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The Donington Cast List: Innovation and Tradition in Parish Guild Drama in Early Elizabethan Lincolnshire

I

Scholars generally agree that the Chantries Act of 1547 dealt one of the severest blows to traditional parish drama during the Reformation because it dissolved the foundations of local religious guilds, one of the chief sponsors of drama in the towns and villages of England. In his *Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England*, H.F. Westlake, going further, argued that the Act simply accelerated the death of organizations that had already 'lost something of their older democratic character' and had begun to exclude 'the poorer classes'.¹ That view would seem to imply that the guilds were a decaying structure simply waiting to be toppled and, by extension, that the drama they produced was also in a parallel state of decline. But to what extent are these two propositions true? As the Records of Early English Drama (REED) volumes emerge, they are gradually providing more information about parish drama in the decades between 1547 and 1570, but at present our understanding of the immediate local effects of the successive reigns of Edward and Mary, and the first decade of Elizabeth, on parish entertainments remains fragmentary.

A document (see Appendix 1) from the parish of Donington in the fenlands of Lincolnshire indicates that parish drama – and the influence of the guilds themselves – may have been much more resilient and perhaps more innovative, at least in this corner of the East Midlands, than traditional histories would suggest. The document is a one-page fragment dating from around 1563 that contains a list of twenty parishioners, together with the roles that many of them were designated to take in Donington's parish play.² The list shows that parish-sponsored drama was still being performed in Donington more than fifteen years after the Chantries Act, and that it was produced by a group with many of the characteristics of a local religious guild. Moreover, the Donington cast list seems to provide evidence for the existence of a now lost English play on a unique subject, namely, the Old Testament story of

Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Hebrew Children. In short, it appears that in at least some locales, parish guild drama was able to endure well into the early years of Elizabeth's reign.

II

Perhaps it is best to begin with a preliminary description of the document itself. The Donington cast list is copied on a single sheet of paper measuring 263 mm by 193 mm. Parts of the sheet's right top, right side, and bottom margins are missing, resulting in the loss of a few words at the ends of lines. It has no heading, bears no dates, and is faded and damaged, making it hard to read. Another document from the same collection of parish records, a fragmentary page of a Donington churchwarden's account that also survives, includes dates between 1563 and 1565.³ It is written in a hand similar to that used in the cast list and includes names of some of the same men on the cast list. On this basis, the list has always been dated *c* 1563–5. One of the players named in the list (Thomas Watson) died between February and 31 March 1563, when his will was proved. If the man who died and the player were one and the same person, as is almost certainly the case, then the cast list cannot have been written later than early 1563. A note on the cast list indicating that actors would be fined 12d for each missed performance therefore might refer to several performances being planned for some time shortly before or during 1563.

Since its discovery in the 1930s, transcriptions of the document have been published three times (see Appendix 2): a woefully inaccurate transcription by Fredson Bowers in 1939; a more accurate transcription, but one that introduced new errors, by M.W. Barley in 1954; and a much better one by Stanley Kahrl in 1974 that still fails to consider many important features of the text.⁴ All three provide very valuable information but also draw some problematic conclusions based on misreadings, which is not surprising given the document's poor condition and the scrawl of the scribal hands.

A reexamination of the document indicates that in addition to the basic need to read the names themselves correctly, many other important questions remain unanswered as well. Can one infer anything about what kind of play the citizens of Donington produced, and if so, why this subject matter was chosen for this particular time and place? How is one to understand the construction of the list itself? Are the two columns on the page meant to be read as separate and distinct groupings, or should one sometimes continue reading syntactically from the left column into the right? Is there some other

structural principle at work? How is one to interpret the cancelled and added names; that is, who is being assigned which part? What can be learned about the biographies and social relations of the players? How might the lost play have fit into the larger pattern of late medieval religious drama in Lincolnshire?

There are several ways to go about answering such questions. To begin with, it is necessary to work from the foundation of a new and more accurate transcription of the document itself (see Appendix 3). Next, one can compare the *dramatis personae* preserved in the Donington fragment with the cast of characters from well-known biblical narratives and from other extant Latin and vernacular plays. In addition to a close examination of the surviving document itself, one can also contextualize it by reading it alongside other archival records from approximately the same time and place. Finally, one can attempt to situate the evidence from Donington within the larger political and religious climate of Lincolnshire from the late 1530s to the 1560s. Through a combination of these various approaches, we hope to shed new light on the history of parish guild drama in the early years of Elizabeth's reign.

III

Whatever else it may tell us about parish life in Donington-in-Holland, the surviving fragment now in the Lincolnshire Archives is essentially a signed cast list for a play that has long since disappeared. As part of their agreement to assess a fine of 12d on any player who failed to arrive on schedule for a performance, members of the parish compiled a list of all the roles necessary for a production of their play, together with the names of the actors assigned to each role. The *dramatis personae* include the following eighteen figures: a king ('rex'), a sultan ('Sawdane'), a duke, a steward, Holofernes, a herald, Daniel, four messengers, four knights, and 'iij yong men'. The sizeable number of actors involved, the use of familiar biblical names, and the seriousness of purpose evident in the agreement to fine all those who failed to appear on time for performances suggests that the parish play must have been a religious drama on a rather ambitious scale. But what exactly was the subject of the lost play? And why was it chosen for performance by the parishioners of Donington in the early 1560s?

To date, two hypotheses concerning the subject of the lost play have been proposed. First of all, early commentators on the document speculated that it must refer to a lost Plough Monday play. Based solely on the fact that a contemporary Donington churchwarden's account contains receipts for sums

twice presented to the parish by the keepers of the plough light, Bowers conjectured in 1939 that the performance might have been a 'Plough Monday play associated with the St. George versions in an Oriental setting'.⁵ Similarly, while admitting that '[t]he Donington characters do not appear in surviving versions from other villages', Barley nevertheless went on to repeat the notion that the lost work must have been a Plough Monday play, 'which are the Danelaw equivalents of the Christmas Mumming plays, Pace Egg plays, and Soul Cake plays of other parts of England, and of the Revesby Sword play'.⁶ The argument that the play list was connected to a plough play or some other form of folk drama was soon laid to rest. Margaret Dean-Smith and Stanley Kahrl pointed to the unconvincing circumstantial evidence adduced by Bowers and Barley and argued persuasively that the Donington play had nothing in common with these popular seasonal traditions.⁷

An alternative hypothesis was first proposed by Kahrl and later elaborated by John Wasson. In his brief discussion of this 'puzzling' list of dramatic roles, Wasson suggests that the play must have been 'based on the Apocryphal Gospel of Judith, so popular in the Middle Ages'.⁸ Wasson conjectures that the play depicted the well-known tale of the young and courageous Jewish widow from the besieged city of Bethulia who, together with her maid, made her way to the camp of the enemy general Holofernes, enticed him into a drunken stupor, and eventually beheaded him with his own sword. When Judith returned to Bethulia and displayed the severed head of Nebuchadnezzar's general, her people were emboldened to attack and drive away the army of Assyrian invaders. Clearly, Wasson's hypothesis that the Donington play enacted the heroic story of Judith is based on a single clue, namely, the inclusion of the name of Holofernes among the cast of characters. At the same time, however, Wasson himself admits that in all other respects the list does not fit the tale of Judith and Holofernes very well at all: 'If the "iij yong men" included Judith and her maid ... we would have a regular Saint Judith play, but it does seem odd that neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Saint Judith is mentioned by name in the cast list. What else the play could have been about, however, is hardly clear'.⁹ Indeed, the lack of the protagonist's name in the cast list, the absence of any mention of women's roles, and the inclusion of numerous characters not found in the Book of Judith would seem to rule out a play on the subject of Judith and Holofernes, although vernacular plays and pageants on this subject were not unknown in England and Europe.¹⁰

There is, however, another biblical tale that explains the Donington cast list far better than Wasson's hypothetical play of Judith and Holofernes, namely, the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Hebrew Children.¹¹

Needless to say, the account of the rescue of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace as reported in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel was well known throughout sixteenth-century Europe. In the biblical account, King Nebuchadnezzar builds a huge golden idol and commands all of his officials to fall down and worship it upon pain of death. A group of jealous Chaldeans denounce Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three of Daniel's youthful companions from the tribe of Judah who had recently been appointed provincial administrators, and accuse them of refusing to obey the royal decree. Threatened with execution in a blazing furnace, the three handsome and talented companions – 'children [pueros] in whom there was no blemish, well favoured, and skillful in all wisdom, acute in knowledge, and instructed in science, and such as might stand in the king's palace' (Dan. 1:4) – defy Nebuchadnezzar with a bold declaration of their faith, insisting that God would not abandon them and that they would not worship the golden idol even at the cost of their lives:

We have no occasion to answer thee concerning this matter. For behold our God, whom we worship, is able to save us from the furnace of burning fire, and to deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But if he will not, be it known to thee, O king, that we will not worship thy gods, nor adore the golden statue, which thou hast set up. (Dan. 3:16–18)¹²

The enraged potentate orders the furnace to be heated to seven times its usual heat and commands his soldiers to bind the three young men and throw them fully clothed into the fire. The executioners themselves are killed instantly by the intense heat, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remain unharmed. Nebuchadnezzar is astonished not only at the miraculous preservation of the three youngsters but also at the sudden appearance of a fourth figure amidst the flames: 'Behold, I see four men loose, and walking in the midst of the fire, and there is no hurt in them, and the form of the fourth is like the son of God' (Dan. 3:92).¹³ The king therefore releases the three young men. His entire retinue observes that their bodies are unharmed, the hair of their head is not singed, their clothing is not scorched, and that no smell of burning clings to them. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar decrees that whoever blasphemes the powerful God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be dismembered and his house razed to rubble, and that the three survivors of the fiery furnace shall be advanced to an even more exalted status in his kingdom.

