

THE UNTIMELY DISAPPEARANCE  
OF THE BEVERLEY CYCLE:  
What the Records Can and Can't Tell Us

*Diana Wyatt*

The welcome invitation to contribute to a Festschrift for David Mills offered a good opportunity to reflect on the range of his own impressive work on many aspects of English civic drama. The most prominent has been that on the Chester Cycle and the records of Cheshire, and it was pondering on those, and going back to his edition of the Chester Plays as well as the *REED: Cheshire including Chester* volume that decided my choice of topic for this article.<sup>1</sup> Chester (and its Plays) offers a number of interesting points of comparison with Beverley, across the country in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and it is one particular point of striking dissimilarity that focussed my attention recently.

From about 1520, the Chester Cycle appears, on the evidence of the records extracted for Records of Early English Drama, to have been reshaped, apparently expanded, and rescheduled in the Church calendar, so that a one-day Corpus Christi production became a three day Whitsun event.<sup>2</sup> The Chester drama's apparently new lease of life in the 1520s is in stark contrast to the complete disappearance from the records of the Beverley Cycle after 1521. The purpose of this paper is not to attempt a point-by-point comparison between the two cycles (the different range of extant records in each case — most obviously the absence of any play text from Beverley — make that impossible); but I was inspired to return to the question, which has long puzzled me, of the apparent cessation of production of the Beverley Cycle about thirty to fifty years before Chester, Coventry, or York. The puzzle is not simply the early disappearance from the records in itself; it is that no extant local record gives any hint of a reason for the Cycle to have been abandoned after almost 150 years of customary performance and support both by guilds and by the town Governors (the elected ruling council of twelve). The major factor contributing to the later suppression of other mystery plays, the Reformation, can hardly be relevant in Beverley at such an early date; in any case the prominence of the town in the anti-dissolution movement of 1536, the Pilgrimage of Grace, suggests local religious conservatism rather than early stirrings of Protestant belief.<sup>3</sup>

To give a clear idea of the difference between what happened to the religious drama of Beverley and that of Chester between c1520 and the late 1530s, it will be helpful to outline the relevant records of each. The editors of *REED: Cheshire including Chester*, summarise:

... we have no reference to a civic play before 1422 when one play was being performed on Corpus Christi Day, and no reference to the Whitsun Plays before c.1520–21 ... We can be sure that a play was being performed by 1422 on Corpus Christi Day ... The fifteenth-century records suggest that the Corpus Christi Play ... was significantly different from the later Whitsun Plays, for it was performed on one day and in one place ... at the conclusion of the procession from St Mary on the Hill ... At some time, possibly 1531–2, the event was divided into three sections and performed over three days at Whitsun ...<sup>4</sup>

The extant relevant Chester records from the early sixteenth century consist of:

- a note of November 1515–1516 that the *Shepherds* pageant and the *Assumption* pageant were played in St John's churchyard (Mayors List 5; BL MS Harley 2125 fol. 33<sup>v</sup>);
- an indenture dated 4 February 1520 between the Founders' and Pewterers' Guild and the Smiths' Guild which provides for agreed financial contributions to the Whitsun play and Corpus Christi light (Mayors' Books; Chester: Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies ZMB 12 fol. 24<sup>v</sup>);
- a petition of 1523–1524 by the Cappers to the Mayor and Council, asking to be relieved of the burden of bringing forth the pageant of 'the store of kynge balak & Balam the proffet' on the grounds of their poverty (BL MS Harley 1996, single sheet);
- two entries in the Assembly Books of 1531–1532, the first an agreement to allow the Goldsmiths and Masons to use the 'carriage' of the Vintners and Dyers '& for the plaiez of the saides Goldsmys and masons and <...>. Successours to be plaied at Whitsontide ...' (CCALS ZAF 1 fol. 11<sup>v</sup>). The second is, importantly, 'The proclamacion for the plaies newly made by William Newhall', the Plays being described as 'diuerse stor<...> of the bible begynnyng with the creacion & fall of Lucifer and

endy <...> iugement of the world to be declared & plaied in the Witsonweke ...' (CCALS ZAF 1 fol. 12<sup>r</sup>);

- and in 1539–1540 the Early Banns, in the White Book of the Pentice, detail the pageants to be played on each of the three days of the performance 'on munday Tewesday & wensday in whitson weeke' (BL MS Harley 2150, fols 85<sup>v</sup>–88<sup>v</sup>).

