

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS IN CHESTER: A Summary Account

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The importance of music in the production of civic drama and pageantry is now well established. For Chester in particular there have been important studies of music in the city's Whitsun Plays, notably by Nan Cooke Carpenter, JoAnna Dutka, and Richard Rastall;¹ Rastall has also written an important article on minstrels' courts which includes a revealing account of the Minstrels' Court of the Duttons, held annually in Chester.² L.M. Clopper's *REED* volume of Chester drama records adds considerable documentary support to such studies,³ and Elizabeth Baldwin and I have found further evidence for music in the city as we have researched the drama-records of the county of Cheshire.⁴ This essay represents a preliminary attempt to survey the music scene in the city in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries using this evidence. It inevitably simplifies what was obviously a complex situation, but may perhaps provide a starting-point for subsequent, more detailed studies. For convenience I have artificially divided the account according to the performers involved. It should be remembered that this account is not concerned primarily with *what* was performed, only with performers and locations.

Church Music

The provision of music at St. Werburgh's Abbey in Chester, which later became the Cathedral of the diocese of Chester, was the responsibility of the precentor. We know little about the precentors before the early sixteenth century. But we are fortunate to have a copy of the contract issued to one of the precentors at the abbey in 1518, John Byrcheley.⁵ Byrcheley was a secular clerk from London who, because he was a married man, was provided by the Abbot with a house in Chester on the understanding that if his wife should die, he would take up rooms in the Abbey. He and his wife are given an allowance of food and drink, and John is to be provided for in the Abbey:

as the saide abbot hath bene accustomed to yeue vnto one of his
lentilmen doyng seruice within the saide monastry

which is indicative of John's status. John's contract sets out his responsibilities in considerable detail:

the said Iohn Byrcheley on his parte Couenauntethe and grauntithe to teche all suche bredren of the place as be or shalbe willyng herafstre to Lerne to syng thaire playnsonge fafunden prykksong descant to play on the Organs And to sett songes yf thay be dysposed to gif theymselffe therunto And aftre lyke manner to Instructe six Children for the Chapell and as many other scolars of the place that haue or shall haue thaire fyndyng within the monastery aforsaid as the saides Abbot and Conuent and theire Successores for the tyme beyng shall thynke necessarye for mayntenance of diuine seruyce within the said monastrye / Item to kepe a ladye masse dayly withe pryksong and organs and an Antemp of priksong foloyng the same Item euery fryday Iesus masse with priksong and thorgans at vj of the Clok in the morowe / And an Antemp of Iohn and of our Lady withe the pees at aftre Euynsong as hathe be vsed withe all other masses matyns and Antymps whiche hathe bene accustomed to be kepte withe pricksonge and Organs on festyvall dayes at any tyme hertofore or that shalbe thoght reasonable by the sayd Abbot and Conuent and their successors ... And to make & set descant upon the playnsonges of the Quere as he shalbe reasonably requyred to thonor of god

John was thus responsible for setting and playing the music at services, and was also empowered to teach the monks if they wished to receive instruction in singing, playing the organs, or 'setting songs', which could just possibly imply something wider than sacred music. Those so instructed would presumably make up the 'singing-men' of the choir. He also had to teach six children who apparently formed the choir in the chapel. They are distinguished from 'other scolars of the place', who seem to have been paid for from outside funds. Possibly they were either destined for a monastic vocation or sent to the Abbey to complete their education. But they might be required to augment the choir on certain occasions. If these arrangements continued after the creation of the cathedral, they have implications for the recruitment of singers for the Whitsun Plays.

John evidently had a marketable skill. He had, after all, been recruited from London, and might decide to move to a more lucrative post elsewhere. The contract therefore contains a proviso:

Also that the said Iohn shall not departe to no mans seruyce for the whyle of his patente But by concent of bothe partyes afore spokon

This clause seems to imply that John might move into private service, which suggests that such practice was not uncommon.

A sidelight on this contract is provided by a curious indenture in MS Harley 2095, dated 11 December 1503, whereby John, the Abbot of Rushen Abbey in the Isle of Man, agreed to pay 13s 4d annually for six years so that one John Darse could study with William Parke of Chester.⁶ Among the skills William was to teach John was music. The indenture specifies the kinds of music and skills to be taught, and they accord with those set out in John Byrcheley's contract. Fenella Bazin notes:

Such instruction would allow Darse to return to the Abbey as Precentor and train other musicians. Although there is no evidence to the contrary, I have yet to find proof that he completed his indentures and took up his duties at Rushen.⁷

Parke may be the William Park who on several occasions in the early sixteenth century was indicted for trading when not being a freeman of Chester. Probably he was, like John, precentor at the Abbey, although if the two William Parks are the same person he is never so described.

