

1679. Much later entries in the records of the Court Baron of Beccles Manor – in 1762, 1773, 1800, 1836, 1845, 1850, and 1857 – all refer to the camping close as a four-acre site bounded on the north by the lands of the lord and lady of the manor; on the south by the way of the lord leading towards Hall Meadows; on the east by a 1½ acre meadow called Holstead; and on the west by town-land called the game place. In the Court Baron of 1850, the camping close was referred to as ‘Guildhall Close or Camping Close 4 acres’. In 1787, a collector purchased from the feoffees the Workhouse on the site of the game place, in connection with the expansion of the jail. In recent years, the site of the game place had been ‘covered by the southern end of Clowes’ Printing Works’, but since 2005 it has been ‘the site of the new Tesco Stores car park bordering Gaol Lane and Newgate ... opposite the back of the Guildhall’. According to Lindley, ‘the medieval acting area of the Game Place was close to the late-eighteenth-century theatre building’ [a medieval or Tudor building] where travelling companies performed.<sup>27</sup>

#### *The Meaning of ‘Game’ and ‘Play’ in Suffolk*

The parts of north-east Suffolk and coastal Norfolk surrounding Beccles were rich in parish drama. The terminology that they, and other Suffolk communities, used in referring to local performance – particularly the words *game* and *play* – can help to illuminate the playing tradition in Beccles.

Of the records of local drama that survive in Suffolk, those from nine communities use the word *game* to describe their most lucrative fundraising entertainment, as do several in the nearby parts of Norfolk. In a few of these nine sets of parish records the precise meaning of *game* is uncertain, but in most of them the word *game* described a play. Bungay (situated about five miles from Beccles) provides the most dispositive example. The Bungay game had a script. In 1525/6, the wardens paid 12s for copying out the game book. In 1557/8, they paid for ‘the Interlude & game Booke’, and for the writing out of parts. The Bungay game had costumes. In 1542/3, the wardens paid for the sewing of *abbes* (‘albs’) that were worn at the game on Corpus Christi Day. In 1565/6, wardens borrowed apparel for playing from ‘my lord of Surrey’ in Norwich, and they paid elsewhere for the staining of certain clothing for the interlude. Following the

27. For these many details concerning the history of the game place, I wish to thank Mr David Lindley. He has collected that extraordinary knowledge in a document entitled ‘The Game Place & Camping Close’, which he most generously made available to me by e-mail on 6 March 2006.

game in 1567/8, they returned apparel to Wymondham, Norfolk (a town that had a game place, and an inventory including ‘a list of “apparel” for the game players’).<sup>28</sup> In 1576/7, the parish sold ‘the game players gownes & coates’ from old copes; elsewhere the same account refers to ‘the game players apparell’. In 1590/1 the parish sold players’ coats, apparently no longer used in community drama. The Bungay game also used props. In 1557/8, a parishioner rode to Yarmouth for game gear. In 1567/8, the wardens purchased nine planks for the cloud, and in 1573, they purchased nails for the stage. And the Bungay game used a scaffold stage. In 1565/6, the wardens paid for a scaffold ‘for the Interlude in the churchyarde’, and took a collection ‘at the churche ale & game on Trinyte sondaie’. In 1566/7, they twice purchased nails for the scaffold, and also paid for making and watching the scaffold. In 1567/8, they paid for disassembling the scaffold. The interchangeable use of *game*, *interlude*, and *play*, as part of a church-ale, confirm that the three terms were one and the same in Bungay; they describe a scaffold play, with written parts, that was staged in the churchyard. A payment ‘to Kelsaye the vyce for his pastyme before the plaie and after the playe both daies’, and another payment for the dying of *heares* (likely ‘wigs’) for the interlude players (both payments in 1565/6), strongly suggests that the play or game was a two-day production, and was very likely a morality play. It was always produced within the context of a church-ale, and the parish provided a dinner for the players.<sup>29</sup> In Bungay, it is abundantly clear that *game* meant ‘play’.

We know that four of the other eight parishes that used the word *game* had something called a *game* only because they travelled to advertise it. Bramfield received 4d when it ‘schewed’ its *game* at Walberswick in 1493/4. Thetford Priory paid ‘Walsham game et Gyslyngham’ 16d in 1505/6. The entry appears to indicate that the two were advertising their co-sponsored *game*. Walsham records, of course, confirm that they used their game place for stage plays (see below), so one might assume that *game* here means ‘play’. In the same year (1505/6), Thetford Priory also paid Bardwell and Mildenhall 12d each for their *plays* (probably for their banns), the like amount for *game* and *play* indicating similar activities. In 1504/5, Mildenhall had staged a *play* of St Thomas in the hall yard, at which they collected £7 in contributions for the parish. One might

28. Lowestoft: Suffolk Record Office 116/E1/1, pages 18 and 52; 115/E1/1, pages 8, 34–5, 48; *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk 1330–1642* edited John Wasson and David Galloway (Malone Society Collections 11; Oxford UP, 1980–1981) 120.

29. Lowestoft: Suffolk Record Office 116/E1/1, 18; 115/E1/1, pages 8, 52, 34–5, 103, 184, 8, 53, 153, 33, 41–3, 48, 35–6.