'.¹³

The earliest reference to a Sheriffs' Riding is this very Corpus Christi proclamation of 1415. The York Sheriffs were created only in 1396, when by Charter of Richard II the City became a county. Before that there were three Bailiffs.¹⁴

QUANDO? (When?)

The Sheriffs rode to make proclamation, as prescribed, four times a year. The first and presumably the most important marked the election (21 September, St Matthew's Day), and oath-taking (29 September, Michaelmas) of the new Sheriffs.¹⁵ The Sheriffs' inauguration date was the same as in London, and coincides roughly with the beginning of the Michaelmas Law Term.¹⁶ In York the actual Riding took place any time between 29 September and Christmas, though the antiquarian Francis Drake says in his *Eboracum* that in his time it was 'usually on Wednesday, eight days after Martinmas' (11 November), which is quite late.¹⁷ It had the double function of reminding people of the rule of law and order, and introducing the new Sheriffs.

After the Riding the Sheriffs gave a dinner at their own costs, which is where we get most of our evidence from as they, especially in the sixteenth century, did their best to wriggle out of it. Our earliest piece of evidence of this inaugural Riding, from 1500,¹⁸ is a list of complaints against ex-Sheriff George Essex on the grounds that

- he had no followers to accompany him in the Riding;
- he did not find suitable table cloths and towels for the dinner;
- the chamberlains, Common Clerk, and the Mayor's sergeants were not bidden to it;
- he habitually went out without having the mace borne before him.

A sneaking sympathy develops when you realise that the City Council operated the well-known METH principle that if you don't come to the meeting you get volunteered to host the next one.¹⁹ In 1558 the Council minutes that at the time of election one Sheriff-elect was overseas and the other was sick.²⁰ Being on your death bed was no excuse. On 2 December 1504, they were faced with the problem that

Oliver Middelton one and elder of the Shireffs of this Citie is now so sore seke and lykly to departe from this mortall warlde unto the mercy of God and upon Tuesday come a seven nyght the Shireffs of this Citie ar accustomed to ryde and make the dyner as hath ben used heretofore ...

The Council decision was, 'if it please God that he lyff to none [noon] of the said Tuysday then the said Oliver to bere the half charge of the dyner of his awn cost'.²¹ (This puts the projected date of the Riding that year at 10 December.) Annoyingly for us, however, because they were paid for by

the Sheriffs at their own costs, neither the Riding nor the dinner were official expenses, and so accounts for them were not returned to Exchequer.²² If they had been, we would presumably know far more detail about the proceedings.

The other three Ridings were massed together in the summer: Corpus Christi Eve (a movable feast), Midsummer Eve (23 June: 24 is St John's Day and a quarter day), and St Peter's Eve (31 July: St Peter ad vincula is 1 August, or Lammas).²³ The first two can of course get pretty close to each other, and even, once in a blue moon, coincide: Easter has to be at its latest on 25 April.²⁴ It was suddenly plain why the notes of remarkable events in the mayoralty of William Holme (1546/7) include 'Also Corpus Cristi day and mydsomer day fell bothe uppon one day',²⁵ which must have been administratively awkward: two Ridings scheduled for the same day.

The choice of at least one of these dates may have been affected by the Archbishop's Lammas fair, 'a two-day gathering which began on the afternoon of 31 July'.²⁶ Like Corpus Christi, it fulfils the criterion of being an occasion when there was a great confluence of people — and presumably when fights might break out.²⁷ However, the records most often mention the Ridings of Michaelmas and Corpus Christi; Midsummer appears much less; and St Peter's Eve fades out completely. Perhaps the fact that the Archbishop took over the policing of the city from the Sheriffs for the time of his patronal Fair (the Minster is dedicated to St Peter) caused problems with jurisdiction.²⁸ In 1553, the year after all ridings were cancelled because of the plague, they were reinstated for Corpus Christi Day and Midsummer Eve, but were 'to be spared on Saynt petre even'.²⁹ Four years later it isn't even mentioned:

It was nowe alsoo aggreed that the Shirefes of this Citie shall ride with harnessed men on Corpus christi day & mydsomar even accustomed ...

11 June 1557: HB 22 fol. 53^v; REED 323; not in YCR

Intentionally or not, this seems to have been a permanent cancellation,³⁰ although the timing seems odd, because in 1557 the two Ridings were less than a week apart.

As for the hour of day, in 1569 it was 'Agreed also that pro[cla]mation accustomed for peace keypyng shalbe on Moneday in wytsonweeke and to begyne at iiij^{or} of the klok in thaftre none'; but whether this was a new timing or the traditional one we cannot tell.³¹ Once the Riding settled

down as the Midsummer Show of armour it was scheduled to start at 9 a.m.³²

There was also a spoof riding on St Thomas's Day (17 December) by Yule and Yule's Wife in which the Sheriffs' Sergeants were involved.³³ This event has been revived in the present-day city by the York Waits in the 'festive carnival' spirit. According to Roger Dodsworth the antiquarian (?1585–1654), from whom Drake ultimately got the information,³⁴ it made proclamation in the same terms as the ordinary Sheriffs' Riding, but added the rider that in the topsy-turvy world over Christmas:

... all manner of Whores and Theiues, Dice-Players, Carders,
and all other vnthrifty ffolke be welcome to the towne, whether
they come late or early, att the Reuerence of the high ffeast of
Youle, till the twelue dayes be passed.³⁵

This was probably part of the reason why the Archbishop and Dean took against it.³⁶ It is noteworthy that in the pro-Yule broadside, the Sergeants (not the Sheriffs) are mentioned as 'the noble spreaders & publishers of this Mystically and miraculous nut' (Drake says that the Yule proclamation is made by the Sheriffs' Sergeant),³⁷ and that the Council minute on the Archbishop's letter refers to 'the Sheryffes Seriantes'; both of which suggest that it was seen as a non-serious affair, though the Sheriffs graced it with their presence, at least at the beginning of the event.³⁸

QUOMODO ('In What Manner?')

The antiquarian Francis Drake gives a version of the winter proclamation (see facing page) which he says is taken from 'a manuscript which is in my hands, the collector unknown'.³⁹ 'This proclamation' says Drake, 'I have given at length as it was antiently used in the city, what is used now [i.e. in 1736] is much abridged'. To us it seems strangely random, because not only do the Sheriffs proclaim the King's Peace, they also proclaim the assizes of bread and ale, and the gist of various other public-order statutes and bylaws, for many of which there are chapter and verse in A/Y and the House Books. However, they cover the main heads which the manuscript cited by Drake says come under the jurisdiction of the Sheriffs' Turn (court),⁴⁰ and comparison with the London *Liber Albus* suggests that this format is standard:

[These are the articles of ancient usage, as to the assize of bread, and
of ale, and of other victuals, and as to various trades, in the City of

O yes, &c. we command in our liege lord's behalf the king of *England* whom God save and keep, that the peace of the king be well kept and maintained within this city, and the suburbs thereof by night and by day with all manner of men, both gentle and simple, in pain that falls thereon.

Also we command that no man walk armed within the city by night or by day, except the officers assigned for keeping the peace, on pain of forfeiting his armour and his body to prison.

Also we command that the bakers of the city bake good bread, and of good boulder, and sell after the assize, &c. and that no baker nor no huckster put to sale any manner of bread, unless that it be sealed with a seal delivered from the sheriffs.

Also we command that the brewers of the city brew good ale, and wholesome for mans body, and sell after the assize, and by measure ensealed.

Also that no man pass out of the city by night or by day to encounter any manner of victual coming to the city to sell, neither by water nor by land, to lett to come to the market, upon paine ordained therefore.

Also that corn brought to the market be *pursuand*, i.e. as good beneath in the sack as above, upon forfeiture of the same corn and his body to prison.