Clearly, the cast list from Donington correlates very closely with the requisite characters for a play of Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Hebrew Children. In

this case, 'rex' would refer to none other than Nebuchadnezzar himself, the volatile Assyrian king who is converted by the miracle he witnesses. Although the king's commander-in-chief is not named in the Book of Daniel, it would be quite natural for a sixteenth-century playwright to import the name of Holofernes, the famous villain who is Nebuchadnezzar's right-hand man in the Book of Judith (cf. Judith 2:4 and *passim*), into another well-known story featuring the same king and his menacing henchman. The four messengers mentioned in the *dramatis personae* would be the emissaries who were sent out in order to summon the various ranks of royal officials to attend the dedication of the king's newly erected idol: 'Then Nabochodonosor, the king, sent to call together the nobles, the magistrates, and the judges, the captains, the rulers, and governors, and all the chief men of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the statue which king Nabochodonosor had set up' (Dan. 3:2). The herald named in the cast list is explicitly mentioned in the biblical account as the one who proclaims the royal decree for all to hear – 'then a herald [praeco] cried with a loud voice' (Dan. 3:4) – while the steward and the duke would seem to represent the various officials summoned to the royal court (Dan. 3:2–3) and the counsellors with whom Nebuchadnezzar consults (Dan. 3:24, 27). The exotic Sultan most likely played the role of the Chaldean at Nebuchadnezzar's court who betrays the three men of Judah (Dan. 3:8). The four knights mentioned in the cast list would play the roles of 'the strongest men that were in his army' (Dan. 3:20) who were burned to death while attempting to carry out the executions ordered by their king (Dan. 3:22). One of the most intriguing entries in the list simply reads 'Edward danyell'. It is conceivable that these are first and last names of a parishioner whose role (unlike every other entry in the cast list) is left unspecified, but on the principle of scribal consistency it seems far more likely that what is meant is that a villager known as Edward or Elward played the role of the prophet Daniel (the scribe does not usually capitalize the names of the play's characters).¹⁴ One can imagine Daniel appearing either as a character in the play itself (cf. Dan. 2:49) or, as seems more likely, as a prologue or narrator. The most telling piece of evidence of all is the inclusion in the cast list of the 'iij yong men', a perfect parallel to the three Judean 'pueri' who are the protagonists of the story. The only essential character from the third chapter of Daniel who is not included in the Donington cast list is the mysterious fourth figure whose 'form ... is like the son of God' [*et species quarti similis filio Dei*] (Dan. 3:91) who joins the three young men in the fiery furnace. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that this non-speaking supernatural character was represented by a mannequin or some other special visual effect rather than by

a human actor. Because every principal figure in the biblical story has an equivalent figure in the *dramatis personae* and because no role in the cast list remains unaccounted for, it seems safe to conclude that in the early 1560s the parishioners of Donington performed a vernacular play based on the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the Hebrew Children.

A dramatization of the events recounted in Daniel 3 would be a distinct rarity in the annals of early European drama but it would not be entirely without precedent. To begin with, it is worth noting that a major part of the Song of the Three Children, the so-called 'Benedicite', formed a part of the Christian liturgy from early times. The Song of the Three Children is a short book of the Old Testament Apocrypha whose sixty-eight verses are inserted into the canonical Book of Daniel after Dan. 3:23 in the Septuagint and the Vulgate versions. Verses 35–66 of the Song of the Three Children (Dan. 3:51–90), a passage attributed to the three youngsters in the fiery furnace, is a canticle known as the 'Benedicite' that is used in Christian worship in both eastern and western rites. In the western tradition, the Canticle of the Three Children is found in the liturgy of certain orders for the Paschal Vigil and later came to be widely used in the morning office of lauds, while in the eastern tradition it was chanted daily at matins.¹⁵

Even more important for our purposes is the fact that the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Hebrew Children came to be included in the quasi-dramatic liturgical ceremony for Christmastide known as the *Ordo Prophetarum*.¹⁶ The source of the *Ordo Prophetarum* is a section of the *Contra Judaeos, Paganos, et Arianos Sermo de Symbolo*, a fifth- or sixth-century homily mistakenly attributed to St Augustine that attempts to persuade the Jews of the truth of the incarnation of Christ by citing both Hebrew and gentile prophets.¹⁷ The sermon was widely known throughout medieval Europe and was often read in one form or another on the last Sunday of Advent, on the day before Christmas, on Christmas itself, or on the feast of the Circumcision (1 January). As one of its proofs, the pseudo-Augustinian sermon calls upon Nebuchadnezzar to testify to the miraculous presence of the fourth figure 'like the son of God' in the fiery furnace:

Tell, Nebuchadnezzar, what you saw in the furnace when you had unjustly sent the three innocent men into it; tell, tell what was revealed to you. 'Have we not', he said, 'sent three bound men into the furnace?' And they told him: 'Truly, O king'. 'Behold', he said, 'I see four men who have been set free, walking in the midst of the fire, and no injury has come to them, and the appearance of the fourth is like the Son of God'. Whence did this stranger come to you? Who

proclaimed to you that this was the Son of God? What law [told you this]? What prophet proclaimed the Son of God to you? Even though he is not yet born in the world, do you still recognize the likeness of one being born? How do you know this? Who proclaimed this thing to you, unless a divine flame within your own heart illuminated you this way, so that – while your Jewish enemies were being held captive there with you – you might still bear true witness to the Son of God?¹⁸

By the eleventh century, the direct address of the prophecies was removed from the third-person expository matrix of this homily and set to music, resulting in various versions of the *Ordo Prophetarum* that were chanted during Christmas and its octave. Nebuchadnezzar's testimony was included in most (but not all) versions of this ceremony. It received its fullest and liveliest treatment in an elaborate version performed at Rouen cathedral at terce on the feast of the Circumcision.¹⁹ The rubrics call for Nebuchadnezzar, costumed as a king, to display his idol ('ymaginem') to two knights. The knights in turn show the idol to the three boys, but they refuse to worship it. Nebuchadnezzar orders them to be thrown into the furnace, which a rubric tells us was to be fabricated of linen and oakum and set up in the nave of the church. Instead of being burned alive, the boys are immediately set free amid the flames and begin to chant the 'Benedictus, Domine Deus'. The king marvels at their singing and is questioned by two 'Vocatores', representing the transtemporal and transpersonal voice of the Church:

Then let the Criers say to the King:
 When you saw in the fire,
 Nebuchadnezzar,
 the boy with the boys,
 what did you say?
 Let the King, pointing to the furnace, say:
 Three boys who were put in the fire
 rejoice with a fourth unfettered companion.²⁰

The Vocatores and Chorus then close the episode by repeating the play's didactic refrain.

At about the same time, the Procession of the Prophets also began to appear in vernacular religious drama. The famous twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Ordo representationis Adae* (better known as *Le Jeu d'Adam*) breaks off abruptly in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's testimony concerning the miraculous preservation of the boys by the mysterious fourth figure in the furnace.²¹

From the fourteenth century on, it was not uncommon for a *Prophetenspiel* to be included in German Passion plays.²² In England, some remnant of the episode is found in all four of the surviving biblical cycles, although the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar does not appear in any of them.²³ Finally, it should be noted that there are four extant Greek manuscripts of a fourteenth-century Byzantine liturgical drama known as *The Play of the Furnace*, a chanted rite based on the events recounted in Daniel 3, although the barriers of distance, language, and culture clearly rule out any connection between this eastern liturgical tradition and the lost Donington play.²⁴ Despite the relatively wide dissemination of the story in both western and eastern liturgies and as a part of both Latin and vernacular versions of the Procession of the Prophets, there appear to have been no other plays devoted solely to Nebuchadnezzar and the Hebrew Children anywhere in England or the Continent (with the sole exception of the Byzantine examples noted above) that could have served as a direct model for the Donington play.²⁵ Nor is there any evidence from Donington or elsewhere to support Marius Sepet's well-known conjecture that the episodes featuring Nebuchadnezzar and certain other prophets eventually detached themselves from the *Ordo Prophetarum*, expanded into independent Latin plays, and then somehow reunited to form the core of the large-scale vernacular biblical cycles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁶ In fact, the choice of subject matter for the Old Testament miracle performed by the eighteen men of Donington seems to have been one of a kind in early English drama, resulting in an ambitious biblical play with a large cast of characters and impressive special effects that was probably composed by a local cleric for performance by the parishioners.

