

## 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<sup>v</sup>-255<sup>r</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

### QUID? ('What?')

It takes the standard form of a proclamation<sup>4</sup> (*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.<sup>5</sup> 'We command' is a performative verb; the act of proclaiming is *performative* in the original Austinian sense.<sup>6</sup>
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?