Also that corn thats once brought into to the market to sell, be not led out of the market for to keep from market-day to market-day, without licence of the sheriff or his deputys, upon pain that falls thereupon.

Also we command that no manner of man walk in the city nor in the suburbs by night without light before him, *i. e.* from **Pasche** to *Michaelmas* after ten of the clock, and from *Michaelmas* to **Pasche** after nine of the clock.

Also we command that no ostler harbour any strange man no longer than a night and a day, unless he do the sheriffs to witt, and if he do the contrary he shall answer for his deeds.

Also we command that no foreign victualer bring any victuals to the city for to sell, whether that it be flesh, or fish, and poultry, that he bring it to the market-stead limited therefore in the city, and not sell it or it come there, upon pain that falls thereupon.

Also we command that the lanes and streets of the city be cleansed of all manner of nuisance, *i. e.* of stocks, of stones, of middings, and of all manner of filth, on the paine that falls thereupon.

Also we command that no manner of men make no insurrection, congregation, or assembly within the city or suburbs in disturbance of the peace; nor in letting of the execution of the common-law, upon paine of punishment, and all that he may forfeit to the king.

Also that no *common woman* walk in the street without a **ray=hood (p)** on **her head and a wand in her hand**.

(p) A radiated, or striped, hood I, suppose.

FIG. 3: From Francis Drake *Eboracum* 1 196-7

London, that ought each year, after the feast of St Michael, to be proclaimed throughout the said City.]

In the first place, that the peace of God, and the peace of our Lord the King shall be well kept and maintained among denizens and strangers; and that the places and the lanes of the city shall be kept clear of all manner of annoyance, such as dung, rubbish, pigsties, and other annoyances, under heavy penalties ...⁴¹

etcetera. By Drake's time it was becoming a self-conscious 'heritage' event — it seems unlikely that the common women of York in the eighteenth century still wore striped hoods and carried wands — but at the time in which we are interested it was a serious legal instrument.

It is noticeable that the winter proclamation given by Drake is not the same as the Corpus Christi Eve proclamation, which is tailored to that particular occasion, and concentrates solely upon public order and the proper organisation of the Procession and the Play. Presumably the former allows it to be counted as one of the four statutory occasions. The only persons allowed to bear weapons, apart from ceremonial swords,⁴² are the officers that are 'keepers of the peace' (the Sheriffs' officials), and the 'keepers of the pageants', who are presumably the guildsmen who escorted their individual pageants,⁴³ both it appears actively engaged in policing the occasion.

We are accustomed to thinking that the force of a piece of legislation lies in its wording. The case in the later Middle Ages is rather different. There was a tension between the language of record and authority (Latin, though sometimes Anglo-French) and the vernacular of those to whom the legislation was directed (various dialects of late Middle English). It was clearly necessary that the gist should be universally understood. Add to this a culture in which a messenger bearing a letter was expected to deliver the detail and even the subtext of the message himself *viva voce*,⁴⁴ and we have an interestingly different stance on authentication, and on what constitutes the actual message.

The York House Books and to a lesser extent the A/Y Memorandum Book are full of proclamations of all sorts.⁴⁵ Some are royal in origin, some local, from the Mayor and Council. The earliest in the House Books is a proclamation of the King's peace made in York on the 13 March 1476 by the command of Richard Duke of Gloucester on his brother's behalf:

Et super hoc missa fuit et directa quedam proclamacio per ipsos Ducem et Comitem predicto Maiori ad pronuntiandum et proclamandum per totam Ciuitatem cuius Tenor sequitur in his verbis:

('And upon that, a certain proclamation was sent and directed by the same Duke and Earl [of Northumberland] to be pronounced and proclaimed throughout the whole city, whose tenor follows in these words:')

The king our souereine . lorde straitely chargith and . commaundith that nomanere man of what so euere condicion or degre he be of. make ne cause to be made any affray. or any othir thing attempt or doo / Wherthrough þe pease of the king . our saide souereine lorde shulde be broken ...

York City Archives: House Book 1 fol. 2^{v46}

The thing to note is that whereas the embedding narrative is in Latin, the proclamation is in English, just as the Corpus Christi Eve proclamation is a long English insert in the middle of a Latin text — indeed, possibly the earliest dated sustained piece of English in the A/Y Memorandum Book. On the other hand, we can see the development of English versions of certain curial formulae which serve to authenticate the spoken as well as a written document: 'The king our souereine lorde straitely chargith and commaundith ... nomanere man of what so euere condicion or degre he be of ...', which we can compare with the preamble to the Corpus Christi Eve proclamation.

In the earlier part of our period at least, written instructions (warrants) for proclamations were in Latin, but they were proclaimed in English, earlier in Norman French. Writs often ask for the *tenor* to be proclaimed, which puts a lot of responsibility on someone to do an accurate translation. According to James Doig,⁴⁷ Edward IV was the first to produce English versions of proclamations as a matter of course, which begs the question, who translated them before this? Were there as many different versions as there were sheriffs or sheriff's clerks?

Proclamation was not, as it is nowadays, a rarely-used ceremony. It was the way in which laws, national and by-, were published, that no one might excuse him by ignorance thereof. The period of the plays is also that of the drift from oral communication to written. Documents of all kinds were read out at Council meetings — there was no circulating of photocopied sheets or e-mails beforehand. (Seditious libels, however, tended to be written and posted on church doors etc, for obvious reasons

of anonymity.)⁴⁸ Reading a document out aloud not only communicated it, it authenticated it. Even after proclamations were printed and displayed in public, they were still read aloud and copied into the House Books.⁴⁹

The Corpus Christi Eve proclamation was, then, far more than a banns; it was a legal instrument. In 1419 the Carpenters and Cordwainers were accused before the Council of breaking the Skinners torches with clubs and Carlisle axes in *grauem perturbacionem pacis domini Regis & impedimentum ludi & processionis corporis christi*, virtually a translation of ‘in distourbanse of þe kynges pees & þe play or hyndering of þe processiou of Corpore christi’.⁵⁰ As late as 1554, the Girdlers were fined because on Corpus Christi Day they ‘did not forthwith folowe with their pageant in dewe course accordyng to thordynance & proclamacion þerof madebut taried an wholle hower & more in hyndrans & stoppyng of the rest of the pageantz folowyng and to the disordering of the same’, which echoes the later version of the proclamation.⁵¹

QUIS (‘Who?’)

Why were the sheriffs responsible for it? The sheriffs were the king’s representatives for the keeping of law and order. It was a tough job and expensive, but you only did it once: and you had to do it if you wanted to enter the final stage of the civic *cursus honorum*.⁵¹ They were the public face of peace-keeping, and they were the channel between the king and the public. The best description of what a Sheriff did is by Caroline Barron in *London in the Later Middle Ages*.⁵³ Many of the things she says about the clash of interests and serving two masters, the King and the City — besides the paying to get away — is true of York as well. Like London, York was fiercely independent, though it had different areas of sensitivity.

The sheriffs executed the king’s writs. A writ is essentially a writing from the king commanding that something or other be done. Because writs were directed to individuals, and thus sealed, they are to be found in the Close Rolls in The National Archives, not the Patent Rolls. PLATE 5 shows one that got away, sewn into York City Archives F 1, the York Sheriffs’ Court records. The strip of parchment at the bottom, with the addressee, was wrapped round the rolled-up letter and sealed. Royal proclamations came as or with a writ (warrant) charging the Sheriff to execute it. The writ was then by statute⁵⁴ to be returned to the Chancery endorsed with a report on the action taken. For proclamations this ought to give us the answer to WHERE?