IV

The question still remains as to how to account for this unique occurrence. Why did the residents of Donington choose to perform the miracle of Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace at this particular time and in this particular place? One can only speculate about the organizers' motives, but one answer that suggests itself is that the play is evidence of the deep-rooted social and religious traditionalism of a rural parish that stubbornly sought to cling to at least some of the institutions and practices of the Old Religion. Although Stanley Kahrl mistakenly identified the Donington cast list as belonging to a Judith play, he was surely right to note that the play's date 'fits the period when there was a search for dramatic source material less controversial than that of the cycle plays and when a number of plays on subjects drawn from

the Old Testament appeared both in Lincolnshire and elsewhere in England'.²⁷ By choosing non-traditional subject matter drawn from the Hebrew scriptures, the villagers could avoid the displeasure of those Protestant authorities who disapproved of the Corpus Christi plays, saint plays, Marian miracles, and other entertainments associated with the outlawed faith.

What is more, the plot of a new play devoted to Nebuchanezzar and the Hebrew Children could be understood as an oblique commentary on the vexed relationship between strict royal oversight of local institutions and traditional pre-Reformation social and religious practices. At first glance it is tempting to imagine that the villagers chose their unlikely subject matter as a kind of cautious critique of Elizabeth's effort to legitimize her authority through such measures as the Act of Uniformity (28 April 1559) and the renewed Act of Supremacy (29 April 1559). The former law abolished the celebration of the mass, established Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer as the sole national liturgy, and required all subjects to attend the Sunday worship of the Anglican Church or pay a fine of one shilling, while the latter declared the monarch to be the sovereign ruler in all matters, whether temporal or spiritual.²⁸ For our purposes, the point is simply that in a predominantly Catholic northern county like Lincolnshire, the suppression of the ancient rites and the imposition of Anglican forms of worship were often causes of deep dissatisfaction. In this context, an audience of that time could have viewed the dramatization of the Hebrews' resistance to Nebuchadnezzar's decrees as an indirect expression of local disapproval of the religious reforms of the day.

On the other hand, it would strain credulity to regard the Donington performance as a deliberate act of subversion. Outright criticism of the monarch and her government would have been risky and extremely unlikely. Even in as conservative a region as Lincolnshire, which had been a hotbed of Catholic dissidence during the armed rising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536–7), the cult of Elizabeth took a quick and powerful hold upon the popular imagination. During the 1570s the queen's players were welcomed throughout the county, while the Anglican bishops of Lincolnshire strongly supported the government's extension of the Reformation throughout the realm. If the Donington play is to be read in the context of public events, therefore, it is perhaps more plausible to think of it as a belated reflection on the community's experience during the troubled years of the later reign of Henry VIII (d. 1547) and that of Edward VI (1547–53) rather than as a commentary on the current state of affairs. In particular, a play devoted to Nebuchadnezzar's treatment of the Hebrews might evoke memories of the executions and imprisonments that followed the Pilgrimage of Grace or of the harsh effects of

the Chancies Act of 1547. This law, which W.K. Jordan describes as ‘the most shattering and irreversible action of the reformation in England’, was a two-pronged measure that was intended to dismantle the Roman Catholic faith by denying the existence of purgatory and proscribing prayers for the souls of the dead, and by requiring that ‘certain chantries, colleges, free chapels, and the possessions of the same be given to the king’s majesty’.²⁹ In addition to striking at a fundamental tenet of the Catholic faith, the legislation effectively disestablished religious guilds and confraternities. Not only did the law put an end to the religious practice of saying endowed prayers for the dead, but it also had hard economic consequences in that it resulted in the confiscation of guild property – including all their props and playing gear. In fact, numerous inventories relating to these confiscations in Lincolnshire still survive.³⁰ For this reason, Edward VI was remembered as the king who sought to deprive his subjects of a beloved institution, namely, the guilds and the plays that they sponsored.

Nevertheless, as the Donington cast list demonstrates, parish religious drama lived on. In terms of the plot of the lost play itself, it would not be too difficult to see Edward VI as a kind of Nebuchadnezzar redux, a powerful monarch who insisted on public displays of devotion to a new faith. By the same token, parishioners could easily imagine themselves as latter-day Hebrew children, the potential martyrs of their parents’ generation who had attempted to cling steadfastly to an ancestral faith despite the threat of persecution. Moreover, like all miracle stories, the tale recounted in Daniel 3 holds forth the possibility of survival, the hope of conversion, and the promise of change. Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were eventually promoted in the province of Babylon by their astonished and chastened king, so might the people of Donington look back upon their own recent history as giving them cause for hope. After all, late medieval audiences were accustomed to thinking of Nebuchadnezzar not only as a tyrant but also as a prophet who, like all the figures in the *Ordo Prophetarum*, proclaimed a brighter future for the community of believers.

At the same time, however, it can also be argued that the lost play may well have been some version of Donington’s traditional parish play rather than a newly composed Old Testament play chosen in response to the current political environment. Donington certainly already had a parish play by 1524–5, some forty years before the performance recorded in the extant cast list, since in that year the town’s players had been paid in Sutterton (see note 37 below). Although the nature of that earlier performance is unknown, the content of the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Hebrew Children

seems to be appropriate subject matter for a traditional parish play in this part of rural England. Donington-in-Holland was a substantial agricultural and market town in a densely populated region of richly abundant agricultural communities. Every parish seems to have had a plough guild, and ceremonies for blessing the land and cattle, and their stewards – on Plough Monday and at other times – were part of the fabric of religious life throughout the area. The story of Nebuchadnezzar and the Three Hebrew Children is a short work, consisting primarily of the words and actions of the three children (and an angel) as they stood in a fiery furnace where they had been cast at the command of a tyrant king. But at the heart of the biblical account is the magnificent hymn which the three youths sing (see note 15 above). It is, in large measure, a great paean to the natural world, with blessings of domestic farm animals, sea creatures (appropriate to communities located so near the sea), the land, and indeed all the processes of nature. Each line of the hymn begins with ‘bless’, ‘blessed’, or ‘praise’ [‘benedicite’, ‘benedictus’, ‘laudate et superexaltate’], as it catalogues the nurturing features of the natural world. Surely, hearing this litany of praise performed would cause a contemporary audience to envision the corresponding features to be found in his or her own community. Thus, the traditional themes of the story would certainly lend themselves to a festive religious play that could be mounted by the parish.

Furthermore, two other aspects of the biblical story and the Donington cast list also suggest that this play could have been the community’s traditional parish play rather than an innovation of the early 1560s. The first is the nature of the miracle at the heart of the story – the casting of the three youths into a furnace whose flames cannot burn them. This motif is reminiscent of the miracle in the late fifteenth-century *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, performed near Bury St Edmunds in the nearby county of Suffolk. In that play, the group of non-believers led by ‘Magister’ Jonathas attempt to destroy a consecrated host first by stabbing it, then by immersing it in a cauldron of boiling oil, and finally by casting it into a ‘furneyes stowte and strong’.³¹ They seek to ‘make an ovyn as redd hott / As euer yt can be made with fere’ (79, ll. 683–4) and then throw the host into the flames. But in the midst of the fire ‘an image appere owt with woundys bledyng’ (80, stage direction after l. 712), which then addresses Jonathas and his companions with a questioning sermon. The use of a blazing furnace which cannot consume a body that has been cast into it by a group of tormentors, the miraculous appearance of an image within the flames, the concluding sermon, and the conversion of the erstwhile torturers are elements that obviously recall major motifs in the Nebuchadnezzar story, suggesting that in the two plays one can perhaps see

the mutual use of theatrical conventions that were common to the East Midlands. Numerous records in Lincolnshire and East Anglia show that parish players in the greater region of The Wash travelled to advertise their plays or to perform them not only in nearby towns, but sometimes in their respective neighbouring counties. The banns of the Croxton play (58–60, ll. 1–80) make it clear that it was intended to travel around the region, and the Donington players certainly advertised in nearby towns. A fifteenth-century wall painting in the Church of All Saints in Friskney, Lincolnshire, vividly depicts three Jews stabbing the host as blood pours from it, offering further evidence that the motif from the Croxton play was well known in Lincolnshire.³² Secondly, the mention of the three youths in the Donington cast list suggests at least the possibility that the grammar school in Donington was involved in the production, a practice common in the towns of Lincolnshire (and everywhere else) during the Elizabethan period and much approved by the Crown. Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that the themes and conventions described above would have been widely known aspects of traditional parish drama in this place and time.