Byrcheley remained at St. Werburgh's until its dissolution, and then resumed appointment as organist to the newly constituted cathedral (1540). The cathedral statutes of circa 1544 provide for six singing-men, eight boy choristers and a choirmaster who was to instruct the boys in singing and in playing the organ. Since Byrcheley was now organist and had previously been required to undertake the teaching duties also, it would seem that a division of responsibility had now taken place. His re-appointment, however, suggests satisfaction and some degree of continuity. The entry on the cathedral accounts for 1543–44:

Item a payr of glovys ffor the prophet with his brikffast iiij d
indicates that quasi-dramatic liturgical ceremonies continued in the cathedral; similar entries occur for 1555–56 and 1558–59.⁸

The few records from Chester companies for the time during which the Whitsun Plays were performed bear ample evidence of the involvement of the cathedral's organists and musicians. Richard Rastall has analysed the records from the Painters', Smiths', Shoemakers', and Coopers' Companies in his account of music in the plays.⁹ The clearest evidence of cathedral involvement comes in the Smiths' accounts for their play of *The Purification*, which include not only payments to boys and singing-men, but also to a minor canon, Sir Randle Barnes, in 1561, and to the precentor, Sir John Gerson, in 1567, both of whom were apparently able to provide singers and would certainly be able to supply the necessary settings. A 'mr white' who was paid 4s in 1566–67 and 4s 'for singinge' in 1567–68, may have been the

greatest of the Chester organists, Robert White, who served the cathedral from 1567–70. In 1569–70, when the Midsummer Show was staged instead of the Plays, the accounts include:

Item payd the menstrelles the same nyghte ij s vj d

Item payd mayster whytte for oure songes iiiij d

which suggests that White provided some musical entertainment at the Company's dinner, presumably of a secular nature.¹⁰ Alan Thacker suggests: 'With White's departure the chapter's interest in the mystery plays seems to have waned',¹¹ but the more probable explanation is that, in the changed circumstances of Elizabeth's reign, the chapter felt it politic to disengage itself somewhat from an event which was becoming increasingly politicised.

It may be significant that the only scored piece of music in the extant manuscripts, that of the 'Gloria' in the *Shepherds' Play*, occurs in the manuscript of James Miller, precentor of the cathedral, which was copied in 1607. Since Rastall is unable to identify the source, the setting may well have been specially composed for the plays by a precentor.

After the closure of the Abbey, singing-men could no longer rely on the subsistence provided by a monastic household. They could fall upon hard times. A singing-man is listed among the paupers in 1617–18, and in 1611–12 a special payment was made to a poor singing-man from Ireland.¹² Special rewards were given to singing-men for unusual services — 3s 6d was paid to a singing-man in 1555 who 'was here all Christemas be the commandemente of mr dayne & ye Canons'. A gift of wine was made in 1559 'for them yat song ye passion att ye passion week'.¹³ These special payments may reflect the restoration of some traditional liturgical ceremonies similar to that involving the Palm Sunday prophet, following Mary's accession. William Hearne, 'a very good singinge man', was given 5s at the choir's request because he was delayed in Chester awaiting a favourable wind when about to sail to Ireland in 1596–97.¹⁴

The Minstrel Court

Chester's Minstrels' Court has been much discussed, most revealingly by Richard Rastall.¹⁵ The tradition in the city was that it was a privilege granted by Ranulf de Blundeville, Earl of Chester, to his steward as a reward for rescuing him from the siege of Rhuddlan by the Welsh. It being fair-time in Chester, the steward was able to raise only a rabble of minstrels and whores, but the sight of this curious army advancing put the Welsh to flight. In consequence, the steward was granted the privilege of licensing minstrels

throughout Cheshire, a privilege which descended to the Dutton family. Sir Peter Leicester's account of the ceremony of licensing in the later seventeenth century, which took place in Chester, is transcribed and discussed in *REED: Chester*. Each year, on 24 June, the Feast Day of St John the Baptist, a proclamation was delivered under the banner of the Duttons in Chester summoning all who wished to practise the art of music to attend the Court. The minstrels processed to St John's Church, where they played, and then went to an inn in the town where the Court was held. On giving certain assurances, each could purchase a licence.¹⁶ This licensing system — which, accepting the traditional date of origin, lasted some five and half centuries — was clearly regarded as effective, and the county was exempted from country-wide licensing provisions in 1315 and 1449, as well as from the various vagabondage acts relating to minstrels during the reign of Elizabeth. One of the successes of the Puritan Cheshire squire, John Bruen, was to persuade his cousin Dutton to emend the minstrel-licences to prohibit piping and dancing on the Sabbath, effectively in defiance of national policy.