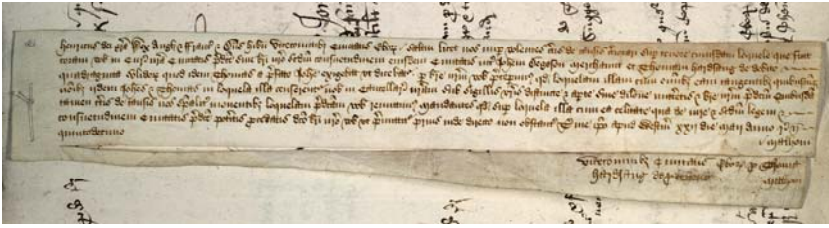


PLATE 5: York City Archives MS F1, fol. 37r:

Writ stitched into records of the Sheriffs' court

UBI? ('Where?')

It would be good to be able to show that there was a standard route around the city with traditional points at which proclamation was made: even better if it were to replicate the route of the Corpus Christi Play. Unfortunately both the surviving endorsed writs from York and the civic copies usually give some variant on 'in all places accustomed within this City'.⁵⁵ The writs themselves tend to leave it open to the Sheriffs to choose: *in singulis locis infra balliuam vestram ... ubi magis expediens fuerit & necesse* ('in individual places within your bailiwick ... where it may be most expedient and necessary').⁵⁶

Sometimes they specifically mention Thursday Market, this being one of the 'plaics as moost resorte is',⁵⁷ besides being the obvious venue for any proclamations concerning prices, weights, and measures. Pavement, the largest open space in the city, where fairs, executions, and other public events were held, is also an obvious place. When on the 24 November 1558 the Mayor and Council were summoned hastily to the Minster 'than and there to knowe further of certayne weighty matters concernyng the Quenes majestie', they were read a letter from Elizabeth announcing the death of 'our lait derest suster' together with her accession proclamation and

they went all togidres streight way unto the Pavement and there caused the said proclamaccon openly to be redde in thaudiens of a great numbere of people there ready assembled and from thens went forthwith unto Thursday market and there alsoo made an other proclamaccon.⁵⁸

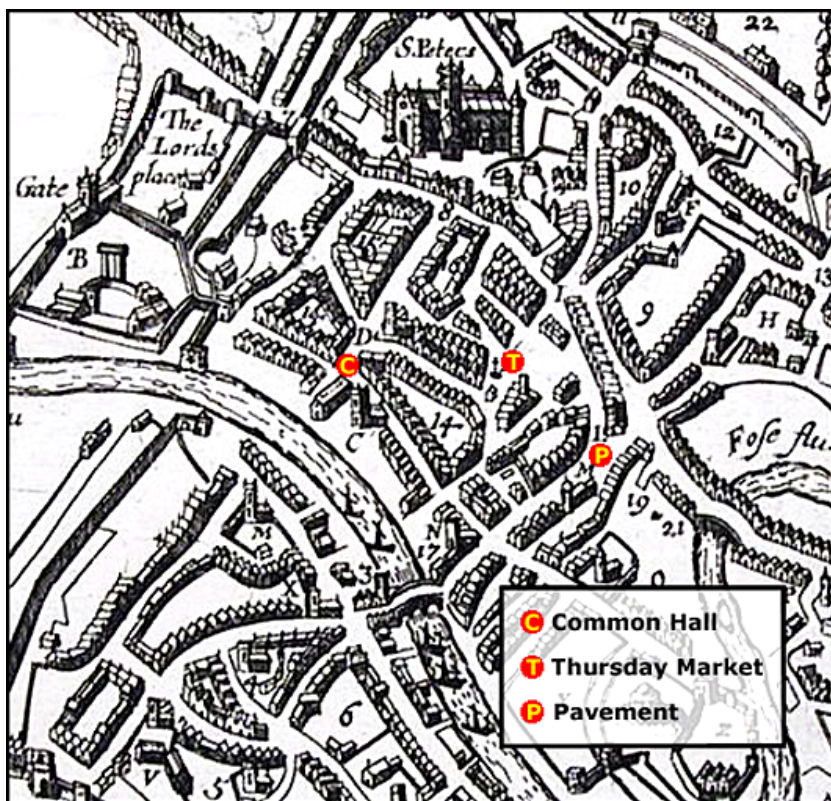
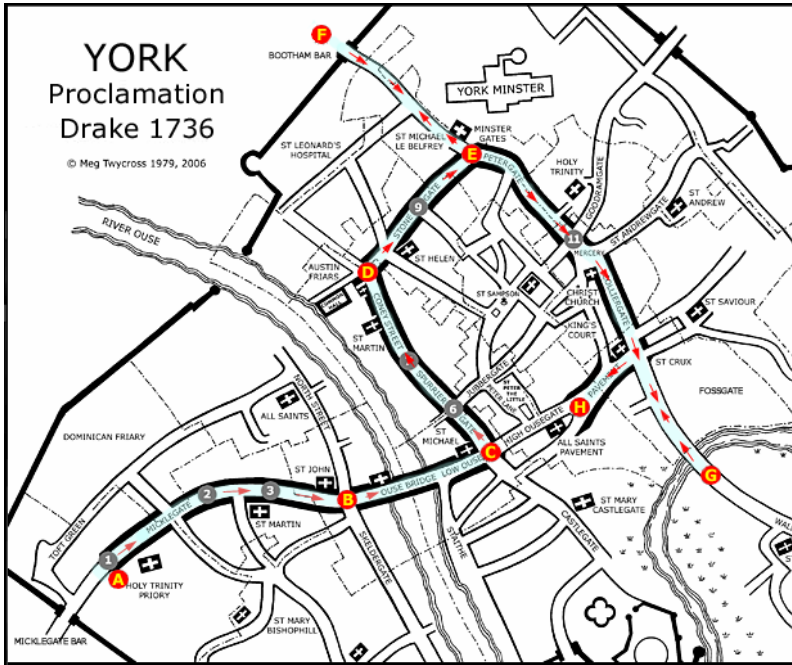


FIG. 4: Named places of proclamation in York

Others were proclaimed in the most appropriate places: the one for keeping the peace during the mayoral election was read on the Pavement and then outside and inside the Common Hall, because its intended audience, the electorate, was not that large.⁵⁹ However, Drake in 1736 gives an extended itinerary for the Michaelmas Sheriffs' Riding.⁶⁰ The map [FIG. 5] shows that this pretty well covers the pageant route⁶¹ with two excursions to the side, and does not go through Thursday Market.

In 1448, nearly three centuries earlier, which is more historically convincing, one of the returned writs in The National Archives (C 255/3/9 no. 18) is actually fully endorsed with a list of places where it was proclaimed (PLATE 6 and FIG. 6). This is a variant on the pageant route:



... they first ride up Micklegate [A] into the yard of the priory of the Trinity (q), where one of the serjeants at mace makes proclamation as has been given. Then they ride through the principal streets of the city, making the same proclamation [B] at the corners⁶² of the streets on the west side Ousebridge. After that [C] at the corner of Castlegate and Ousegate ; then [D] at the corner of Coneystreet and Stonegate over against the Common-hall ; then again [E] at the south gate of the Minster. After that they ride unto [F] St. Marygate tower without Bootham-bar, making the same proclamation there. Then returning they ride through the streets of Petergate, Colliergate, Fossgate, [G] over Fossbridge into Walmgate, where the proclamation is again made ; and lastly they return into [H] the market-place in the Pavement ; where the same ceremony being repeated, the sheriffs depart to their own houses, and after to their house of entertainment ; which is usually at one of the publick halls in the city.

(q) The riding of the Sheriffs into this priory, and into Bootham, formerly the jurisdiction of the Abbot of St. Mary's, must have commenced a custom since the reformation ; and seems to be a taking possession of those two, before privileged, places.