Seen from the perspective outlined above, a strong case can be made for the traditional nature of the Donington play. Yet as we have also seen, the Nebuchadnezzar story undeniably has other features that also would have made it topically resonant during the early Elizabethan period. After all, the traditional blessings on the abundance of the natural world are sung by youths who have been imprisoned and tortured by a royal tyrant for their refusal to adopt a new form of worship. The episode thus embodies a thematic tension that a rural audience of the mid-sixteenth century might indeed perceive to be a form of social protest. In fact, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, for all its celebration of piety and the miraculous, has elements of social commentary within it, having apparently been written in part as a defence of the orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation. In this regard, one can see the forces of both innovation and traditionalism at work in both plays. Paradoxically, then, the lost Donington play may have been a dramatic innovation in the service of social and religious traditionalism, celebrating the resilience of local customs and practices in the face of pressure to abolish them. Or, it may have been a traditional parish play composed long before the 1560s, whose subject matter nevertheless lent itself to differing interpretations in differing circumstances, depending on one's view of traditionalism and reform. No matter which of these two hypotheses concerning the play's origin one finds more plausible, there can be little doubt that the Donington play of Nebuchadnezzar and the Hebrew Children celebrated both the parishioners' spirit of

thanksgiving for the blessings of agricultural abundance and their steadfast endurance in the face of adversity. Moreover, this understanding of the play's dual thematic focus and its complicated historical context is confirmed by a closer look at what the Donington cast list reveals about the persistence of the guild structure and guild sponsorship of religious drama long after the imposition of the Chantries Act of 1547. Like the three children in the furnace, the guilds and their plays somehow managed to survive.

V

Having established the general nature of the lost play, it is now time to direct our attention back to the document in the Lincolnshire Archives (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 3) in order to see what it can tell us about the personal identities and social relations of the men who performed it. The first step in this process is to decipher the names correctly and then examine the rationale for the way they are organized on the page. Most of the problems with the three previously published transcriptions and with the document itself have to do with readings of the first five lines and with their placement on the page. First, looking at the left column, the top name, George Atkynson, was added by the scribe above the original column, replacing John Wright, and the word 'rex' (his role) was added above his name. Similar interlineations occur in the right column, but only Bowers places Atkynson above the line; any other placement creates the impression that the name was part of the original list, which it was not. All three published transcriptions correctly identify the cancelled second name (Wryght) in the left column, though two capitalize the 'w' and Barley reads what follows Wryght's name as an abbreviation for 'representeth' when it is in fact 'rex', and he wrongly interprets the word as being connected syntactically with the words above Wryght's name in the left column where it is interlineated below Thomas. Next in the left column, the three published transcriptions represent the name Sinear variously as Swoar, Senecar, and Sucar. For the remaining words in the left column, problems other than variant capitalizations occur with only two other words. Bowers transcribes 'messengers' as 'singers', and Kahrl transcribes 'Newton' as 'Melton'.

Looking at the right column, the word 'ye' is on a line by itself in the document and seems to have been a false start to the line by the scribe. Bowers wrongly connects it with the cancelled word 'cowper' and misreads 'cowper' as 'comrades', presuming it to be a scribal comment about the list below it, which it is not. Barley omits both the words ('ye' and 'cowper'); Kahrl excludes

'ye' and spells 'cowper' with a 'u' rather than with a 'w'. The word 'dycconson' Barley spells as 'Dyarson'. Next in the right column, all three editors incorrectly indicate that Wryght, whose name is interlineated below Thomas Dycconson, is to replace John Page as the Duke when in fact he is to play the Sawdane. All three misread the name Robert Heris, which is interlineated above Strayker, and who is the Duke. Barley excludes Heris entirely; Bowers gets the first name only; and Kahrl makes out none of it. All other names in the right column are correct, although the signatures at the bottom of the page are wrongly made to appear that they are written under the right column when in fact the first signer, Toplyche, signed near his own name near the left column and the others signed beneath his name. They do not appear to be part of the right column. The 'Robert Sh' at the bottom of the page, which appears to be contemporary but could possibly be modern, may refer to Robert Shakforth, a churchwarden named in the fragmentary page of a churchwarden's account that also survives.³³

In brief, Atkynson, instead of Wryght, was to play the king. Wryght (cancelled as the king) was to play the Sawdane (replacing first Dycconson, then Cowper, both cancelled). Robert Heris was to play the Duke.³⁴ The remaining names and roles in the list present no problems.

What then is one to make of the names and the way they are organized on the page? Fortunately, out of the twenty names on the list, wills for fourteen (and inventories for seven of those fourteen) survive.³⁵ It so happens that in their wills and inventories, most of the men in the left column mention other men who are also listed in that same column, while those in the right column usually refer in their wills to others who are also in the right column. There are two exceptions. William Straker witnessed the wills of three from the left column and two from the right. He was obviously much trusted and was perhaps a clerk, which would explain his movement between groups. Unfortunately, he left no will. John Wryght, though originally in the left column and scheduled to play the king, ended up in the right column, cast as the sultan. He seems to have been the senior person in the group in that he was the first to sign his name at the bottom of the list, and he also corrected the list, entering his own name, interlineated below the line in the right column as the one to play the sultan. Thus, the impression arises that the two columns represent two different groups, either two different guilds or more probably two different constituencies within a single guild.

Of the thirteen men named in the left column, the nine who can be identified were all farmers, sometimes also described as yeomen (see Appendix 4). Of those nine, five were clearly well-to-do at the time of their death, having

substantial lands, properties, and bequests. And that wealthy five (Wryght, Jakes, Rayner, Love, and Topydye) tend to mention each other in their wills. Of the other four farmers, the two Brownes certainly owned hemplands and livestock, and all four were substantial enough to need wills. Since all nine were farmers, this group may represent the rural part of the parish, while those in the right column may have been from within the town. Further, the farmers seem connected both in a guild-like way and in rank as eventual senior members of the yeoman class (at least they were senior at the time of their deaths some twenty or more years later). And they played most of the important roles in the play as well.

In the right column, although fewer of the men can be identified, in all but one case their wills mention cash but no lands, farm equipment, or cattle. One is the perennial witness Strayker. Another (Dyconson) appears from his will to have been a wealthy tradesman. A third (Heris) mentions both a churchwarden (Jackson) and a warden of the plough light (Tilson), and his will mentions a lot of cash but no lands or cattle or equipment. The two exceptions among this group are Page, a farmer, who was cancelled in the list and replaced by Heris, and Wright, also a farmer. The impression arises that people in this group were mainly but not exclusively town-dwellers associated with crafts and trades. They seem to have been from the same top rank of yeomen as were those in the left column.

The names and associations may also say something about sponsorship and about the play itself. First, as has proved to be true elsewhere in England, control of the traditional parish play seems to have been in the hands of the local oligarchy of senior yeomen, often in their capacity as churchwardens or guild officers, but it was produced and acted by the somewhat younger yet substantial men among them. Since many of the participants named in the class list died approximately twenty to thirty years later, one might assume that most were between their late twenties and forties at the time of the performance.³⁶ Although the Chantries Act of 1547 had abolished the guilds more than fifteen years prior to the date on which the list was made, the close ties of brotherhood and association evident among these men suggest that their guild was still continuing to function in all but name – a cohesion that seems to have declined in the final decades of the sixteenth century.

The idea that mature local leaders (in our own time one might imagine the mayor and city council) were expected to be actors with major roles in annual productions – some of which travelled to other communities – is a concept foreign to most modern civic experience, but it had been fundamental to parish-sponsored drama of this kind in the period before the 1570s.