The existence of the Court must have encouraged itinerant musicians to come to Cheshire and to Chester itself, and thus augmented a problem of competition from the outsiders with the established liveried performers in the town. The Duttons seem themselves to have been patrons of musicians in their household — Edmund Kelly, from the Kelly family of musicians, was in their service in 1574/5.¹⁷ They could also call upon the services of musicians for special occasions. When two of his daughters married in a double wedding in 1539–40, the wedding was solemnized on St John's Day, and the steward of Dutton met the returning wedding party with the Dutton banner and all the newly licensed minstrels playing, and escorted the guests through Chester to their houses.¹⁸

Some of the Duttons' servants were involved in an incident during Chester's Midsummer Show of 1610 which seems in some obscure way to relate to the 'musical politics' of the city.¹⁹ The Tallowchandlers' Company processed in the Show with 'before them ij musitioners with vialls [before them] playinge accordinge to an auncient Custome' when 'there Came ij or iij of Mr Duttons men of dutton vnto them and tooke the instrumentes from the musicke'. The choice of instrument seems surprising, since viols provide a low (bas) music and one tends to think of the Show as having loud (haut) music. The record suggests that such performance was, however, a traditional part of the Company's contribution to the Show. But more puzzling is the seizure of the instruments, which led eventually to bloodshed. Was this an attack upon musicians assumed to be unlicensed? While we have

no information about the Tallowchandlers' Company (which merged with the Barber Surgeons), we know that other companies hired minstrels for the Show.²⁰ Or was it merely professional jealousy by musicians who had not been hired for the Show?

The Waits

Like other towns, Chester had its Town Waits. There is no evidence of when they were established; we first encounter them when they are given a contract in the second mayoralty of Henry Gee (1539–40), which points out that their precise duties have never before been defined, although it is clear that they have had customary duties.²¹ They were to play each evening, except Wednesday and Friday, and in the morning on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. New regulations were approved in 1672. They were entitled to, and required to, wear the city's livery.²² An agreement on 28 May 1590–91 established that the instruments played by the Waits were their property.²³ The instruments there are specified as 'the how boies the Recorders the Cornetes and violens'. The inventory of William Maddock, one of the Waits of Chester, in 1604, refers to a sackbut, double curtal, two cornets and a tenor viol.²⁴ Maddock was evidently the leader of the City Waits at that time and the instruments in his personal possession were presumably those used by the company.

The position of Wait had become to some extent hereditary, at least by the later sixteenth century. The 1590–91 agreement refers to the sons of two of the waitmen, Thomas Williams and Christopher Burton:

When they shall have served out their yeres as Apprentices to the said
exercise

This 'apprenticeship' did not confer the freedom of the city upon its completion, because the waits were not a city company. When George Cally, a status-conscious individual, became in 1608 the first waitman to be admitted to the freedom of the city, it was:

in regarde he was borne broughte vpp and hath all his life tyme
hitereto dwelled in this Citie

not because he was a wait. Thomas Fisher, who petitioned at the same time and could claim not only that he was born in Chester but also that his grandfather had been a freeman, was turned down in the same year.²⁵ The Fisher family must have entered waitmanship through apprenticeship to a wait, for the Waits did take apprentices from other city families. Their own sons learned their trade from their fathers or from other members of the

group and the skill and position were passed down from generation to generation. Under the 1590–91 agreement, the instruments always remained among the families of this small group.

The Waits and other musicians played at private functions and also on public street celebrations such as the Whitsun Plays and the Midsummer Show. We see them on their rounds in 1620, coming down Bridge Street as far as the Dee Bridge, and, having finished their tour, drinking with a friend until it was time to go on to a private engagement for the evening, ‘the musicke goeing to plaire att a gentle[le] mans chamber’.²⁶ But they must have played on other occasions although we have only rare glimpses of them. It was possibly the Waits who provided the cornets at the opening of the Assizes in 1618/19. They also played in other towns; they received 7d for playing at Congleton in 1617–18. Similarly, waits from other towns occasionally came to Chester; the sole example is that of waits of Shrewsbury who were paid twelve pence by the Cordwainers’ Company in 1549–50 at a private occasion.²⁷

Cases of breach of the peace among the musicians of the city are fairly frequent. In 1588–89 Wiliam Maddock, Thomas Williams, William Mercer, and Christopher Burton of the waits were bound over to keep the peace. A similar order was made in 1590–91 binding George Kelly, John Kelly, Christopher Burton, Thomas Hough, and William Maddock. There is no indication of the reason for these disputes but they probably reflect tensions of a personal, professional, and financial nature.²⁸ In 1609 Thomas Williams, who had been a City Wait and worn the city’s livery, refused to play with the other Waits and was imprisoned. Released on condition that he resumed his duties, he still refused to play with them. While technically imprisoned for breaking his contract, he had left without licence and travelled to various engagements elsewhere, presumably on the strength of being a liveried player.²⁹

Such dereliction of duty occurred on a larger scale in 1613–14, when George Kelly petitioned the Assembly:

Deseringe that he and his felowe Musitians may be admittedn waytes of this Cittie in stede of the Waytes now absent fyndinge Instrumentes of his owne Charg to perferme the service which is deferred to be graunted vntill it may be vnderstoode what are become of the ould waytes.³⁰

It seems amazing that the Waits had apparently deserted their duties without the fact being recognised by the Assembly. Kelly, with his ensemble, had

been quick to spot the opportunity and make a bid for the funded post, which ultimately was successful.