Francis Drake *Eboracum* (London: William Bowyer for Francis Drake, 1736) 197

FIG. 5: Route of Sheriffs' Riding as specified by Drake. Apart from the stations at **F** and **G**, this follows the route of the Corpus Christi Play (other stations in grey).

Responsus Nicholai Holgate &
Roberti Perte vicecomitum ciuitatis Ebor.

Virtute istius littere in singulis
necessarijs infra Ciuitatem
Ebor. die Jouis proxima ante festum
sancti Andree Apostoli Anno regni domini
Regis nunc infrascripti vicesimo
septimo videlicet apud mykilgate
infra Ciuitatem predictam Item
ad finem [p]ontis vse iuxta /
ecclesiam sancti [I]ohannis Euangeliste infra
Ciuitatem predictam Item ad finem
Regie strate de Overousegate infra
Ciuitatem predictam Item apud
Pauimentum infra e[a]ndem Ciuitatem

Item ad finem Pontis aque de
ffossa infra Ciuitatem predictam

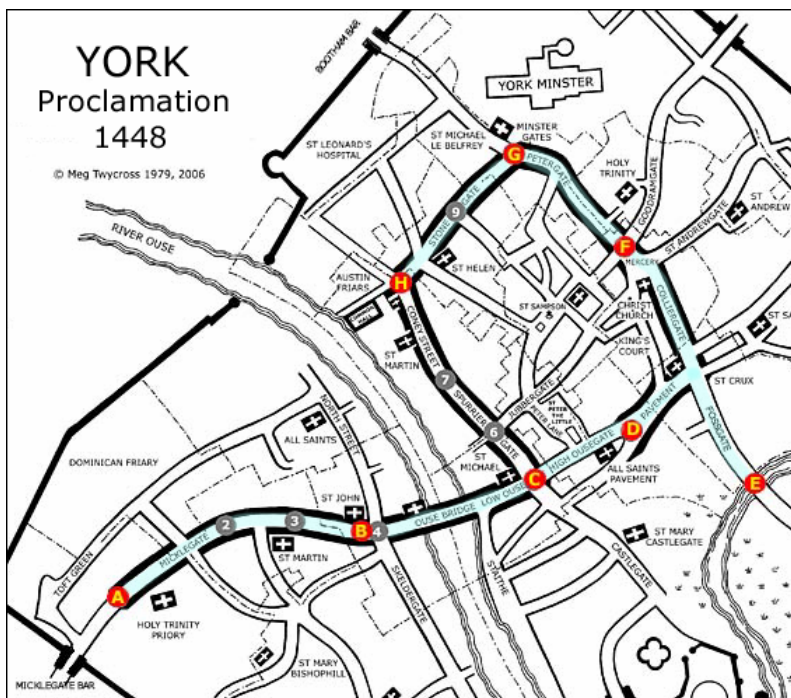
Item ad finem regie strate
que vocatur Petergate infra
eandem Ciuitatem Item ad
finem regie strate que vocatur

Stayngate iuxta portam
ecclesie Cathedralis beati Petri
Ebor. infra Ciuitatem predictam

Item ad finem regie strate que
vocatur Conyngstrete infra ~
Ciuitatem predictam ex parte domini
Regis publice proclamari fecimus
omnia & singula in breue isto contenta
& specificata secundum tenorem ~
eiusdem & prout in eius nobis precepit

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PLATE 6: Kew: TNA, C 255/3/9 no. 18
Endorsement of writ of proclamation, 1448



- A.** at Mykilgate (Micklegate) inside the city;
- B.** at the end of Ousebridge next to the church of St John the Evangelist;
- C.** at the end of the king's highway of Overousegate (High Ousegate);
- D.** on the Pavement;
- E.** at the end of the bridge over the water of Fosse;
- F.** at the end of the king's highway which is called Petergate;
- G.** at the end of the king's highway which is called Stonegate next to the gate of the Cathedral Church of the blessed Peter;
- H.** at the end of the king's highway which is called Conyngstrete (Coney Street).

FIG. 6: Route of proclamation specified on the dorse of TNA, C 255/3/9 no. 18
Endorsement of writ of proclamation, 1448

All maps © Meg Twycross

once over Ouse Bridge, it proceeds in the opposite direction — again with a side trip to Foss Bridge. Interestingly, à propos of the pageant route, the writer calls four of the streets ‘the king’s highway’ (*regia strata*): Micklegate, Petergate, Stonegate, and Coneystreet. Does it identify them as having a special status, or perhaps merely indicate that they were better maintained than others?

QUIBUS AUXILIIS (‘With what help?’) with some QUOMODO?

The Riding was a formal ceremonial occasion. Drake again gives a detailed account of who rode in the eighteenth century:

... they appear on horseback, apparelled in their black gowns and velvet tippits, their horses in suitable furniture, each sheriff having a white wand in his hand, a badge of his office, and a servant to lead his horse, who also carries a gilded truncheon. Their serjeants at mace, attorneys and other officers of their courts, on horseback in their gowns riding before them. These are preceeded by the city’s waites, or musicians, in their scarlet liveries and silver badges playing all the way though the streets ...⁶³

There is sufficient evidence from our period to suggest that the personnel and trappings were not very different, save that the Sheriffs would have been in scarlet or crimson, not black.⁶⁴ A change was effected in 1561 for Corpus Christi, since ‘the lat fest ... is not nowe celebrat & kept holy day as was accustomed’, the city officials were to ‘goe about in semely sadd apparell & not in skarlet’.⁶⁵ Their white wands were an official sign of office.⁶⁶ The presence of the City Waits is not mentioned in the earlier records, though they may well have been there.⁶⁷ The City seem to have hired visiting trumpeters for the odd proclamation, and when in 1546 the King prescribed that proclamation was to be made of a treaty with France ‘with sounde of trumpetts yf ye have any there’ they had to decide on a substitute ‘in default of a trumpett to have a drum’.⁶⁸ One assumes that the harnessed men (men in armour) who are an increasingly prominent feature of the sixteenth-century Ridings were always there in some form or other as ‘kepers of þe pees’.

Who actually read the proclamation? One obvious candidate might be the City bellman.⁶⁹ A Council decision of 18.12.1570 speaks of ‘all proclamacons and common cryes ... made by the Lord Mayor, Sheryffs bellman and others’.⁷⁰ It seems unlikely, however. The bellman was more the local free newspaper to the royal proclamation’s national (and up-market) daily. He could be hired by private citizens: his most dramatic

appearance in the records is in the case of the recalcitrant Masons, thrown into the kidcote on suspicion of breaking the Tilers' tools, who 'presumptuouslie hired the belman to go thrugh the Cite with the bell shewing if eny man wold haue oght forto doo with maister mason and his feliship Masons com vnto the kidcote and per they shall fynd pame in dispite of all his f Enemies'.⁷¹ The Bellman ended up in jail beside the Masons. Before the Reformation he made most of his income from obits; when this lucrative source of revenue was removed, he seems to have struggled.⁷²

Drake says that in his day one of the Sheriffs' sergeants-at-mace read the actual proclamation.⁷³ However, Eileen White alerted me to another piece of evidence. From 1578, it is quite late in our story, and refers to the Michaelmas Riding.