And as happened in other places, apparently Donington occasionally had trouble getting some people to fulfil their obligation to the play. Although it is expressed somewhat cryptically and some words are missing, a note at the head of the list appears to order that any actor who failed to play his part in a timely manner was to be fined 12d for each missed performance. The wording suggests that the organizers had experienced a history of tardiness or absence at previous performances, and that more than one performance was planned for unspecified future dates. By the same token, the changes in the major role assignments noted above probably resulted from changed circumstances at repeated performances of the play. There can be little doubt that the Donington play traditionally travelled to and had audiences from other towns. Players from Donington were paid 12d at Sutterton in 1524–5, and received 6s 8d for their banns at Long Sutton in 1563–4.³⁷ No evidence has surfaced that the play was performed at Donington's three fairs (26 May, 4 September, and 17 October), or at Corpus Christi, May Day, or the local feast of dedication, but such times certainly presented opportunities similar to those used for drama in other towns. The obligation in time and effort for the players could have been considerable.

VI

It then remains to ask how the Donington play of Nebuchadnezzar and the Hebrew Children fits into the pattern of parish-sponsored traditional drama in Lincolnshire. The evidence shows that a great number of towns and villages in the county had plays, and that those plays often travelled to other towns for fund-raising performances.³⁸ For example Sutterton, in addition to paying numerous other entertainers, paid players from six nearby towns between 1519 and 1531: Whaplode (eight and one-half miles from Sutterton) in 1519 and 1531; Swineshead (four miles) and Donington (four and one-half miles) in 1525; Frampton and Kirton (two and three miles respectively), seemingly both in Sutterton together, in 1526; and Quadring (three and one-half miles) in 1535–6.

Long Sutton paid players, bann bearers, or dancers from sixteen towns between 1542–3 and 1573–4, an extraordinary number of places that included Freiston (thirteen miles from Long Sutton) for their banns, and Frampton (twelve miles), both in 1542–3; Walsoken, Camb (eight miles) in 1555–6; Bolingbroke (twenty-two miles) in 1560–1, 1564–5, and 1566–7; Spalding dancers (eleven miles) in 1560–1, 1564–5, and children in 1573–4; Wisbech, Camb (eight miles) in 1562–3, and children in 1565–6; Donington for their

banns (fifteen miles) in 1563–4; Leake (twenty miles) and Boston (thirteen miles) for their banns, both in 1564–5; Ipswich, Suffolk (eighty miles) in 1564–5; Kirton (twelve miles) for their banns in 1565–6; Gosberton (twelve miles), Moulton (eight miles), and Nottingham, Nott (fifty-one miles), all in 1566–7; Keston (?) in 1570–1; and Lincoln (thirty-three miles) in 1572–3.

Grimsby paid players from eight towns between three and forty miles distant in the years between 1514 and 1577, including Willoughby (twenty-four miles from Grimsby) in 1499–1500; Grimoldby (thirteen miles), Stallingborough (three miles), and Hull minstrels (opposite bank of the Humber) in 1514–15; Marsh Chapel (seven miles) in 1515–16; Hatcliffe (seven miles) in 1570–1; Kirton-in-Lindsey (twenty miles) in 1571–2; and Boston (thirty-five miles) in 1576–7. Leverton paid the banns and players of Swineshead (ten miles away) in 1526. And Louth paid the players of Grimsby (fourteen miles) for their banns in 1527–8 and for Withern's (seven miles) banns and play in 1547–8.³⁹

The high number of these plays in rural Lincolnshire during the first seventy years of the sixteenth century suggests that Donington was typical both in having a play and in travelling to announce or perform it in other towns. Yet of this great number of town or village-sponsored plays, the Donington cast list provides rare evidence for what a parish-sponsored play might have been like. Grimsby civic records mention their 'play of holy John of bowre' (the guild of St John the Baptist was the principal guild in the town).⁴⁰ And, in addition to traditional Christmas and Easter plays, Lincoln Cathedral and civic records mention a Pater Noster play, plays of St Thomas, St Lawrence, St Susanna, King Robert of Sicily, St James, St Clara, and a dramatization of the story of Tobit from the Old Testament Apocrypha.⁴¹ Otherwise, parish records offer few clues as to the content and nature of the plays themselves.

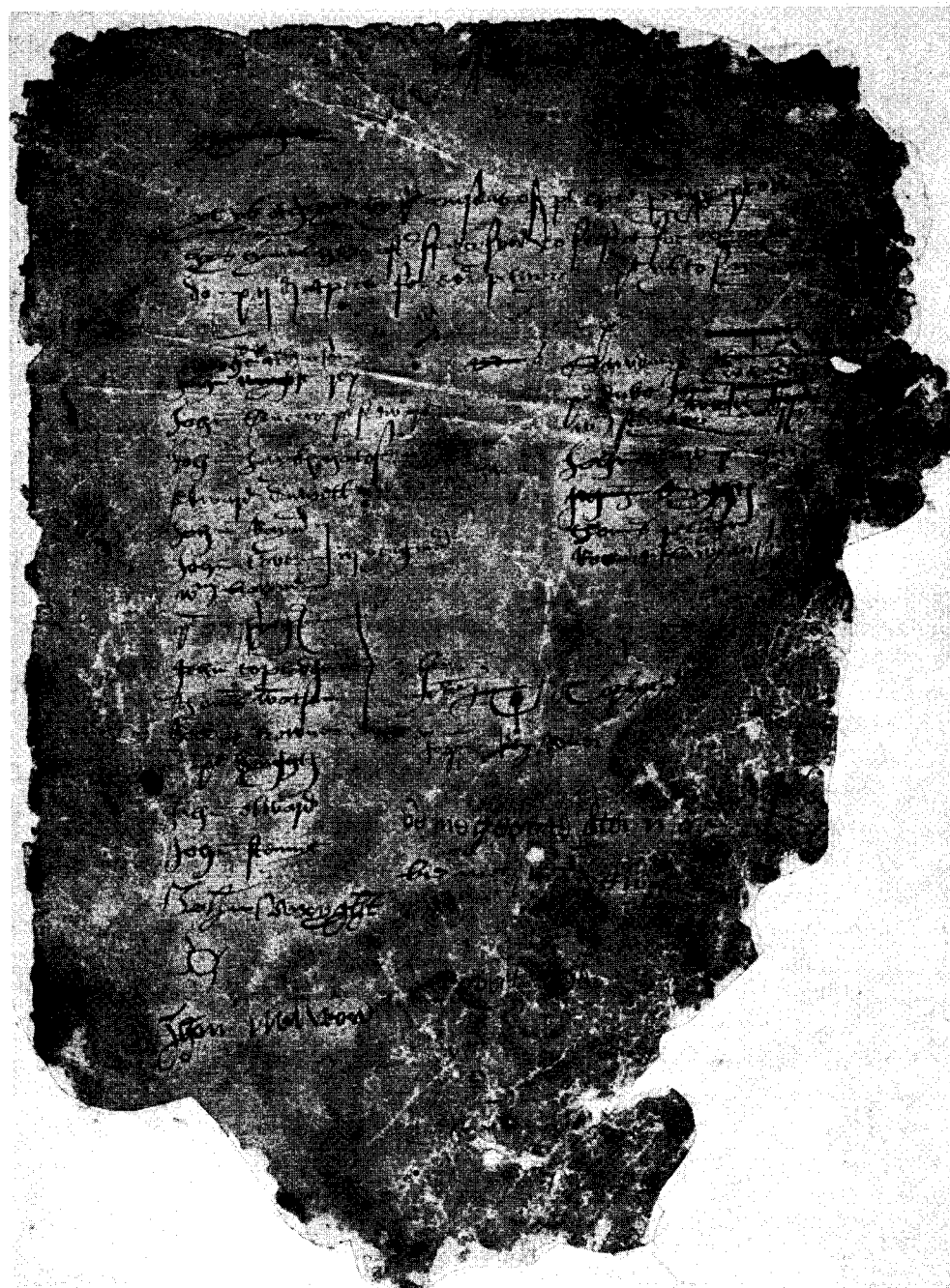
The impression arises from the records that often the plays were mounted by local social and religious guilds (as at Grimsby). In a valuable study of these local guilds, historian Barbara A. Hanawalt concludes that unlike the great craft guilds such as those at York, which sponsored the cycle plays, the 'social-religious confraternities of the countryside and small towns' mainly sponsored religious processions and ceremonies often reflective of seasonal, agricultural, and ritual activities.⁴² On the other hand, Stanley Kahrl, Hardin Craig, and numerous others have proposed that cycle plays such as the N-Town Cycle travelled through the countryside of the East Midlands.⁴³ But such descriptive evidence as survives invariably points instead toward saint plays and other history plays that dramatize well-known stories with clear moral or religious themes and strong popular appeal, with some relevance to

the local community, and featuring rather large casts, elaborate costumes, and sophisticated props. Clearly, the Donington play of Nebuchadnezzar and the Hebrew Children would have been no exception to this general rule.