A few other records of the 1530s indicate the involvement of various guilds in the pageants, detailing payments for houses to store their pageant carriages, and in one case a request for formal amalgamation of several crafts, the Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers, as one guild, partly in recognition of their long association for the purposes of producing the pageant of 'the shepperds Wach with the Angells hymne'.

The records of Chester in the 1530s clearly show the health of the local Plays at that period. Beverley has records of a similar type — showing the involvement of both craft guilds and local government in the pageants — but not at that period; in any case there was never, according to any surviving evidence, any comparable expansion of the Beverley Play. Beverley did have a full Corpus Christi cycle, the earliest records of which appear before 1400; and the Play text did evidently undergo revision in 1519–1520. The difference between Beverley's revision and Chester's is that after revision the Chester Plays seem to have gone from strength to strength for another forty years (and then, though evidently struggling and intermittent, on to a final recorded performance in 1575). The Beverley Play however is recorded as being performed once after revision — several records of it appear in the Governors' accounts of 1520–1521; thereafter it is never mentioned again in any surviving record. The facetious response to that is to wonder just how bad the revision must have been — but even if it were (and the only other extant work by the probable author of the revisions does not inspire confidence), there must be more to the story than that.<sup>6</sup> On the face of it, the Governors' response to unsuccessful revision of a Play they cared to improve would surely have been to find a better writer to revise the revisions, but there is no evidence that any further work was done on the text.

The surviving records from Beverley in the relevant period are these (all references are to the MSS held in the East Riding County Record Office):

- Ordinances of the Fishers' Guild, 1512, detailing required contributions to their Corpus Christi pageant (Great Guild Book, BC/II/3 fol. 63<sup>v</sup>);

- 1515 general ordinances made by the Governors for special Corpus Christi pageant contributions to be made by burgesses to their respective crafts (BC/II/3 fol. 45<sup>r</sup>);
- Town Governors' expenses recorded in the town accounts for 1519–1520 for meeting with *domino Willelmo pyers poet ... pro conductibus secum faciendis pro transposicione Ludus corporis christi* in Beverley (7s) and 4s 3d paid to him for his expenses and labour in travelling from Wressle *pro Alteracione eiusdem (scilicet the Corpus Christi Play)* (BC/II/6/17, mb 3<sup>d</sup>);
- In the following year's town accounts, no fewer than three guilds were fined for transgressions in the course of performance of the Play, which was the first after the recorded *alteracio* of the Play in 1519–1520: the Painters' Alderman, Richard Trollop, was fined 2s, because their pageant of *The Three Kings of Cologne* was played *male et indirecte ... in contemptum tocius communitatis et in presencia multorum extermorum*; Richard Gaynstang, the Tailors' Alderman, paid 12d because their pageant of *Sleeping Pilate* was played badly against the relevant ordinance; and the Drapers' Alderman, William Patson, paid 2s *pro ludo suo male ludato*, plus another 4d because (ironically) their pageant wagon was not covered with suitable draperies (BC/II/6/18 mb 4).<sup>7</sup>

The accounts for the following year list payments (as do those of several previous years) made to visiting magnates' entertainers, but make no mention of the Play. Thereafter no town accounts survive till 1541–1542, and from that year onwards the extant accounts detail payments to visiting entertainers and the town waits, but never mention the Play again. Only one other relevant record survives from the years round about 1520: an important but undated complete list of pageant assignments to guilds for the Corpus Christi Play entered at the beginning of the Great Guild Book.<sup>8</sup> On the basis of the hand, which strongly resembles that found in other records of 1508–1514, this list probably dates from the same period. It could be related to the Governors' preparations for the unspecified *alteratio* to the Play for which William Pyers was engaged in 1519, but no extant record confirms it.

Apart from the records mentioned above, surviving evidence for the fate of the Beverley Corpus Christi Play is simply missing. We do have guild ordinances, but only in the versions registered by the Governors, along with general town ordinances and other formal records, in their own

registers, as well as the Town Chartulary and the Great Guild Book. The latter was compiled between 1409 and 1589, but no dated record of the 1520s mentions the Play.<sup>9</sup> Of the extant town records some are fragmented, as is the case with the Accounts, with their twenty-year survival gap at the relevant period. Others are too early: the first surviving Governors' Minute Book covers the period from 1436 to 1468, and the Town Chartulary is datable only to the fifteenth century; and although numerous guild ordinances registered in it are undated, there is no palaeographical reason to suggest sixteenth-century dates for them. Other town records are too late: the other surviving Governors' and Mayors' Minute Books are all from the 1550s or later.