[margin] Controversie for readyng the proclamacion at Ridyng of the Shireffes

And now forasmoche as ther ys some contrauersie now depending betwene James Birkebye gent of thone partie And Laurence Robinson and Edward Vavasour Sheriffes of the Cittie of Yorke And william Vavasoure gent of thother partie for and concerninge the rydinge with the said Sheriffes and reading of the proclamacion as hath bene accustomed by the predecessoures of the saide Sheriffes and for that yt hath bene crediblye enformed to this Courte that the Recorder of the said Cittie heretofore in tyme past hath rydden betwene the Sheriffes of the said Cyttie yt is ~ therefore now ordered And established by this Courte that mr Byrnand now Recorder shall ryde betwene the said Sheriffes to morow in ther rydinge of the said Cittie And the rather for the better conservac[ion] of the quenes majesties peace in breache wherof dyverse presumpcions hath bene enformed and partely appar[ant] in this Courte betwene the said parties And wheras also yt standes in question betwene the said parties whether to the said James Birkebie or to the said William vavasour the readinge of the said proclamacion apperteyneth yt is therfore further ordered And established by this Courte that neyther the saide James Birkebie or yet the said William Vavasoure claiminge both the title of readinge ye same shall not take vpon them the readinge or publishing therof neither ride in the Companie of the said Sheriffes or suche As shall Assocytate them the said day As in the sayd rydinge, but that Edmond Faile⁷⁴ as a personne indifferent shall reade the said proclamacion at the ryding aforesaid for this tyme onlie as the Sheriffes Clerk hath heretofore bene accustomed Provided alwaies

that the riding of the saide Recorder and the reading of the said proclamacion by the saide Edmond Faile shall not in annie Wise be preiudicyall to the titles of eyther of the said parties or to the disesean of eyther of them in the lawfull possession thereof anie thing in this vnder conteyned to the contrary notwithstanding ~ ~ ~ ~

1 December 1578: HB 27 fols 123^v.4^r

It turns out to be one of those situations in which what is reported is only the tip of the iceberg. Why did Mr Birkby and Mr Vavasour each think they were entitled to pronounce the proclamation? It transpires that James Birkby was the Sheriffs' Clerk, and had every expectation that he should read the proclamation 'as the Sheriffes Clerk hath heretofore bene accustomed'.⁷⁵ In 1571 he was elected Sheriff and it was agreed that he could pursue his salaried post by deputy for that year.⁷⁶ Several years later, in 1579 and after this entry, the House Book records that questions were raised as to whether he had violated the conditions of his patent. There are no details of exactly how this had happened. Whatever it was, it blew up into a cause célèbre in which Birkby appealed to the Lord President of the Council in the North — thus breaching a major city taboo. He may well have been over-connected with that body for the City's liking: in 1574 he was said to be 'one of the attorneys before the L. Presydent and Counsell in these North partes',⁷⁷ and Huntingdon says in his supporting letter that 'he is now a member of this bodie'. The final decision (12 October 1579) was that while it was all being sorted out they should appoint a substitute 'for two or thre yeares as law will permit'. The substitute duly elected was ... William Vavasour.⁷⁸ So it looks as if two people are using this as a test case as to which is to be Sheriffs' Clerk — with all the emoluments attached. (It did not disqualify Mr Birkby from civic office: he was twice Lord Mayor: 1587, 1595).⁷⁹

This makes sense. If the Sheriffs' Clerk was originally the one who translated the proclamations in some haste,⁸⁰ he might well be the one to read them. (It could be that in the fifteenth century — or earlier — no one else in the Sheriff's entourage *could* read.)⁸¹ It also emphasises the seriousness and prestige of the occasion.

QUO? ('Whither?' or 'What happened next?': not in the original seven)

What happened to it? It would take too long to trace how the Corpus Christi proclamation became a Midsummer Show in which every able-

bodied man between 15 and 60 had to turn out under arms, and which consumed 600lb of gunpowder (half paid for by the City and half by the Sheriffs personally). This seems to turn the original proclamation on its head. But the Sheriffs had always been accompanied by armed men,

Master Shyrryffes of this Citie shall Ryde vpon Corpuscristy day
with men in hernes accordyng to the ancyent Custome of this said
Citie
3.5.1537: HB 13 fol 96r; REED 263; YCR 4 21

and the Statute of Winchester provided for a twice yearly view of armour.⁸² As the sixteenth century goes on, however, York appears to get more and more paranoid about rebellion and invasion — or better organised to confront them. Musters are called and inventories of arms are taken. In 1545, during the invasion of Scotland, Corpus Christi Day is made the occasion for ‘alle suche persons within this Citie that haith harnes & wapen to serue the king ... to attend appon the Shyrryfes / thorro this Citie honestly furnyshed with ther harnes & wapen’.⁸³ (It is difficult to tell whether the Play was also played on that day: the *Creed Play* had been suggested, but the Bakers appear to have played their Corpus Christi pageant.) When you read through the House Books in an attempt to get the general picture, what comes over is a century when plague, religious dissension, and the collapse of Ouse Bridge each in their way contribute to a general discontinuity in the Play, while war, rebellion, and rumours of war and rebellion elbow their way to the front. Men are scouring breastplates rather than burnishing haloes.

I hope I have answered most of my questions, however briefly: *Quis* the Sheriffs; *quid* a proclamation of the King's peace; *ubi* ‘divers places in the city’; *quibus auxiliis* the Sheriffs' Clerk, Sergeants, Recorder, and Waits; *cur* carrying out various statutes; *quomodo* with legal formality; *quando* at four several times in the year, and various times of day. I also hope I have provided a different slant on the kind of creature it was, and how it thus managed to slide fairly easily into a military occasion with no-one apparently finding it particularly incongruous. The Sheriffs' Riding has tended to be seen only as an adjunct to other more ‘theatrical’ performances: the Corpus Christi Play on the one hand, and the Riding of Yule and Yule's Wife on the other. Investigating the context of the proclamation restores it to its proper importance and legal weight; and has incidentally extended our understanding of the Corpus Christi pageant route as a traditional performance space.

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Abbreviations

YCR York Civic Records edited Angelo Raine

HB York House Book

AY York Civic Archives MS E 20 (A/Y Memorandum Book)

Sellers A/Y A/Y Memorandum Book edited Maud Sellers, 2 vols

Statutes of the Realm The Statutes of the Realm, from original records and authentic manuscripts (1101–1713), printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third edited A. Luders, Sir T. Edlyn Tomlins, J. France, W. E. Taunton, and J. Raithby, 12 vols (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall for the Records Commission, 1810–1828; reprinted 1963).

Drake Eboracum Francis Drake *Eboracum: or the History and Antiquities of the City of York ...* 2 vols (London: William Bowyer for F. Drake, 1736).

NOTES

1. It has virtually been washed away by the waters of the Ouse, but UV images show that the pre-1892-flood transcription by Lucy Toulmin Smith in her edition of the *York Plays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885) xxxiv is extremely accurate. I only take issue with a few of her readings, of which ‘careynge tapers of ye pagentz’ for ‘[saveyin] keepers of þe pagentz’ is the most crucial. Francis Drake has the latter reading (*Eboracum* I xxxii), which seems to be correct.
2. Meg Twycross ‘Forget the 4.30 a.m. Start: Recovering a Palimpsest in the York *Ordo paginarum*’ *METH* 25 (2003) 98–152.
3. The poem is appended to the tale of ‘The Elephant’s Child’ in Rudyard Kipling *Just So Stories* (numerous editions). The doctrine of the seven ‘circumstances’ is attributed to Cicero in the *De inventione* 1: 24. They were formulated as questions by Victorinus in his commentary on this work, and passed on by Boethius *De Differentiis Topicis*, PL 64, 1212. The tag is quoted by St Thomas Aquinas as: *Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando* in *Summa theologiæ* 1a2æ. 7.3 — see *Summa Theologiæ: Volume 17, Psychology of Human Acts* edited and translated Thomas Gilby (Cambridge UP, 2006; paperback edition of the Blackfriars edition, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970) 42–3. Its use has for centuries been well-nigh universal: in the law, the confessional, and today in journalism and

