

one of the customs noted above, for while we might dismiss the ubiquitous Shrovetide cock-fighting as a sport irrelevant for street pageantry, Ronald Hutton quotes the reminiscences of the seventeenth-century antiquarian John Aubrey of the practice in his schooldays, an account which atypically extends into the aftermath of the combats, when the owner of the champion cock would parade ‘through the streets in triumph decked with ribbons, all his school fellows following with a drum and a fiddle’ on their way to feast at their master’s house.¹² While customary parades (and perambulations) can be undertaken for their own sake, and so productive of documentation, they can also be auxiliary, essentially a means (if concurrently demonstrative and spectacular) of getting to and/or from the venue for some customary activity or other, and so often unnoticed or taken for granted.¹³

Thus encouraged, we *could* play the transnational card, and seek authentication of the Norwich account in continental evidence, and will in due course do so, but not before confronting problems, both contextual and textual, seriously undermining its documentary credentials.

Contextual Aspects

The simplest and most basic problem with regard to context is that Gladman’s parade did not occur and could not have occurred ‘on fastyngong Tuesday’ in 1443, which was 5 March. The parade was in some way related to a riot in Norwich which provoked a royal inquisition, and that inquisition delivered its verdict several days before Shrove Tuesday, on 28 February. It furthermore indicated that Gladman’s parade occurred between 22 and 25 of January (almost six weeks before Shrovetide).¹⁴ We who have asserted or assumed otherwise¹⁵

12. Hutton *Stations of the Sun* 153–4.

13. We shall encounter the same phenomenon again later in connection with Shrovetide archery contests.

14. The discussion of the historical context that follows is largely based on Norman P. Tanner *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984) 146–52.

15. Ian Lancashire *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Cambridge UP, 1985) 236; Thomas Pettitt “‘Here Comes I, Jack Straw’: English Folk Drama and Social Revolt” *Folklore* 95: 1 (1984) 3–20, at 5; most recently Claire Sponsler *The Queen’s Dumbshows: John Lydgate and the Making of Early Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) 205.

have been misled by the text's perhaps deliberately ambiguous formulation (to which we will return).

This contextual problem is also literally *con-textual* in that the account just quoted is not the only documentation, and not necessarily the most reliable, for the events concerned. Indeed this account of the parade is itself often (as above) cited out of its own textual context, lacking adjacent passages revelatory of its true status. The full statement actually begins, 'And wher that it was so that on John Gladman of Norwich ...', revealing the whole description of the parade as an adverbial clause syntactically prefatory to (and rhetorically pre-emptive of) the immediately ensuing main clause, which complains that notwithstanding Gladman's wholly innocuous activity, certain ill-disposed persons

... caused the seid meir and comonalte and the said John Gladman to ben indited of that, that thei shuld an ymaged to a made a comon rysyng and a corouned the said John Gladman as kyng w^t coron ceptre and diademe.¹⁶

The 'King of Christmas' scenario is in other words designed to counter and refute an *alternative* (and prior) account, a con-text, according to which the parade was an insurrectionary demonstration, and Gladman's crown a challenge to established royal authority. Furthermore the full text of that antagonistic account, here merely summarised by the opposition side, is also available, and merits more serious attention than it has as yet received.¹⁷

These very disparate witnesses to the event represent the respective views of the two sides in a long-running dispute over rights and resources between on the one hand the City of Norwich, as represented by the mayor, most of the council, and many common citizens, and on the other the powerful Cathedral Priory, seconded by neighbouring monastic institutions, regional magnates and a faction within the city oligarchy. It culminated on 25 January 1443 when a crowd of commoners initiated a siege of the Priory, trying in vain to break down its gates. When after a few days order was restored, the Crown instigated the formal inquisition just mentioned, at which the alternative account effectively became the official view. It places the parade in the run-up to the riot, asserting

16. *Records of the City of Norwich* 346.

17. Its relative neglect is doubtless due partly to its comparative colourlessness, but it may also have played a role that the *Records of the City of Norwich* supplied (340) only a partial and somewhat misleading translation of the Latin original (remarked on by Tanner *Church in Late Medieval Norwich* 151, note, with which I concur).