Simply surveying the range of relevant extant records forces consideration of what the records can and cannot tell us, and why. Sheer survival, either of original documents or of copies — contemporary or (more obviously in the case of Chester than of Beverley) antiquarian — is the basic pre-requisite.<sup>10</sup> In general, the Beverley MSS from the fourteenth century to the mid-seventeenth are in good condition, which suggests careful storage; yet there are still significant and frustrating gaps in otherwise well-preserved series — the account rolls and the Governors' minute books. Lack of dating of many of the guild ordinances of which fair copies were registered in the Town Chartulary and the Great Guild Book frustrates any attempt to trace the fortunes of individual guilds' pageants — although, as these registered copies were presumably intended as permanent, that is understandable; worse than that is the loss of any original guild documents. In short, the records that have failed to survive can tell us nothing at all, either positive or negative.

Where records do survive, we still have to tread carefully through the minefield of interpretation. In the case of the latest surviving documents of the Beverley Play, there are as many questions as answers. When was the list of pageant assignments to guilds compiled and registered in the Great Guild Book, and why? It is the only such list extant — were previous lists made and lost? Was the surviving list designed for a specific occasion such as the Governors' decision to alter the Play, or merely the latest in a series of lists adjusted over the years to take account of shifts in responsibility for certain pageants? Who exactly was 'William Pyers, poet' (a wonderfully intriguing reference), and why was he asked to make alterations to the Play? Did he in fact make them? Were the three fines imposed the following year for poor performance and presentation (no other year's accounts show as many as three guilds being fined at once) related to the

resulting revised text, and if so how? Was there a simple failure of actors to learn new scripts in time, or are we looking at some complicated traces of local politics? Most fundamentally, even taking account of gaps in some of the contemporary records, it is surely impossible that the Play could have survived much beyond its last recorded performance without appearing in any subsequent town record: documents were still being registered in the Great Guild Book up to 1589, and accounts survive for twelve years between 1541 and 1575 — the latest date by which we could reasonably hope to see any record of its performance (or suppression). Even taking into account the necessary caveat that absence of evidence must not be taken for evidence of absence, the Play does seem to have ceased production relatively early in the sixteenth century.

On the positive side, the questions posed by the existing records of c1515–1521 can be partly answered. We do have a clue to the identity of ‘William Pyers’, for instance: a William Peeris is known to have been a priest and secretary at that period to the fifth Earl of Northumberland, whose family, the Percies, then one of the most powerful and influential in the north of England and well-established patrons of Beverley, owned Wressle Castle nearby — from where the Governors paid Pyers’ travelling expenses.. If ‘Pyers’ and ‘Peeris’ represent the same individual, this would explain the style *dominus* in the Beverley account. Pyers is interestingly styled ‘poet’ in the Beverley account roll; Peeris wrote a verse chronicle of the Percy family. The chronicle survives, and is decidedly not poetry of a high standard, but more interesting from the point of view of this article is the suggestion that Pyers/Peeris was employed by the Governors to alter the Play text *because* of his poetic status, and that therefore his work had a significant effect on the language of the play.<sup>11</sup> The identification of Pyers and Peeris is admittedly not proved, but Occam’s Razor may usefully be applied here; it is more likely that the names both indicate a single individual than that there were two separate individuals with very similar names — the differences easily accounted for by the vagaries of contemporary orthography — both priests, one known to have been secretary to the Earl of Northumberland and a poet, the other paid to visit Beverley from Wressle to discuss the undertaking of work to which his being a poet was evidently relevant.

Assuming Pyers to have been Northumberland’s secretary, we are still left with three questions: what exactly was he asked to do to the Play, why did the Governors want it done, and why did they ask William Pyers in particular? Two words are used in the Latin MS to denote the task in