In addition to plays, several towns and parishes record elaborate Corpus Christi processions, ceremonies, and pageants. But nowhere do these records suggest the existence of cycle plays comparable to the four surviving mystery cycles. Rather, the preliminary impression arises that towns in Lincolnshire had elaborate Corpus Christi processions with pageants (either carried or something larger) plus a single parish-sponsored play, though conclusions about local drama in the county must necessarily await completion of the comprehensive study of documents now underway for the REED volume on Lincolnshire.⁴⁴ However, for the moment it does seem safe to say that the Donington cast list appears to typify the dominant pattern in the towns and larger villages of Lincolnshire. It describes a single play with a large cast and special effects, a production capable of travelling to neighbouring communities, an innovative choice of subject matter, and sponsorship by the parish, with production in the hands of the local yeoman oligarchy and actors chosen from among a group of closely linked members of guilds or other brotherhoods. Finally, the Donington cast list stands as an example of both traditionalism and innovation in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, inasmuch as it demonstrates that some parish religious guilds survived as sponsors of what may have been newly composed religious drama for at least one full generation after they had been officially abolished.

Appendix 1

LA: Donington-in-Holland Parish 23/7



Appendix 2

Earlier Transcriptions of LA: Donington-in-Holland Parish 23/7

	rex		y ^c [comrades]
	George atkynsoñ ³		Sawdane [thom ² s Dyarson]
	[John Wryght] rex		wryght
	Johñ Swoar ⁴ y ^c steward		y ^c duke [Johñ page]
	Johñ Jayk holofern		Robart br. . . .
	Edward Danyell		w ^m st'ayker messyng
	Johñ Rayn } iij young men		Johñ law y ^c harrowlld
From: F. Bowers	Johñ love } iij young men		[john J] Knyght
<i>Review of English</i>	w ^m browne }		thom ² s Playn
<i>Studies</i> 15			Robart lawranson }
(1939), 192-4	y ^c iij syng		Johñ (mark, J T) Toplyche
	Johñ toplydge		Johñ Rayshener ⁶
	thoñs Watson		be me george Atkynson (mark)
	Robart browne		be me Johñ Swgar ⁷
	y ^c Knyght		
	Johñ elward		Robert Sh ⁸
	Johñ stenny		
	Johñ Wryght		
	(mark)		
	Jhon Newton ⁵		

	george atkynson		Sawdone
	John wryght rep th		ye duke John wryght
	John Sencar (?) ye steward		Wm strayker messynger
	John Jaykes holofernes		John law ye harowlld
	Edward danyell		Kynghts
	John Rayner } iij yong men		thomas playn
From: M.W. Barley	John love } iij yong men		Robert lawranson
<i>Review of English</i>	Wm browne }		
<i>Studies</i> 5			(Signatures)
(1954), 165-7	ye messyngers		John † Toplydge
	John toplydge		John Rener
	thomas watson		be me george Atkynson
	Robt browne		be me John Sugar
	ye Knyghts		
	John elward		Robert Sh
	John stenny		
	(Signatures)		
	John Wryght		
	Jhon ☒ Newton		

	rex		[Couper]
	George Atkynson		Sawdone [thomas dyconson]
	[thomas]		Wryght
	[John Wryght] rex		y ^e duke [Joh page]
			[Avant() prit (?)]
	John Sucar y ^e steward		William Strayker messynger
	John Jaykes holofernes		John law y ^e harrowlld
From: S.J. Kahrl	Edward danyelle		「Joh J」 Knyghts
Malone Society	John Rayner	} iij yong men	thomas playn
<i>Collections</i> 8	John love		Robertt lawranson
(1974), 6-7	Wm browne		
	y ^e messyngers	}	
	John toplydge		
	Thomas watson		
	Robert browne		
			<i>(These names are signatures.)</i>
	y ^e knyghts		John ‡ toplydge
	John Elward		John [Rey] Rener
	John Stennynt		be me george Atkinson
			be me John Sugar
	<i>(Signatures.)</i>		
	John Wryght		Robert Sh
	☒		
	Jhon Mellton		

Appendix 3

Transcriptions of LA: Donington-in-Holland Parish 23/7

buttfendyke ffor ffyndyng of ⟨...⟩
 ⟨...⟩
 ⟨...⟩¹

[yt ys agey]

yt ys Agreyd by ye consent of ye hole parysh yat evere man yat ⟨...⟩²
 hys tymes here after specyfyed to forfeyt for every tyme yat h⟨.⟩
 do xij d. Apece for evere playr yat ys to say

rex		ye
George Atkynson		[cowper]
[Iohn wryght] rex	[thomas]	Sawdane [thomās dyconson] [wryght] ³
Iohn Sinear ye steward		ye duke [Iohn page] [Robert [hesis] heris] ⁴
Iohn Iaykes holefernes		<i>william strayker messynger</i>
		Iohn law ye harrowld
Edward danyell		[Iohn I] knyghtes
Iohn Rayner] iij yong men	
Iohn Love		thomās playn
<i>william browne</i>		Robert lawranson
ye messyngeres	} (signed)	
Iohn toplydge		Iohn IT ⁵ Toplyche
thomas watson		
Robert browne		Iohn [Reg] Rener

1 ⟨ ⟩: 10–30mm of damage to top right corner of MS resulting in loss of text on 3 lines, possibly including part of date

2 ⟨.⟩: 10–15mm of damage to right edge of MS resulting in loss of text

3 [wryght]: written below the line to replace first thomas dyconson then cowper both cancelled

4 [Robert ... heris]: written below the line to replace Iohn page, cancelled

5 IT: Toplydge also makes his personal mark of the initials I and T interlaced

ye knyghtes

John Elward
John Stenny

be me george Atkynson +(.)⁶
be me Iohn Swgar

(signed)

Iohn Wryght
X⁷
Ihon Newton

Robert Sh

⁶ +(.): *unidentified personal mark*

⁷ X: *unidentified personal mark in the form of a circle with four short strokes radiating from it*

Appendix 4*Information Concerning Names of LA: Donnington-in-Holland Parish 23/7*

Name	Date of death	Identity	Associates
LEFT COLUMN			
George Atkynson	1598	'laborer'; will mentions only cash	One of six who signed the list
John Wryght	1587	well-to-do farmer	Rayner (by marriage), Tilson
John Sinear	no will		
John Jakes	1581	well-to-do farmer	Toplydge ('brother' to Jakes senior; godfather to Jakes junior)
Edward Danyell	no will		
John Rayner	1592	well-to-do yeoman/farmer	Strayker (witness) Atkynson, Wryght, Jakes, Toplydge, Sugar, Tilson (cw) were all associates of his father (d. 1565)
John Love	1569	well-to-do yeoman/farmer	Strayker (best coat to him); Wryght and Jakes (appraisers); Toplydge (supervisor)
William Browne	1592	farmer (hemplands, horses)	
John Toplydge	1587	well-to-do yeoman/farmer	Jakes (his son's uncle); Rayner, Love (supervisors)
Thomas Watson	1563	farmer	R. Shakforth (warden of plough light, supervisor)
Robert Browne	1584	labourer (owned cattle and hemp)	Strayker (witness; both were messengers in the play)

Name <i>(cont)</i>	Date of death <i>(cont)</i>	Identity <i>(cont)</i>	Associates <i>(cont)</i>
John Elward	1569	farmer	John Wryght and John Sugar (supervisors)

John Stennynt	no will		
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RIGHT COLUMN

Thomas Dycconson	1597	wealthy; tradesman(?); no lands	Strayker (witness)
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John Page	1578	husbandman; owned cattle	Strayker (witness)
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William Strayker	no will		
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Robert Heris	1584	yeoman; lots of cash	Tilson (warden of plough light), Jackson (cw)
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John Law	no will	} all three had sons born in 1561 or 1562	
Thomas Playn	no will		
Robert Lawrenson	no will		

CHURCHWARDENS (FROM CW ACCOUNT)

(1) Thomas Tilson	1571	well-to-do farmer	Robert Heris (uncle to #2, supervisor of both wills); John Wryght (appraiser for inventory of #2)
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(2) Thomas Tilson	1583	son, well-to-do farmer	
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Notes

Parts of this essay are based on a paper delivered by James Stokes at the Thirty-Second International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 1997, at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, Michigan). Stephen Wright wishes to thank the Foley Fund of the Catholic University of America for its generous support of this project.