- management. See further D.W. Robertson Jr 'A Note on the Classical Origin of the "Circumstances" in the Medieval Confessional' *Studies in Philology* 43 (1946) 6–14.
4. See *Tudor Royal Proclamations* edited Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 2 vols (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1964) 1 xxvi–xxix. Though this concentrates on Tudor proclamations, the overall scheme remains true for earlier periods.
 5. James A. Doig 'Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations in Late Medieval England' *Historical Research* 71: 176 (1998) 253–80, at 265–8. Doig suggests that these were part of the preamble to the writ, and not necessarily proclaimed. See also *Tudor Royal Proclamations* 1 xxv–xxviii (*Rationalization*).
 6. J.L. Austin *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Clarendon Press, 1962).
 7. *REED Cheshire including Chester* edited Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, 2 vols (University of Toronto Press, and London: British Library, 2007) 1 71–2 (William Newhall's proclamation, 1531–2); 1 81 (proclamation 1539–1540), 81–7 (Early Banns). The Chester proclamation is shorter than the York, but likewise stresses public order.
 8. 13 Edward I (8 October 1285): *Statutes of the Realm* 1 96–8. Among other provisions, it specifies the closing of the city gates from sunset to sunrise, the night watch, the clearance 200 feet each side of highways, the arms that every man shall have in his house according to his means, and a view of these arms twice a year. The last two items were not repealed until 21 James I (1623); the item about the night watch not till 7 & 8 George IV.
 9. Westminster, 12 October 1426; to Sheriff of Somerset and Dorset: like writs to sheriffs throughout England (*Calendar of the Close Rolls Henry VI Vol. 1*: 316–17).
 10. *Statutes of the Realm* 1 158; Ordinances c. 2. This, with elaborations, becomes the formula: see e.g. the first Statute of 1 Henry IV, *Statutes of the Realm* 2 111.
 11. *The Peterborough Chronicle* edited Cicely Clark (Oxford UP, 1958) 54 (1135). The king concerned is Henry I.
 12. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H: 1375–1399* edited Reginald R. Sharpe (London: Francis, 1907) 71 (Richard II); *Statutes of the Realm* 2 111 (Henry IV, as above note 9); *Foedera* edited Thomas Rymer, revised George Holmes, 20 vols (London: J. Tonson, 2nd edition 1726–1735) 9 1 (Henry V); 10 254 (Henry VI); *British Library Harleian Manuscript* 433 edited Rosemary Horrox and P.W. Hammond, 4 vols (Gloucester: Alan Sutton for the Richard III Society, 1979–1983) 3 31–2 (Richard III); Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations* (see note 4) 1 3 (no. 1, Henry VII); 79–81 (Henry VIII); 381 (no. 275, Edward VI); 2 3 (no. 388, Mary Tudor), 99 (no. 448, Elizabeth); Paul H. Hughes and James L. Larkin *Royal Stuart Proclamations* (Oxford UP, 1973) 1 1 (James I and VI); etcetera.
 13. House Book 20 fol. 67; *REED* 300, YCR 5 63; *REED* 302 'ridyng in harnesse to kepe the Kynges peax on Corpus christi Day, mydsomar even & Saynt Petre'.

14. *Sellers A/Y* 157–62; *A/Y* fols 61^r–62^v. The change seems to have increased the standing, income, and responsibilities of the persons elected as sheriffs, though the area of responsibility remained much the same. See ‘The Later Middle Ages: The City’s Franchise and Officers’ in *A History of the County of Yorkshire: the City of York* edited P.M. Tillot (Victoria County History; London: Oxford UP for the Institute of Historical Research, 1961) 69–75; On-line at <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=36330>.
15. *Sellers A/Y* 2 259–60.
16. Caroline Barron *London in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford UP, 2004) 159–160.
17. Drake *Eboracum* 1 196. Presumably he means in the week after Martinmas. He adds ‘but they are not strictly tied to that day, any day betwixt *Martinmas* and **Yoo**le, that is Christmas, may serve for the ceremony’.
18. 16.12.1500: HB 8, fol. 102^v.
19. It was also a potential source of revenue: see Drake *Eboracum* 1 186.
20. 21.9.1558, HB 22, fol. 135^r (YCR 5 186). He died: see 24.11.1558, HB 22 fol. 140^v (YCR 5 190).
21. 2.12.1504, HB 9 fol. 20^v (YCR 3 10). See also the longest-documented tussle, in 1516, over William Barker who was legitimately in London: 12.12.1516, HB 9 fol. 87^v (YCR 3 53–4). He eventually invoked Cardinal Wolsey as having said, ‘that they shuld make no fest nor dynner at ther rydyng as other Shireffs hais doyn affore tyme’. Less dramatic, but still reprehensible, was Rauf Symson, who was banned from the Council for the ‘manifest contempt’ of going to Malton last Michaelmas instead of making the traditional dinner: 13.1.1530/31, HB 11 fol. 105^v (YCR 3 135).
22. See e.g. Kew: TNA, E 101/599 for York Sheriffs’ returns to the Exchequer.
23. E.g. on 10 July 1551, the House Book notes that Sheriffs Parsyvall Crawfurth and Edward Grenebery

shold haue rydden apon myddsom^{er} even ^ \Corpus christi day. And saynt petre even/ with their officers and a nombre in harnes to se the kynys peas kept accordyng to the Laudable custome of the Citie and hath not soo done contrary to their dewties

and are therefore fined £10 each: HB 20 fol. 67 (*REED* 300, 302; YCR 5 63); see also HB 20 fol. 87 (*REED* 302).
24. It would also have happened in 1451: see C.R. Cheney and Michael Jones *A Handbook of Dates* (Royal Historical Society Guides and Pamphlets 4; Cambridge UP, revised edition 2000) 225. It happens very rarely — once every century, sometimes once every two centuries.
25. 3.1.1546/7 (possibly), HB 18 fol. 67 (YCR 4 150).

26. David Palliser *Tudor York* (Oxford UP 1979) 182. According to Drake, the Sheriffs proclaimed Whit Monday and 'St Peter's fair' Drake *Eboracum* 1 217–18. At some point during the day, however, they handed over their authority to the Archbishop, whose fair it was. See also H. Richardson *The Medieval Fairs and Markets of York* (St Anthony's Hall Publications 20; York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1961).
27. Possibly they are also accounting dates? Midsummer was a Quarter Day. The Sheriffs had to account on the Friday after Corpus Christi Day, i.e. the day after. But this does not seem particularly relevant to the Ridings.
28. Palliser *Tudor York* 182.
29. 9.5.1553, HB 21 fol. Mv (*REED* 307–8, YCR 5 89):

It is more ouer agreed by the sayed presens that the Shirefes of this Cite that now be shall accordyng to the auncient custome of the same City in peaceable maner ride with ~~a numbre~~ a numbre their officers and a numbre of fotemen with theym in harnesse orderly On Corpus christi day / And than their officers on mydsomar even ffor the worship of this Cite & seeing the Kinges peax then kept / And so to be spared on Saynt petre even /