hand: *transposicio* and *alteracio*. The first is odd: in Latin usage of the period it can mean ‘translation’, or ‘transposing’ of prose to verse — neither of which seems helpful.<sup>12</sup> What would the Play text need to be translated from, or into? It was presumably in English, and the Beverley Governors would surely have had to be singularly eccentric to decide to have their Play translated *out* of English. Then again, unless it was unique among known Corpus Christi texts, it would already be in verse rather than prose. However, the scribe who wrote the record may have been latinising an English word for which he did not know a standard Latin equivalent, and the *OED* offers a sense of *transpose* as ‘change, convert’, with examples from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The other word used in the record, *alteracio*, suggests non-specific change, so ‘change’ or ‘revision’ is perhaps as near as we can go to understanding what Pyers was to do with the text. The records do not tell us exactly what kind of change, nor indeed how much of it. The town accounts of 1519–1520 list 7s spent by the Governors at the house of Edward Metcalff ‘for making agreements with [William Pyers] for the revision of the Play of Corpus Christi’ plus 3s 4d paid to Pyers ‘for his expenses and labour (in) coming from Wressle to Beverley for the alteration of the said play’.<sup>13</sup> That so much more was spent on refreshments than actually paid to Pyers suggests a very insignificant level of alteration to the text — but as he was in the Earl of Northumberland’s employment, his actual work on the text (as distinct from the meeting with the Governors) may have been covered by his existing salary or remunerated separately by the Earl. A look at surviving play texts and records from Coventry in the same period provides an interesting comparison: Coventry was also in economic decline, and revisions of play texts are recorded in 1519 and again in 1535. In the latter years, according to the colophon of the surviving Weavers’ Pageant, ‘T<h>ys mater [is] nevly translate be Robarte Croo’. In this case, because an earlier text of the pageant also survives, we can surmise that *translate* meant incorporating revisions in a new copy of the text, not composing a completely new play. However, the Coventry Plays weathered the economic crisis, surviving until 1579; and Croo, unlike Pyers, was evidently very much a local man of the theatre (though not, on the evidence, a great writer).<sup>14</sup>

The second question is really, on the basis of any available evidence, impossible to answer; we cannot know, because the records offer no clues, why the Governors wanted the change or changes made. It is easier to suggest why Pyers in particular was appointed to do the job, although

again there are no definite answers: the Percies were established patrons of Beverley. Speculation is very tempting: was the employment of William Pyers a favour to Northumberland, and was it he who had asked for the textual alterations? The 1520–1521 town account does not mention his attendance at the performance of the Play, but the fines imposed suggest the Governors' embarrassment at being let down in the presence of 'many visitors' (*multorum externorum*) — perhaps the Earl of Northumberland and other magnates who were his guests. The town records do offer occasional fascinating glimpses of local politics, but I have found no solid evidence of the kind of conflict among the Governors, or between Governors and craft guilds, which might offer an explanation of the abandonment of the Play after the 1520 performance. But the influence of Northumberland may help to explain why, if Pyers' revisions were disliked in the town, the Governors did not subsequently seek another writer to do the work.

However, another kind of explanation may be suggested for the early demise of the Play, which is supported by external records, though not very clearly by the town's own surviving documents, and that is the economic decline of Beverley in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the twelfth and thirteen centuries Beverley was 'noted for its cloth', and was connected by way of its Beck via the River Hull to the sea, so that it had some importance as a port also.<sup>15</sup> By the 1530s, however, the antiquary John Leland, in his *Itinerary*, made some illuminating comments: that the town was (still) 'larg and well builded of wood', but that its former 'good cloth making' was by then 'much decayed'.<sup>16</sup> His observation that the 'fairest' part of the town (the least decayed, presumably) was to the north indicates that the town's prosperity had moved away from the Beck at the south-eastern end; the textile industry had by then moved westward and southward from east Yorkshire, and Beverley's importance as a port had been overtaken by the royal foundation of Kingston upon Hull. Beverley's decline is clearly demonstrated by its descending ranking in tables drawn from poll-tax returns and subsidy rolls from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. In the 1334 subsidy assessment, Beverley ranked twentieth in terms of taxable wealth. The poll tax of 1377 shows Beverley ranking eleventh according to taxpaying population (behind London, Bristol, Coventry, and Colchester, but ahead of Newcastle, Winchester, Yarmouth, Hull, and Chester). But its ranking according to taxable population in 1524–1525 (from the subsidy of that year) has been estimated at 24th, and only 34th according to taxable wealth.<sup>17</sup> By 1548, the taxable

population of Beverley has been estimated to have dropped by a quarter to 3,900.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the picture is not entirely clear. Recent urban historians have cautioned against tending to simplify when interpreting the available evidence. Susan Reynolds notes that 'prosperity and economic growth can be defined in varying ways', as can decline: 'A house described as ruinous may only have needed repair: such words in medieval accounts should evoke in modern terms the customary gloom of a surveyor's report rather than photographs of war-torn buildings'. She adds that there is plenty of evidence of new building and conspicuous consumption on the part of wealthier citizens to counteract any impression of widespread decay in the early sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> In that light, Leland's use of the word 'decayed' for Beverley's textile industry should perhaps be treated with caution as a relative term implying a degree of decline rather than utter dereliction.