- 1 H. F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919), 128. On the functions, development, and decline of social and religious guilds, see also Barbara A. Hannawalt, 'Keepers of the Light: Late Medieval English Parish Gilds', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984), 21–37, and Ben R. McRee, 'Religious Gilds and Civic Order: The Case of Norwich in the Late Middle Ages', *Speculum* 67 (1992), 69–97, especially 70 n 3.
- 2 Lincolnshire Archives, Donington-in-Holland, Parish, 23/7. We would like to thank the vicar and the Donington Parochial Church Council for granting us permission to reproduce this cast-list page from the churchwardens' accounts (see Appendix 1). Donington is situated at a junction of roads leading to Boston, Grantham, and Spalding. It is midway between Boston and Spalding on one road, and midway between Boston and Grantham on the other. Donington is an ancient market town and was a centre for the flax and hemp trade. It had one hamlet (Northope), and its church is dedicated to St Mary and the Holy Rood. See *Donington Parish Church: A Short History* (Ramsgate, 1966).
- 3 Lincolnshire Archives, Donington-in-Holland, Parish, 7/2.
- 4 For transcriptions and references to the list, see Fredson T. Bowers, 'A Sixteenth-Century Plough Monday Play List', *Review of English Studies* 15 (1939), 192–4; W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest: A Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England* (Cambridge, 1946; rpt Chichester, 1983), 281; M.W. Barley, 'Cast of Plough Monday Play at Donington, Lincolnshire, c 1563–5', *Review of English Studies* ns 5 (1954), 165–7; Margaret Dean-Smith, 'Cast of a Plough Monday Play at Donington', *Review of English Studies* ns 5 (1954), 394–6; Stanley J. Kahrl, *Records of Plays and Players in Lincolnshire: 1300–1585*, Malone Society *Collections* 8 (Oxford, 1974 [for 1969]), 6–7; and Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558*, *Studies in Early English Drama* 1 (Toronto, 1984), 123–4 (no. 605).
- 5 Bowers, 'A Sixteenth-Century Plough Monday Play List', 193.
- 6 Barley, 'Cast of Plough Monday Play', 166–7.
- 7 Dean-Smith, 'Cast of a Plough Monday Play', 394–6; Kahrl, *Records*, xxviii.
- 8 John Wasson, 'The English Church as Theatrical Space', *A New History of*

- Early English Drama*, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.) (New York, 1997), 34–5. Kahl, who also described the lost play as a ‘puzzle’, was the first to suggest that it might have been based on the Book of Judith (*Records*, xxviii). The Book of Judith, originally written in Hebrew, now survives in the Greek Septuagint (as well as in early Latin and Syriac versions). As such, it forms a part of the Old Testament Apocrypha and cannot accurately be described as a Gospel.
- 9 Wasson, ‘English Church as Theatrical Space’, 35. Strictly speaking, Judith is a Jewish heroine, not a Christian saint.
- 10 The story of Judith and Holofernes is the subject of Pageant 42 of *Le Mystère du Viel Testament*, James de Rothschild (ed), 6 vols, Société des Anciens Textes Français 9 (Paris, 1878–91), 5.231–354 (ll. 41856–44325). A dramatization of the ‘histoire de Daniel’ was performed in Abbeville in 1477 but the exact subject matter of the play is unknown; see Louis Petit de Julleville, *Histoire du théâtre en France: Les mystères*, 2 vols (Paris, 1880; rpt Geneva, 1968), 2.40. In German-speaking Europe, Judith and Holofernes appeared in the Ingolstadt Corpus Christi procession and the Luzern Passion play; see Rolf Bergmann, *Katalog der deutschsprachigen geistlichen Spiele und Marienklagen des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1986), 154 (no. 64) and 224–5 (no. 98); Bernd Neumann, *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit: Zur Aufführung mittelalterlicher religiöser Dramen im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, 2 vols (Munich, 1987), 1.406 (no. 1954). Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records*, lists several examples from England: a pageant welcoming Mary Tudor to Edinburgh in 1503 in which the virtue Force defeated Holofernes (315, no. 1663); a play of Holofernes performed for Princess Elizabeth at Hatfield House in 1556 (344, no. 1805); a pageant of heroic women, including Judith, presented for Elizabeth I at Norwich in 1578 (239, no. 1236); a Latin Judith play from Hitchin (Hertfordshire), c 1550–7 (155, no. 775/8); and a play of Holofernes performed at Derby in 1572 (122, no. 596); see also David Galloway (ed) *Norwich*, REED (Toronto, 1984), 245, 256–9; E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1903), 1.202, 219, 221; 2.196; and Robert Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline*, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1918–20; rpt New York, 1963), 1.168–9.
- 11 For a study of the representation of Nebuchadnezzar in a wide variety of early historical sources, see Ronald H. Sack, *Images of Nebuchadnezzar: The Emergence of a Legend* (Selinsgrove, PA, 1991); for pictorial representations, see B. Ott, ‘Jünglinge, Babylonische’, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Engelbert Kirschbaum, et al (eds), 8 vols (Freiburg i. Br., 1968–76), 2.464–6.
- 12 All biblical citations and verse numbers are from the English translation of the Vulgate (Douai-Reims); all Latin citations are from the Vulgate.

- 13 'Ecce ego video quattuor viros solutos, et ambulantes in medio ignis, et nihil corruptionis in eis est, et species quarti similis filio Dei.'
- 14 The notion that 'danyell' refers to a role rather than to an actor's surname is supported by the fact that no family named Daniel or Daniels is to be found anywhere in the surviving parish records. The second letter in the first name, which readers to date have consistently taken to be a 'd', is in fact defective and could possibly be read as an 'l', indicating that the role was played by someone named Elward. The name John Elward appears elsewhere in the cast list and in Donington records; see n 35 below.
- 15 See 'Benedicite' and 'Song of the Three Children', *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F.L. Cross (ed), 3rd ed by E.A. Livingstone (Oxford, 1997), 182 and 1519; Fernand Cabrol, 'Benedicite et Benedictus es Dominus (cantique)', *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (eds) (Paris, 1907–53), 2.cols. 660–4; and John Meyendorff, 'Liturgy, Byzantine Church', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 13 vols. (New York, 1982–89), 7.612.
- 16 Karl Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1933), 2.125–71; Wilhelm Creizenach, *Geschichte des neueren Dramas*, 2nd ed, 3 vols (Halle, 1911–23; rpt New York, 1965), 1.61–8; Wolfgang F. Michael, *Das deutsche Drama des Mittelalters*, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 20 (Berlin, 1971), 46–8.
- 17 For the text of the sermon, see *Patrologia Latina*, J.P. Migne (ed) (Paris, 1861), 42.cols. 1117–30. Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2.126–31, prints a twelfth-century version of the 'lectio' from Arles used at Christmas matins.
- 18 'Dic, Nabuchodonosor, quid in fornace uidisti quando tres uiros iuste illuc miseris, dic, dic quid tibi fuerit reuelatum. 'Nonne', inquit, 'tres uiros misimus in fornace ligatos?' Et aiunt ei: 'Vere, rex'. 'Ecce', inquit, 'ego uideo quattuor uiros solutos deambulantes in medio ignis, et corruptio nulla est in eis, et aspectus quarti similis est Filio Dei'. Alienigena, unde tibi hoc? Quis tibi annuntiauit Filium Dei? Que lex? Quis propheta tibi annuntiauit Filium Dei? Nondum quidem mundo nascitur et similitudo nascentis a te cognoscitur? Vnde tibi hoc? Quis tibi istud annuntiauit nisi quia sic te diuinus ignis intus illuminauit ut cum illic apud te captiui tenerentur inimici Iudei, sic diceres testimonium Filio Dei?' See Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2.130; translation by Stephen Wright.
- 19 Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2.154–65
- 20 'Tunc Uocatores dicant Regi: Puerum cum pueris, / Nabugodonosor, / [cum in igne videris, / quid dixisti?] Rex fornacem ostendens dicat: Tres in igne