Later the same year Kelly and ‘the reste of his nowe Company’ were admitted as Waits and the Mayor handed over to Kelly:

one double Curtayle wantinge a staple of brasse for a reede, and one
tenor Cornett beinge the Citties instrumentes.³¹

Since these instruments would not furnish a company of waits, Kelly’s offer to provide instruments at his own expense must have seemed particularly attractive to the Assembly. The records do not indicate what had become of the former Waits, but it would seem that they had left the city and taken the majority of the city’s instruments with them.

Ensembles

Private functions were the competitive battle-ground for the various groups of musicians within the city. Members of the Kelly family in particular were simultaneously Waits, and servants of notable local families whose liveries they wore, and leaders of their own musical ensembles which may have been recruited on a somewhat ad hoc basis. Something of the complexity of the situation can be gauged from the records of the Shoemakers’ Company. Grouped together in their accounts for 1605–06 are George Kelly and his company; the Waits; and Henry Shurlock, a piper in Chester.³² This demonstrates that George Kelly had at that time his own ‘group’, possibly with its own instrumental combination. One possibility is that the usual shawm-and-trumpet combination of the Waits could provide loud music for dancing; the piper dance-music in a different style (see below); and the Kelly company perhaps music during the meal. Where, as often happens, only Kelly is mentioned in the accounts, he probably performed solo. George Kelly’s brother, Robert, also had his own company of musicians (compare 1611/12) and is also mentioned alone (compare 1614, 1616/17). He, the Waits, and the company led by his brother George were all hired in 1609/10, and the payment to the ‘Kellyes’ in 1611/12 perhaps suggests that the brothers also played as a duo. We seem, in fact, to have a fairly flexible situation in which a company requiring music might hire the waits; or a local solo player such the piper Henry Shurlock; or go to one of the Kellys who would assemble a group for the occasion. There seems, in fact, to have been a pool of musicians in the city.

Moreover, private patrons might look outside the town for their musical ensembles. In 1574 a Richard Preston, who played treble violin, said that he

lived at Warrington and that he and his company were playing 'up' St Werburgh's Lane from the Eastgate towards the Northgate towards 'their hoste foxall his house'.³³ Apparently Mr. Foxall had hired Preston, who lived at some distance from Chester, for a private function and Preston had brought his own company to the town to play. Like a wait, Preston seems to have had an apprentice musician with him, since at one point he handed his instrument to 'his boy'. Mr. Hicock, the defendant, proved himself an accomplished violin player, and so impressed Preston that he invited Hicock to drink with him at Foxall's house. We have no evidence of Hicock as a professional musician, so he was presumably a gifted amateur, evidence of the musical ability that existed among the ordinary citizens.

The relationship between the Kelly brothers was not always amicable. In 1599 Robert Kelly was bound over to keep the peace with his brother George and his wife Jane.³⁴ Professional rivalry evidently lay behind this feud. Relations had evidently become so strained between the brothers that in 1599–1600 an agreement was drawn up between them:³⁵

to Contynue be and remayne of one Consorte and to play vpon their instrumentes together still in one Company and be lovinge and frendlie thone to thother . . .

The agreement indicates that George had two boys and Robert one. These were evidently apprentice musicians, but were part of the ensemble, because the fees were to be divided 3:2 in favour of George and were to be proportionately adjusted as the numbers changed.

The agreement was not fully successful. As the Shoemakers' accounts quoted above indicate, the two brothers still continued to appear separately as well as together. And feelings continued to run high between them. In 1609 George Kelly was accused of uttering insulting speeches against his brother.³⁶

the said George Cally then said [the] that his brother Roberte Croutched to gett Sir John Savage patches which he would neuer doe, and said yat he was [the] Lord of darbys man . . .