Another look at Beverley's own records in the years leading up to 1520 reminds us that the evidence suggests a complex mixture of decline and continuity, even growth — at least as far as the guilds' and Governors' attitudes to the Play are concerned. The Drapers' Guild was formed relatively late, in 1493, as a result of its own petition to split from the Merchants' Guild.<sup>20</sup> The text of the petition mentions a Rogation Day castle (the structures from which guild masters watched the Rogation Day procession), but no pageant; however, a set of Governors' ordinances made on the day (25 April) of the annual election of new Governors reports that the Drapers made a petition for their own livery, 'and to haue a Castell and a pageante as other occupacyons hase'.<sup>21</sup> The ordinances 'of the craft of drapers newly established' (*artis pannariorum de nouo fundatis*) specify not only the castle, and a light in St Mary's Church, but also a Corpus Christi pageant (*Deeming Pilate*) to be played 'every year when the Community ... shall have agreed that the pageants are to be played ...' (*annuatim quam Communitas ... consensierunt pagendas ludi*).<sup>22</sup> It seems striking, at a time of evident decline in the local cloth industry, that the Drapers wanted to incur the expense of independent guild status, but so the evidence appears to tell us. Into the sixteenth century, what little evidence survives suggests at least an intention on the Governors' part to keep the Play going: in the General Ordinance of 25 April 1515, the Governors decree that each burgess and brother of any craft may in general make contributions only to the craft of which he is a brother, except in years when the Corpus Christi Play is performed, when each burgess must make the appropriate contribution to the pageant his craft 'apperteyneth to'. This makes clear

that pageant contributions were a mandatory addition to regular subscriptions. The likely closeness in date (c1512–1520) of the list of assignments of pageants to guilds may have been designed to clarify exactly which pageant was the responsibility of which crafts (singly or in combination) at that period.

It is possible that the Governors' perceived need to insist on these responsibilities reflects an increasing unwillingness — perhaps for financial reasons — on the part of at least some craft members. And successive groups of Governors, even in the teeth of crafts' financial struggles, may have continued to see the town's pride as reflected in its ability to mount the Play — not indeed every year, but that was not a new phenomenon: records back to 1411 allow for the Play being a regular but not annual event.<sup>23</sup> The apparent discontinuation of the Play after 1520 may have had mixed economic and political causes, but the sheer incompleteness of the records, and the need for caution in interpreting those that survive, frustrates the attempt to come to any firm conclusion.

Hamlet, just before his own untimely demise, said, 'The rest is silence' — well, that's all he knew, and both *Hamlet* and Hamlet are alive and well 400 years later in the hands of performers, audiences, and academics. But in the case of the Beverley Play we are indeed faced with a silence, which it is temptingly enjoyable but pointless to fill with speculation. The surviving records tantalise with gaps and ambiguities: for example, the Beverley Governors knew (presumably) exactly what they meant by asking William Pyers to 'transpose' or 'alter' the Play, and therefore saw no need to have it spelt out in the records. Careful setting of the extant local records in the wider contemporary context can shed an oblique light on the subject, but the fate of the Play remains shadowy: a lesson in restraint for cultural historians, who must be content (as Hamlet also reminds us) to speak no more than is set down for them. We know that the Play, like the entertainer Yorick, lived and mattered to local people; but we don't know what either of them died of. To paraphrase Horatio, perhaps we do need a ghost come from the grave to tell us this — so long as we could trust it.

*Wantage*

## NOTES

1. *The Chester Mystery Cycle* edited R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 2 vols, EETS SS 3 (1974) and SS 9 (1986); *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire including Chester* edited Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David

Mills (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press and British Library, 2007).

2. *REED: Cheshire including Chester* introduction and records: see extracts below.
3. The support of Beverley people and the strategic importance of the town during the events of late 1536 is clearly shown in the work of recent historians: see R.W. Hoyle *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (Oxford UP, 2001) and Geoffrey Moorhouse *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002).
4. *REED: Cheshire including Chester* xxxiii. In Appendix 5, 'The Development of the Plays', the editors discuss the revisions of both the play texts and the Banns announcing performances, and the relationship between the Corpus Christi and Whitsun Plays. They comment:

'[T]here is no evidence of ... alterations [in accordance with religious changes] until the reign of Edward VI. The Smiths continued to produce the 'Purification' and the Wives the 'Assumption' and the clergy their Corpus Christi Play at least until 1539–40, when the Banns were copied into the Pentice Book'.