- positi pueri / [Quarto gaudent comite liberi]'. See Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2.165; translation by Stephen Wright.
- 21 See David Bevington (ed), *Medieval Drama* (Boston, 1975), 121.
- 22 Creizenach, *Geschichte des neueren Dramas*, 1.113–14.
- 23 *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8*, Stephen Spector (ed), 2 vols, EETS ss 11 (Oxford, 1991), 1.65–70; *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills (eds), 2 vols, EETS ss 3 (London, 1974), Play 5, 1.79–97; *The York Plays*, Richard Beadle (ed), York Medieval Texts, 2nd ser (London, 1982), Play 12, 110–14; *The Towneley Plays*, Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley (eds), 2 vols, EETS ss 13 (Oxford, 1994), Play 8, 1.64–71.
- 24 Miloš M. Velimirovic, 'Liturgical Drama in Byzantium and Russia', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962), 351–88, examines performance records and play texts in order to trace the development of this widespread form of liturgical drama in Byzantium and Russia. Although the earliest extant Greek manuscripts date from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century (353–4), Velimirovic argues (363) that an earlier version of the play may have been performed as early as the eleventh century. No surviving Russian text dates from before the first half of the sixteenth century; most date from the seventeenth century. Velimirovic's study is accompanied by three Greek versions of the play, musical notation, reproductions of manuscript illuminations, and photographs of a 'furnace' constructed for performances in Novgorod Cathedral. It should be noted that in 1422, Bertrandon de Brocquière, an emissary from Duke Philip the Good to Emperor Manuel II, attended a day-long performance in Hagia Sophia which, according to his description, sounds more like a European mystery play than a part of the Byzantine Divine Office: 'Je attendi tout le jour pour veoir leur manière de faire et firent un mistère des trois enfants que Nabuchodonosor fist mettre en la fournaise. Et fus tout le jour sans boire et sans mangier jusques au vespre, bien tard pour voir'. See Vénétiá Cottas, *Le Théâtre à Byzance* (Paris, 1931), 98–9.
- 25 A lost play of Nebuchadnezzar was performed eight times by the Admiral's Men between 19 December 1596 and 21 March 1597; see *Henslowe's Diary*, R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (eds) (Cambridge, 1961), 55–7. An anonymous and probably unrelated play (sometimes attributed to Joshua Sylvester, 1563–1618) dates from the early seventeenth century; see Margarete Rösler (ed), *Nebuchadnezzars Fierie Furnace*, Materials for the Study of English Drama, ser 2, vol 12 (Louvain, 1936).
- 26 Marius Sepet, *Les Prophètes du Christ: Étude sur les origines du théâtre au moyen âge* (Paris, 1878; rpt Geneva, 1974), especially 48–147, 165–79; cf. Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2.170–1. As Bevington notes (*Medieval*

- Drama*, 79), the simplest refutation of Sepet's theory is that the list of figures appearing in the *Ordo Prophetarum* is very different from the Old Testament episodes in the cycle plays.
- 27 Kahrl, *Records*, xxviii.
 - 28 See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven, 1992), 565–93, and Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage*, Yale Studies in English 103 (New Haven, 1943), 64–93.
 - 29 W.K. Jordan, *Edward VI: The Threshold of Power* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 181, 183; for a detailed discussion of Edward's religious policies, see pages 181–203, 240–401.
 - 30 Inventories taken in 1566 (together with some from earlier years) for two hundred parishes survive at Lincolnshire Archives in LA: Diocesan Records FUR 2, a document of 201 leaves entitled 'Inventarium Monumen(...) Superstitionis'. Other inventories for an additional thirty parishes, originally part of this collection, were removed from FUR 2 during the nineteenth century. They can now be found in LA: Dean and Chapter Cijj/36 where they have been repaired and bound. Many of the inventories from FUR 2, together with related documents, have been published in Edward Peacock, *English Church Furniture, Ornaments and Decorations, at the Period of the Reformation, as Exhibited in a List of Goods Destroyed in Certain Lincolnshire Churches, A.D. 1566* (London, 1866), and by C.W. Foster, 'English Church Furniture, A.D. 1566', *Lincolnshire Notes and Queries* 14 (1916–17), 78–88, 109–16, 114–51, 163–73. For an inventory from 1548 for the deanery of Calcewaith, see C.W. Foster, 'Inventories of Church Goods, A.D. 1548', *Associated Architectural Societies Proceedings* 34, Pt. 1, 27–46. For some damaged but surviving inventories from Lincoln Cathedral, see Christopher Wordsworth, 'Inventories of Plate, Vestments, &c., Belonging to the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Mary of Lincoln', *Archaeologia, or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* 53 (1892), 12–71. Extracts from inventories that contain references to players and/or playing gear will be published in the forthcoming REED volume for Lincolnshire, currently being edited by James Stokes.
 - 31 *The Play of the Sacrament*, in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, Norman Davis (ed), EETS ss 1 (London, 1970), 79 (l. 489); see also the edition in David Bevington (ed), *Medieval Drama*, 754–88. The play was probably composed not long after 1461 when the miracle it dramatizes was supposed to have occurred at Heraclea. The banns demonstrate that the play travelled and that it was to be performed 'at Croxston on Monday' (60, l. 74). Croxton is a common place name in the region, but the mention of Babwell Mill (77, l. 621)

indicates that the play was originally composed near Bury St Edmund. Various fifteenth- and sixteenth-century dramatic treatments of the same story are also recorded in Italy, the Netherlands, and France; see Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, lxxv–lxxvi.

- 32 Graham Platts, *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1985), 271.
- 33 See note 3 above.
- 34 The name Cowper – or variants thereof – occurs four times in the Donington Parish Register (Lincolnshire Archives, Bishop's Transcripts of Donington Parish Register, 1561–1819): on 12 November 1566, humffrey couter was christened; on 31 October 1576, (illegible) Coppar was christened; on 15 May 1591, John Cowper was buried; and on 14 March 1602, Agnes Cowper, daughter of Edward Cowper, was baptized. Clearly, persons of that name lived in Donington. Among these four, the one most likely to be the player is John Cowper.
- 35 All the wills and probate inventories are to be found in Lincoln Consistory Court Wills (L.C.C. + year of death + vol + fol no.) at the Lincolnshire Archives. They are (in the order in which they appear in the cast list, left column first): John Wright, 1587, f 364, Inv. 74/242; John Jaques (Jakes), 1581, f 118v; John Rayner, 1565, ff 43v–45, Inv 44/9; John Love, 1569 i, ff 4–4v, Inv 49/300; William Browne, 1592, f 546; John Toplish, 1588, ff 422v–23v, Inv 74/542; Thomas Watson, 1563, ff 18v–19; Robert Browne, 1584 i, ff 21v–2; John Elward, 1569 i, ff 118–18v, Inv 49/26; Thomas Dikkonson, 1597, ff 63–63v; John Page, 1577 i; ff 11v–12; Robert Heris, 1589, ff 359–60; and in the churchwardens' account, Thomas Tilson, 1571 ii, ff 148v–49v, Inv 50/84.
- 36 Bits of information about some of those who left no will do turn up in the parish register. Children of William Strayker, Thomas Playn, and Robert Lawrenson were christened during 1561–2 (two of the children soon died), as was the child of John Wright (who left a will). So these three of the players were married at the time of the play and seem to have been of the same general age group as most of those with wills. Children with the surnames Stennytt and Law were christened during 1562–3 (but their parents are not named) as were children with the surnames Watson, Toplish, Shakforth, and Strayker, furthering the impression that most of the players (if these parents indeed are they) were young married men of some means and financial expectations within the parish. John Newton, who signed the list and was a churchwarden in 1562, seems to have remarried in 1563 and died in 1575.
- 37 Kahrl, *Records*, xviii, 92, 72; see also Edward Peacock, 'Churchwardens' Accounts of Saint Mary's, Sutterton', *The Archaeological Journal* 39 (1882), 53–63.

- 38 A cryptic note in the damaged top right corner of the sheet seems to indicate that the Donington play may have been meant to raise funds for the construction or repair of a dike in the region known as Butt Fen: 'buttfennydyke for ffyndyng of ...' (Appendix 3). For the widespread practice of using parish plays to revenue for local construction projects, see John Wasson, 'The End of an Era: Parish Drama in England from 1520 to the Dissolution', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 31 (1992), 71–3, and John C. Coldewey, 'Some Economic Aspects of the Late Medieval Drama,' *Contexts for Early English Drama*, Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (eds) (Bloomington, IN, 1989), 91–6.
- 39 Kahrl, *Records*, 91–3, 70–4.
- 40 Kahrl, *Records*, xxvi–xxviii, 12; Hanawalt, 'Keepers', 28.
- 41 Kahrl, *Records*, xvi–xvii, 24–5, 27–8, 30–2, 50, 67–8.
- 42 Hanawalt, 'Keepers', 21, 28–9.
- 43 Kahrl, *Records*, xxi–xxv; Hardin Craig, 'Note on the Home of Ludus Coventriae', *University of Minnesota Studies in Language and Literature* 1 (1914), 72–83.
- 44 An increasing body of recent scholarship draws generally the same conclusion, namely, that saint plays and other history plays rather than biblical cycles were the typical form for other areas of the Midlands. See J.A.B. Somerset, "'this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house": Records of Early English Drama and Modern Play-texts', *Editing Early English Drama: Special Problems and New Directions*, A.F. Johnston (ed) (New York, 1987), 95–113; Barbara D. Palmer, 'Corpus Christi "Cycles" in Yorkshire: The Surviving Records', *Comparative Drama* 27 (1993), 218–29; Garrett P.J. Epp, 'The Towneley Plays and the Hazards of Cycling', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 32 (1993), 121–50; and John Wasson, 'The Secular Saint Plays of the Elizabethan Era', *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, Clifford Davidson (ed) (Kalamazoo, MI, 1986), 241–2.