The Savage family was one of the two great influential families in the area. They lived in a splendid house called Rock Savage to the north of Chester, overlooking the Mersey estuary, and provided a number of mayors of the city, including the Sir John Savage who, as mayor, was responsible for the last performance of the Whitsun Plays in 1575. George's sneer suggests that Robert had grovelled to win favour and enter Sir John's service. The 'patches' seem to be a disparaging reference to the Savage livery. George, by implication, served the Earl of Derby, one of the second of the great families,

who lived at Lathom Hall in Lancashire but provided a number of Chamberlains of Chester. George's insult goes beyond the personal; it insulted the Savages, but also implied a social hierarchy of service in the city. George, who had successfully petitioned to be made a freeman, seems to have been particularly conscious of status and hence to have resented his brother's position.

Apparently thinking himself in safe company, Kelly had gone further still in his incautious remarks, commenting dismissively upon the outgoing mayor, William Gamull, and making the following interesting assessment of his successor:

the said Cally ~~saih~~ said prae ^said^ yat ^when^ mr Leicester should be maior he would nether loue the waite ^men^ nor himselfe and more saith not.

The implication here seems to be that the waitmen were to some extent dependent upon the good will of the individual mayor, though it is not clear in what respect this might be true.

Kelly built up a strong position for himself as wait, ensemble leader, servant to the Earl of Derby, and freeman. But his near monopoly of music in the city in the early seventeenth century was threatened by competition. In 1614-15 he was again petitioning the Assembly, this time to have his competitors expelled.³⁷ He urged particularly that he was a native Cestrian, a freeman and the Assembly's servant, unlike his competitors, John Farrar, Thomas Squire, Richard Bell, and Nicholas Webster, 'meere strangers vnto the Cittie' who have:

of late intruded theimself into the Companies & societies of seuerall persons in the said Cittie, and doth arrogate vnto himself the said arte of dauncinge & the teachinge thereof ^and^ the science of musicke

Squire is probably the cornet player who in 1613-14 was paid eighteen pence for playing on 'the kinges day'; enigmatically under the same accounts is the entry:

Payde to Squire the Cornett player by mr Mayors appoynment to gett him out of the Cittye vjs viijd³⁸

We know nothing more about the other two named musicians. Kelly's petition should be read with the undated petition of about the same period (see below). Here the competition is evidently from trained musicians who could read and teach music, whereas the joint petition seems rather to refer to those who played by ear. Kelly points to the large number of his dependents,

and it is evident that his livelihood is being eroded. Unfortunately, we do not know the outcome of the petition.

Itinerant Musicians

That distinction between the minstrel and musician is made also in a curious poem in praise of the Stanleys which was written by Thomas Stanley (*obit* 1570). Thomas recounts what was evidently a family tradition, that Edward Stanley had been an accomplished instrumentalist and had defeated the musicians of the King of Castile in a music contest before Henry VII, playing first the recorder and then the horn. It describes how:

He stode before the kinges doubtles this was true
In a fayre gowne of cloth of gould of tissiue
Like no common minstrell to shewe taverne myrth
but like a noble mann both of Land and byrth
he shewed much conning those two kings before

The poem distinguishes the common minstrel showing ‘taverne myrth’ and the noble man in his splendid robes, skilled in the art of music (‘conning’). Thomas’s account suggests that musical accomplishment was prized by the family as one sign among many of Edward’s gentility.

Though the musician servant of the lord might feel superior to the town waits, both felt superior to the itinerant musicians who came to Chester and who might be licensed by the Minstrels’ Court of the Duttons. Among the Innkeepers’ loose papers is a petition from George Kelly and his company, Thomas Skinner and Robert Kelly and their company, and the Waits of Chester urging that they alone shall have the right to play for the Company.³⁹ It is worth quoting the petition in its entirety for the distinctions it makes:

In humble manner complayning seweth vnto your Worships that where as the Musitians of the Cittie of Chester haue bene and are from tyme to tyme attendant at the requeste of any to the said company belonging, there in [h<...>ly] to bestowe theire tyme, and good will to the vttermost of theire power accordingly, and as becommeth men of that science liberall in theire behalfe as behooveth: and againe where as divers customeable intrude them selves, being not Musitions in deed, but rather Apish imitators of so excellent a science, neither borne and brought vp in this Cittie, nor having served as apprentices with the Reste, no lesse to the disgrace of such severall inholders where they vse, as to the losse of others whose practise is apparante, and

theire knowledge throughlie knowne to all estates of what degree soever. These are therefore to beseech *your Worships* that consideracion had thereof, men of no knowledge, nor yet of good government, may not be suffered to presume the preffer of theire loathsome stiffe, being no currante musicque at all: but that George Calley the Right Honorable the Earle of Darby his servant, and Consorte; the Waites of this Cittie of Chester; Thomas Skinner and Roberte Calley with theire company, may be admitted as musitions only, and non other. Which if *your Worships* shall vouchsafe to performe, *your said Orators* shall rest satisfied, all resortes better contented, and lesse molested, the Cittie not disgraced, the majestie of Musicque fully revived, and *your Orators* bound to pray to god for the preservacion of *your Worships* good estates long to continue.