This suggests that the Midsummer Riding was less important, if it could be undertaken by the Sheriffs' officers alone.
30. In 1580 the Sheriffs' Riding and the Show of Armour was to be on St Bartholomew's Day (24 August) 'and so from hensforth yerely upon Mayday and Midsomar even'; HB 27 fol. 246r; YCR 8 36; *REED* 393.
31. HB 24 fol. 140r; *REED* 357; not in YCR.
32. It took some time to settle down. In 1580 it was to be on St Bartholomew Day (24 August) at 1 p.m. (see above note 28); in 1584 the Show was to begin between 4 and 5 a.m. and to be ended by 11 so that Grafton's Play could begin at 1 p.m. (HB 28 fol. 144v, YCR 8 77, *REED* 406); 1587 it was timed for 6 a.m. (HB 29 fol. 196v, YCR 8 140, *REED* 429); in 1591 at 7 a.m. (HB 30 fol. 241v, *REED* 445), then from 1593 onwards it moved to 9 a.m. (HB 31 fol. 124v, *REED* 452), as with 1594 (*REED* 458), 1595 (*REED* 463), 1596 (*REED* 469), 1598 (*REED* 481), 1600 (*REED* 1491).
33. A.F. Johnston 'Yule in York' *REED NL* 1 (1976) 3–10. See also Patricia Badir 'Textuality, Corporeality, and the Riding of Yule in York' *Leeds Studies in English* NS 29 (1998); *Essays in Honour of Peter Meredith* edited Catherine Batt, 19–34.
34. The question of how far back this account goes is too complicated to explore here. Patricia Badir points out that the version Drake cites in *Eboracum* 1 196–7 comes from Thomas Hearne's edition of John Leland's *Itinerary* 9 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press at the Sheldonian Theatre, 1710–1712) 4 146–7. She therefore deduces it must be c. 1534. But it is not actually in Leland: Hearne has

- added it 'Out of Mr. *Dodsworth's* Coll. MSS' (146). Roger Dodsworth (Oxford: Bodleian Library, MS Dodsworth 155, fol. 114^r) attributes it to Charles Fairfax's transcription from the York City Records. The mention of the Sheriffs going to 'heare a Masse of St. Thomas' suggests a date either pre-1547, or 1553-1558.
35. MS Dodsworth 155, fol. 114^v. The larger letters presumably copy those in the original manuscript. Drake's version is fractionally different: '... all manner of whores, thieves, dice-players, and all other unthrifty folk be wellcome to the town, whether they come late or early, at the reverence of the high feast of Yoole, till the twelve dayes be passed' (196-7).
 36. 13.11.1572: HB 25 27^{r-v}: REED 369. See further the article by Alexandra Johnston in this volume.
 37. REED 361.
 38. 21.11.1572: HB 25 fol. 27^r; YCR 7 55; REED 368-70. Drake *Eboracum* 1 196-7.
 39. Drake *Eboracum* 1 189 note (l) for attribution; 196 for text. He does not say how old the manuscript is. It appears to concern the roles and duties of the Sheriffs.
 40. Drake *Eboracum* 1 189-90.
 41. *Munimenta Gildhallæ Londoniensis* edited Henry Thomas Riley, 3 vols in 4 (*Rerum britannicarum mediæ ævi scriptores* 12; London: Longmans, 1859-1862) 1 *Liber Albus* 78. The first paragraph is '[s]upplied from the *Liber Custumarum*, fol. 201, it being omitted in the *Liber Albus*' (footnote to page 78). It is difficult to tell from Riley's edition how many of the provisions were to be proclaimed.
 42. This is also one of the bylaws of London: see Riley *Liber Albus* 387-90 (c. 1363):

No-one is to go about armed
 Also, that no-one, regardless of status, is to go about armed in the city or its suburbs, nor bear arms by day or night, except for: the squires of the great lords of the land, who carry the swords of their masters when accompanying them; the sergeants-at-arms of the king, queen, prince, and the other children of the king; the city officials and persons who, at their command, go about in their company to assist them in preserving and upholding the peace. Upon penalty as mentioned and the confiscation of their weapons and armour.

Corporation of London Records Office, *Liber Albus*, folios 223-4.
 See also Kew: TNA, C54/300, mb 13d, dated 11.3.1450: Proclamation: no arms of offence to be carried except lord, knight or notable esquire may have one single sword carried behind him (CCR *Henry VI* 5: 182); HB 2-4 fol. 157^v dated 4.3.1485 (Attreed 354). For the Mayor of York's sword, see Sellers A/Y 160 (A/Y fol. 6^v).
 43. The best account of this is 20.10.1475, the Armourers Constitution:

... alle the maisters of the same Crafte frome nowefurth yerely on Corpus Christi day in the mornynge be redy in thair owen propre personnez euery one of thayme with Ane honest wapyn to awayt upon

thair pagende maisters ande pageande at þe playnge and settyngefurth
of thair saide pagende at þe firste place were theyshall begyns Ande so
toawayte apon þe same þair pageande thurgh þe Cite to þe play be
plaide as of þat same pagende.

B/Y Memorandum Book fol. 140r, REED 104.

See also e.g. 1417 Cordwainers (A/Y 78r, REED 30, 715); 1422/3 Plasterers and
Tilers (A/Y 258r-v REED 39, 725); 1432 Millers (A/Y 283v, REED 49, 733-4);
1477 Masons (A/Y 291v, REED 113, 778); 1494 Spurriers and Lorimers (HB 7
109v, REED 176). This extends the meaning of the verb *produce*: 'Bring/lead
forth'. In 1572 it was specifically said that the pageant masters of the
occupations whose waggons were being used in the Paternoster Play should
accompany them 'and see good ordre kepte' (HB 25 fol. 15r, REED 366). The
Paternoster Guild Return of 1388/9 says that members of the Guild are to
accompany the play on horseback and in livery *pro dicto ludo pacifice gubernando*
(Kew: TNA, C47/46/454, REED 7).

44. See J.D. Burnley 'Curial prose in England' *Speculum* 61:3 (July 1986) 593-614;
Michael Clanchy *From Memory to Written Record* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd
edition 1993) 220-3, 253-78, though he deals with an earlier period.
45. The A/Y Memorandum Book has a number of Statutes copied out in full, dating
from between 1381 and 1421. It seems that they were intended to be proclaimed;
e.g. the Statute of 8 Henry V which appears on fols 85r-v is addressed in Latin to
the Sheriffs of York, and ends with an injunction to proclaim it, also in Latin.
The body of the statute is in Anglo-Norman. Since the version of this statute in
the *Statutes of the Realm* (2 203) says nothing about proclamation, it seems that in
this copy the Latin writ has been 'wrapped round' the actual statute. It even ends
with the name of the Chancery clerk who issued it, as do actual writs.
Conversely, A/Y omits the call for proclamation from the statute of 17 Richard II
(fols 83r-84v), presumably because this is taken for granted.
46. See Lorraine C. Attreed *York House Books 1461-1490* 2 vols (Stroud: Alan Sutton
for Richard III & Yorkist History Trust, 1991) 1 8-9. It is noticeable that at this
stage most of the text of the House Books is in Latin, but transcriptions of letters
tend to be in English, as are some of the transactions which might be of interest
to individual citizens. The punctuation in this proclamation may be rhetorical.
47. James A. Doig 'Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations in Late Medieval
England' *Historical Research* 71 (October 1998) 253-80, at 264-5. There were
occasional English proclamations before this, but on the whole 'most writs of
proclamations continued to be issued in Latin'. Doig suggests that the lack of a
standard language until the mid fifteenth century may have meant that Latin
was more comprehensible over the country as a whole.
48. See e.g. Kew: TNA, C54/300, mb 7d: 14.4.1450, proclamation forbidding seditious
libels, *quos tamen quia ipsi eorum auctores se facere seu cognosci non volunt in valuis seu*