For the fullest in-depth study of the complex development of Chester drama in the sixteenth century, see David Mills *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

5. *REED: Cheshire including Chester* 67–87.
6. See below for discussion of Piers/Peeris.
7. These records have all been extracted in Diana Wyatt in 'Performance and Ceremonial in Beverley before 1642: an annotated edition of local archive materials' (unpublished D.Phil thesis; University of York, 1984). The same materials are in preparation for publication by Records of Early English Drama.
8. Beverley: East Riding County Record Office (ERRO), BC/II/3 fol. 1<sup>r</sup>. Despite its (modern) title, the Great Guild Book was a register maintained by the Governors of Beverley.
9. The Town Chartulary (BC/II/2), like the Great Guild Book (BC/II/3), the series of town accounts from 1344 (BC/II/6), and a broken series of Governors' and later Mayors' minute books (BC/II/7) are all currently deposited in the East Riding County Record Office in Beverley.
10. Chester has been well served by its antiquarians: five of the extant pageant texts are of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries — post-dating the last performances but well within living memory of it: *The Chester Mystery Cycle* I ix–xxvii. The records of Chester also contain immensely valuable antiquarian material, particularly the *Breviaries* of Archdeacon Robert Rogers and his son David; see *REED: Cheshire including Chester* Appendix 4. Beverley has no surviving Play text, either contemporary or in antiquarian copy, and although

several antiquarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did make copies of some records of the pageants, none supplies any significant material not found in the extant originals. The two most significant are George Oliver *The History and Antiquities of the Town and Minster of Beverley* (Beverley: M. Turner &c, 1829), and George Poulson *Beverlac; or the Antiquities and History of the Town of Beverley* (London: for George Scaum of Beverley, 1829).

11. William Peeris *Chronicle of the Family of Percy* edited John Besly (Reprints of Rare Tracts 1; Newcastle: Richardson, 1847 for 1843). Here is a random sample of the verse style:

This said third Lord William Percy as the Chronicles doth tell  
With kinge William Conqueror was in favour specially,  
Hee found none more stedfast among all his Councill  
Therefore hee promoted him in favour singularly  
ffor his merits & his manhood hee loved him cordeally  
& into the Boreall parts hee willed him to resort  
A noble Lady caused him to marry named Em de Porte.

12. I am grateful to Dr Abigail Young of Records of Early English Drama for her informed suggestions on this point.
13. Beverley: ERRO, BC/II/6/17: *Et (computantes petunt allocacionem) de vij s expendis per xcij<sup>cim</sup> gubernatores existentes cum domino Willelmo pyers poet apud domum Edwardi Metcalff pro conductibus secum faciendis pro transposicione Ludus corporis christi.*
14. For texts and discussion, see *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* edited Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2000). The editors suggest in their introduction that successive revisions to the Coventry play texts from the late fifteenth century, 'may be largely explained as efforts at accommodation to changing guild resources' by 'the combining and rationalizing of pageants' during times of economic difficulty' (3–6). I am grateful to Pamela King for drawing my attention to the possible parallels between Coventry and Beverley.
15. *Victoria History of the County of York: Volume 3* edited William Page (London: Constable, 1913) 436–7.
16. *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535–1543* edited Lucy Toulmin Smith, 5 vols (London: Centaur Press, 1964; reissue of 1906–1910 London edition by Bell) 5 39.
17. Alan Dyer, ranking lists of English medieval towns in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume I, 600–1540* edited D.M. Palliser (Cambridge UP, 2000) Appendix, 758–67.
18. Jennifer Kermode 'The greater towns 1300–1540' in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain Volume 1* 441–645.

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19. Susan Reynolds *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 144–5.
20. Beverley: ERRO, BC/II/3 fol. 25<sup>r</sup>.
21. Beverley: ERRO, BC/II/3 fol. 25<sup>v</sup>.
22. Beverley: ERRO, BC/II/3 fols 81<sup>r</sup>–81<sup>v</sup>.
23. Beverley: ERRO, BC/II/3 fol. 77<sup>r</sup> (1411), ordinance of the Bowers, Fletchers, and Coopers: *Et quod artes predictae annuatim ludent seu ludi facient quandam pagendam in festo corporis christi de habraham & Isaak et fleyng to Egip. Quando communitas in festo sancti marci concensiunt pagende generaliter ludi ...*