Here George Kelly, the city Waits, and Thomas Skinner and Robert Kelly, who were rivals for business within the city, make common cause to claim a monopoly over the 'outsiders' who now seem to offer a threat to their business with the Innkeepers, who were presumably among their best patrons. The case is argued on the basis of quality. The petitioners have served their apprenticeships in music and are knowledgeable in its science; they can read, one infers, music and and perhaps compose. The 'Apish imitators' seem to be those who play only by ear. Presumably the latter offered an acceptable service at a reasonable rate. Though the petition is undated, it belongs to the early seventeenth century and suggests that competition had become more intense by that time.

The terminology for these vagrant players is difficult to untangle. *Musicioner* or *musicion* seems to imply that the performer has received some kind of formal training and can read music. Richard Preston, mentioned above, is described as a *musicioner* by profession, but just before the word, 'pip' has been deleted. Preston was not a piper, but possibly the fact that he had come from outside the city disposed the clerk automatically to designate him such. It is tempting to imagine an angry expostulation from Preston. Another term is *minstrel*. 'Brasey the minstrel' was paid four pence on two separate occasions in 1585–86 by the Painters' Company, but it is not clear what instrument he played.⁴⁰ But these itinerants were not without noble support. In 1583 Christopher Goodman wrote to the Earl of Derby about the 'vnprofitable and Idell persons' who were entertained by the city because they wore the liveries of noblemen, the city fearing to incur the displeasure of the powerful. Among them he includes minstrels.⁴¹ Goodman's letter claims

that visits from such undesirables were frequent, but again it is not clear exactly what is intended by the term.

There are numerous references to pipers and fiddlers in the court records of the county, but comparatively few relating to Chester itself. Most probably such musicians were employed to provide entertainment in the numerous inns of the city, as they did elsewhere in the county. According to a case in 1612, in which William Moores, an innkeeper, was accused of not observing the curfew, a piper called John Peacock had taken up residence in William's inn in Chester. William 'sayth That this night last past the said Piper played vntill Eleven of the Clocke in the night or theraboutes'. And Elizabeth Craddock from Baguley, who was staying at the same inn while en route to see her mother in the Wirral, 'danced after him for a while with an ould man. whose name she knoweth not'.⁴² It seems likely that John Peacock was allowed lodging in order to provide entertainment for William's residents and guests. He was evidently one of a family of musicians itinerant within the county. A 'Peacock of Beeston a piper' is mentioned in a Gaol File of 1615, Beeston being a village to the south of Chester⁴³ and 'one Peacocke a fiddler' accompanied a riotous assembly in Bunbury in 1620.⁴⁴ The baptismal records of Malpas parish, Cheshire, distinguish 'Peacock ye fidler' (1637) and 'Peacock the Piper' (1640),⁴⁵ and 'Humffrey Peacock a piper' turns up at Tarporley Wakes in 1616.⁴⁶ The music was evidently dance-music and the dancing impromptu, but fiddlers might also sing topical songs. In 1588 two fiddlers in a hostelry sang, in anticipation, of 'the last Triumphe of england against the spaniardes', and were rebuked by a visitor from Lancaster who said:

he wold geue them noe money for that song for that he liked it not for
that it was not ~~fit~~ for a man to reioice before the victory.⁴⁷

We find references to pipers and fiddlers most frequently in court cases relating to the popular revels and wakes in the county villages. Possibly because of the nature of their engagements within the city, it is rare to find them causing disturbances in Chester itself. Henry Shurlock, whom we have seen hired by the Shoemakers, was in 1588–89 restrained from playing his pipes *matutine* without a licence from the city; it is not clear whether this means merely 'in the morning' or more precisely 'in the early morning', though one strongly suspects the latter; charged with him was another piper, Richard Chatterton. In both cases the Portmote Court threatened to confiscate their pipes if they did not observe the order.⁴⁸ In 1574 Henry Turner of Chester vouched for the good conduct of the piper Richard Jackson, which suggests that Jackson had not been behaving himself.⁴⁹

Sometimes, however, the itinerants became involved in serious political actions. When the Earl of Derby fell under suspicion of Catholic sympathies, among the aspersions cast upon his loyalty was the claim that one of his servants, one Kent, a minstrel, had criticised the city's council for not ringing the bells on All Saints' Day.⁵⁰

In 1642 a most curious but evidently well-planned incident occurred. The Grand Jury had met for a dinner in Castle Lane, Chester when 'Came in Thomas Cowper & his company whoe dwell att Whichurch in the Countye of Salopp: beinge fiddlers and Rouges by the Stattute; did singe scandalous songs'.⁵¹ The songs were political. They criticised Parliament for releasing John Bastwicke and William Prynne from banishment, and for making peace with Scotland. Bastwick (1593–1664) and Prynne (1600–69) were both puritan controversialists who had been punished on several occasions for their outspoken attacks upon the Laudian Church. Both had appeared together before the Star Chamber in 1637, Bastwick for his 'Letanie of Dr. John Bastwicke', and Prynne for a pamphlet attack on Wren, Bishop of Norwich, and had been punished with £5000 fines, loss of their ears (in Prynne's case what remained from a previous mutilation) and imprisonment.