- foribus ecclesiarum aut aliorum locorum clauis affigi seu in locis quibus volunt proici faciunt ac iactari.* For a York case in 1536 about slanderous bills, see YCR 4 7–13.
49. See e.g. HB 22 fol. 196^r (YCR 7 8), Oath of Submission for taking part in the Rising in the North, 1569: copied into the House Book complete with ‘Imprinted in London at Powles Church-yerde ...’
 50. A/Y fol. 201^r (Sellers A/Y 2 79, REED 32–3). See also HB 7, fol. 4^v: 16.6.1490: the Cordwainers in the Corpus Christi Procession were ‘rebell and disobeaut’ to the proclamation about bearing their torches (REED 158, YCR 2 40).
 51. HB 21 fol. 46^v (REED 312).
 52. Palliser *Tudor York* 71.
 53. Barron *London in the Later Middle Ages* 159–63 (see note 15). Drake also gives a detailed account of the responsibilities of the Sheriffs in *Eboracum* 1 186, 189–97.
 54. 13 Edward I 1285, 2 Edward III 1328, 1425.
 55. 14.10.1541: HB 15 fol. 56^r, YCR 4 68.
 56. A/Y fol. 85^v: Statute of 8 Henry V, 28.1.1421.
 57. 6.7.1546: HB 18 fol. 45^v, YCR 4 146.
 58. HB 22 fol. 140^v–141^r; YCR 5 190–1,
 59. HB 6 fol. 140^r: Tuesday, St Blaise’ Day, 3 February 1488/9, proclamation for keeping the peace during Mayoral election: *Et eadem die quandam proclamacio \pro/ Rege in tribus locis infra. Ciuitatem videlicet primus locus eiusdem ad stallago [Pavement] secundus locus ad ostium Guihald tercius ad & infra Guihald in forma sequente factus fuit* (also YCR 2 40).
 60. Drake *Eboracum* 1 197.
 61. For a convenient map of the pageant route, see *The York Plays* edited Richard Beadle (London: Arnold, 1982) 34.
 62. This may suggest several stops in Micklegate.
 63. Drake *Eboracum* 1 196–7.
 64. In the sixteenth century their ceremonial gowns are more often described as crimson: see e.g. HB 27 fols 265^r, 266^v, (January 1580/1: YCR 8 41). On 27.1.1580/1 the Council agreed ‘that the Aldermen, Sheriffes and xxiiij shall weare ther skarlet and cremisyn gownes with tippetts’ at all time when commanded by the Lord Mayor, save that widowers may wear black for a year, HB 27 fol. 271^r (YCR 8 43).
 65. HB 23 fol 19^v (REED 333). This item suggests that the Mayor and aldermen accompanied the Sheriffs ‘in makying the proclamacion accustomed’.
 66. For their symbolic use in marking out the limits of their jurisdiction and that of the Sheriff of Yorkshire during the visit of Margaret Tudor, Queen of Scots, see HB 9 fol. 4^v (YCR 2 188–9, REED 197–8). On this occasion the Sheriffs were

- dressed in crimson. They also probably had a mace borne before them: see HB 8 fol. 102^v (REED 184).
67. In the 1440–1460s (see REED 65–73, 75–84, 94, 101, 106) they were paid at Easter, at Corpus Christi, St John's Eve, and Christmas, and on the feast of St William ('viz the day that my Lord Mayour makith his great feast': CCR 8:3 mb 5, REED 397). Easter and Christmas appear to have been official paydays, and St John's Day was a quarter day, so it is difficult to tell if any of these dates were anything to do with the Ridings. The entry for 1499 (CCRolls C4:4, REED 181) says that they are paid at these times *pro honore Ciuitatis super magistris attendentes*. In the 1580s they went with and proclaimed the Show with fife and drum.
 68. King's trumpeter hired: 14.10.1541, HB 15 fol. 56^r (YCR 4 68); drum substituted 6.7.1546, HB 18, fol. 45^v (YCR 4 146).
 69. First mentioned in 1377 as being paid 10s yearly: A/Y fol. 9^v (Sellers A/Y 1 26). On the Bellman, see T.P. Cooper 'The Common Bellman of the City of York' in *Burdekin's Old Moore's Almanack* (York: 1937) 2–12.
 70. HB 24, fol. 219^r (YCR 7 18). The punctuation is uncertain.
 71. 31.8.1490: HB 7, fol 14^r; YCR 2 60.
 72. In 1587 he was reduced to petitioning the Council for the right to cry prices of wood and coals on the Staithe in order to collect the dues, 22.3.1586/7: HB 29 fol. 130^r; YCR 8 135.
 73. He did make proclamation for the Sheriffs (27.7.1587, HB 29 fol. 207^r, YCR 8 143). In London, the Common Serjeant-at-Arms was the 'Common Crier', elected by the Common Council upon pleasure to be part of the Mayor's household (Riley *Liber Albus* 9; Barron *London* 190–191).
 74. Edmund Fale or Faile was the son (?) of Common Clerk Thomas Fale (died March 1571). He lived and died (March 1588) in the parish of St Michael le Belfrey, marrying twice and having at least six children, half of whom died in childhood; *The Registers of St Michael le Belfrey, York* edited Francis Collins, 2 vols (Yorkshire Parish Register Society, 1899) 1. He was admitted to the Freedom of the City in 1573/4 as 'Edmondus Fayll, scryvener'; *Register of the Freemen of the City of York* edited Francis Collins, 2 vols, *Surtees Society* 96 (1897 for 1896), 102 (1900 for 1899) 2 15 — like John Clerke, who was also admitted as 'scryvener', son of Thomas Clerke *generosus*, in 1537/8; Collins *Freemen* 1 256. In a deed enrolled by his (?mother) Joan Turner formerly Fale in the B/Y Memorandum Book (*York Memorandum Book* BY edited Joyce W. Percy *Surtees Society* 186 (1973) 289–290) he is also described as 'scrivener'. From 1573 he appears regularly in the House Books on matters connected with record-keeping. Perhaps he had become Deputy Common Clerk to Leonard Belt (Freeman 1570/71), his father's successor, following John Clerke, and took out

the freedom accordingly. At the time of his death he was one of the City's three coroners (HB 30 fol. 19^r, YCR 8 162). He knew Birkby, as they both attended the same church, and are marked down by the vicar as having taken communion together there at the feast of St John the Baptist in 1572, when Birkby was Sheriff (Collins *St Michael le Belfrey* 1 103).

75. On the Sheriffs' Clerk, his duties and emoluments, see A/Y fol. 54^r (Sellers A/Y 1 138–9). It was a responsible position and was held by someone with legal qualifications.
76. 21 September 1571 (St Matthew's Day): HB 24 fol. 260^r; YCR 7 37. In 1573 he is back being Sheriffs' clerk (HB 25 fol. 97^r, YCR 7 81).
77. HB 25 fol. 145^r (YCR 7 97).
78. HB 27 190^r–192^v, YCR 8 19–22.
79. 29 Eliz, 1586/7; 37 Eliz, 1594/5. *Register of the Freemen of the City of York* edited Francis Collins, 2 vols, *Surtees Society* 96 (1897 for 1896), 102 (1900 for 1899) 2 29, 38.
80. James Doig suggests, 'More than likely a local official, possibly the sheriff's clerk, was responsible for translating the Latin text of the proclamation into English'; 'Late Medieval Royal Proclamations' 264. This incident would seem to reinforce this.
81. Certainly in the earlier centuries, there is no reason to believe that all Sheriffs were customarily literate. In the late thirteenth century (14 February 1298) Parliament was sufficiently concerned about this to issue a Statute deprecating the reliance of Sheriffs upon their clerks in interpreting and answering writs, *even though* they might themselves be lettered. Clerks were therefore to be liable for damages arising out of their defects of return, if it could be proved that they were responsible, and not their sheriffs (*Statutes of the Realm* 1 213). All civic officials were much more dependent on their secretariat than nowadays we can begin to imagine. It suggests that there might have been another reason for having documents read to them than either the demands of formality or the dearth of photocopiers in the fifteenth century.
82. *E qe veue des armes soit fete deus fois per an* ('And that View of Armor be made every year two times'): repealed 21 James I (1623) c. 28: 44 (SL page 307).
84. 2.6.1545: HB 17 fol. 90^r, REED 285: not in YCR. The war with the Scots was 1542–1550.