Bastwick was incarcerated in St. Mary's Castle, Scilly, and Prynne in Carnarvon Castle. They had been released by the Long Parliament in 1640 and had enjoyed a triumphal entry into London. Both were later to play prominent roles in the Parliamentarian cause. Prynne was already well known for his attack on stage-players and performers, *Histriomastix*, of 1632, which would provide a further incentive to the protests of Cowper and his company.⁵²

Other Music and Musicians

Not all the musicians in Chester can be accommodated under the above heads. The city had its own drummer, who was called upon to play at civic occasions and at troop musters. The Shrovetide Races and the Midsummer Show were ceremonial events at which he would perform. He also accompanied the Cryer when he proclaimed the race on St. George's Day, established in 1610; probably he would routinely accompany him at all proclamations.⁵³ Expenditure on repairs to the city's drum — not all of which are listed in *REED: Chester* — occur frequently in the accounts. The earliest reference to the official post of drummer is in the Treasurers' Accounts of 1583–84 when a payment of twelve pence is made 'to city drumer'.⁵⁴ The post was held for a long time by one Guest, who first appears in the accounts in 1612–13 and is still holding the post in 1641–42.⁵⁵

At the other extreme was impromptu music-making. William Helen found himself in trouble in 1585 for playing a joke on four women whom he found singing and dancing near his house one evening:

two beinge manske borne (as it seemed) vsed such straunge kynde of daunce, singinge, and wanton toyes, as seemed were straunge to your orator

The reference is the earliest extant to Manx dancing as a distinctive form, and the singing which accompanied it was clearly also distinctive.⁵⁶

The spectrum of music in Chester is thus wide. Among the professionals, the need to earn one's living meant that an opportunist ability to find engagements and build up contacts was combined with a search for long-term employment in a household or as a wait. The broad distinction between those who had been educated to read music as well as play and those who had learned to play by ear became increasingly significant, especially in a county which had its own independent licensing system for minstrels. The competitiveness of the profession is reflected not only in the attempts of George Kelly to secure protection from competition, but also in the acrimonious disputes between musicians, both as competitors for business and also within ensembles when personal chemistry or poor performance could lead to insults and blows. Yet despite the insecurities, people do not seem to have been deterred from taking up music as a career, and our records are scattered with names of musicians, glimpsed, when itinerants, usually only when they fall foul of the law. Probably the itinerants, like the professional companies but on a smaller scale, had their own circuits around the towns, wakes and inns of the county. It seems unlikely, however, that we shall be able to trace those circuits with any certainty.

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NOTES

1. Nan Cooke Carpenter 'Music in the Chester Plays' *Papers on English Language and Literature* 1 (1965) 195–216; JoAnna Dutka *Music in the English Mystery Plays* (Early Drama, Art and Music Reference Series 2: Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo, 1980); Richard Rastall 'Music in the Cycle' in R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1983) 111–64.
2. G.R. Rastall 'The Minstrel Court in Medieval England' *Proceedings of the Leeds Literary and Philosophical Society* 18:1 (1982) 96–105.

3. *REED: Chester* edited L.M. Clopper (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1979).
4. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Leverhulme Trust in providing funding for a two-year Research Associateship, held by Elizabeth Baldwin, to pursue this project; and of the British Academy in providing funded study leave for David Mills in session 1995–96 to complete the work.
5. The John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester, Latin manuscript 460, fol 21¹.
6. BL Harley 2095, fol 106b.
7. Fenella Crowe Bazin ‘Music in the Isle of Man up to 1896’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Liverpool University, 1995) 49. I am grateful to Dr. Bazin for allowing me to read and quote from her thesis, which is intended for publication as a definitive study of music in the Isle of Man.
8. *REED: Chester* 45; for the 1555–56 and 1558–59 payments, see *REED: Chester* 58 and 62. Alan T. Thacker’s pamphlet *Chester Cathedral: Its Music and Musicians* (Chester, n.d.) provides an admirable brief account of music and musicians at the cathedral, to which I am indebted.
9. Rastall ‘Music in the Cycle’ 132–38.
10. *REED: Chester* 78, 86, 89.
11. Thacker *Chester Cathedral: Its Music and Musicians* 5.
12. Cheshire County Record Office, Cathedral Treasurers’ Accounts 1611–44, EDD/3913/1/4: 28 (1611–12) and 141 (list of paupers, 1617–18).
13. Chester County Record Office, Cathedral Treasurers’ Accounts 1542–49, EDD/3913/1/1: 274 (1555) and 325 (Palm Sunday, 19 March 1559).
14. Cheshire County Record Office, Cathedral Treasurers’ Accounts 1596–97, EDD/3913/1/3: 201.
15. Rastall ‘Minstrel Court in Medieval England’ 96–105.
16. *REED: Chester* 486–89.
17. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Files, QSF/29/122:
Edmnd Cally of the Cyty of Chester Muscioner servant to the said
John Dutton esquier of thidg of xxxth of yeres or thereaboutes.
18. *REED: Chester* 43–44.
19. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Examinations, QSE/9/69.
20. Typical is the entry in the Joiners’ Accounts for 1590–91: ‘Iteme geven to the
minstrells to playe a fore our compeny one mydsomer even ij s’; *REED: Chester*
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21. See *REED: Chester* 43.
22. The Treasurers' Account Rolls for 1554–55 include a payment of 39s 8d to Thomas Smith 'for vij yarde of Clothe to the wettemens gownys'; *REED: Chester* 55.
23. *REED: Chester* 164–65.
24. Cheshire Record Office, Wills, WS William Maddock, 4 September 1604 (single sheet folded).
25. *REED: Chester* 226–27.
26. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Files, QSF/67/6.
27. *REED: Chester* 49.
28. Chester City Record Office, Mayor's Book 1584–89, MB/24: fol 12^v (18 November 1588–89) and Mayor's Book 1589–92, MB/25: fol 62^v (4 September 1591).
29. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Examinations, QSE/9/2: fols 1^r–2^r (21 October 1609).
30. *REED: Chester* 280.
31. *REED: Chester* 285.
32. Chester City Record Office, Cordwainers and Shoemakers' Company Accounts, G8/3, fol 22^v.
33. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Examinations, QSE/5/46.
34. Chester City Record Office, Mayor's Book 1596–99, MB/27.
35. *REED: Chester* 194–95.
36. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Examinations, QSE/9/8.
37. *REED: Chester* 290.
38. *REED: Chester* 281.
39. Chester City Record Office, Innkeepers' Company Loose Papers, undated (early seventeenth century), G13/42.
40. Chester City Record Office, Painters' Company Account Book 1585–86, G/17/1, fol 84^r.
41. Clwyd Record Office, Ruthin, DD/PP/844, December 1583 (single sheet).
42. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Files, QSF/61/47, 1612 (single sheet).
43. Cheshire County Record Office, Quarter Sessions Files, QJF/44/1/99, 8 May 1615 (single sheet).

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44. Public Record Office, Information on May Games, CHES/24/115/3, July–August 1620 (single sheet).
45. Cheshire County Record Office, Malpas Parish Registers 1562–1609, P/21/3607/1/1: 117 (6 August 1637) and 1640–80, P/21/3607/1/3: 3 (28 June 1640).
46. Public Record Office, Gaol Files, CHES/24/113/4, 19 August 1616 (single sheet).
47. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Examinations, QSE/3/84, fols 2^r–v.–89, MB/24: 17 May 1588–89, fol 36^v .
48. Chester City Record Office, Mayor's Book 1584–89, MB/24: 17 May 1588–89, fol 36^v .
49. Chester City Archive, Mayor's Book 1572–76, MB/21: fol 142^v (3 May 1574).
50. Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 159/15–17; *Calendar of Salisbury at Hatfield Manuscripts*, part 1 (1883), number 1754. I am most grateful to David George for drawing this entry to my attention, and to Lord Salisbury for permission to transcribe and publish the document.
51. Public Record Office, Gaol Files, CHES/24/126/3, unfoliated (22 April 1642).
52. On Bastwick, see *Dictionary of National Biography* 1, 1309b–1310a; on Prynne, DNB 16, 432a–437b. As he passed through Chester on his way to Carnarvon, Prynne was hospitably received by a group of local puritans, headed by Calvin Bruen, and their public displays of support provoked retaliatory action by the Bishop of Chester.
53. Compare Chester City Record Office, Corporation Lease Book, CHB/3, fol 103^r (23 April 1612):

[The race to be] houlden and kepte vpon St George his daye except it fall out to light either vpon Saterday or Saboath day, Then they shalbe Runne for vpon Mondaie next followinge and the Warninge by the drummer and Cryer shalbe upon Saterday or the day next before St George day not beinge ye Saboath.
54. REED: Chester 137.
55. REED: Chester 275 and 459.
56. Chester City Record Office, Quarter Sessions Files, QSF/36/58, fol 1^r–v (3 November 1585).