

2019 Seminar Abstracts: 5PP: Players, Playwrights, Playhouses, Plays, and Parishes
Alan H. Nelson (University of California, Berkeley)

John H. Astington (University of Toronto)

“Deciphering the Parish: St Botolph Aldgate”

The parish of St Botolph Aldgate, to the north and east of the Tower, beyond the walls, lay partly within the London city limits and partly outside them, lending it an interesting character as far as regulation and administration went. The residence of numerous actors and others involved in showbiz more widely, it also saw some theatrical entrepreneurship. My paper examines the intersections of parish business and theatre business over roughly a hundred years, from c. 1560 to the Restoration.

Sean M. Benson (University of Dubuque)

**“[D]runk with those that have the fear of God’:
 Shakespeare’s Good Christian drinking”**

My essay takes its cue from the evidence in the *Records of Early English Drama (REED)* volumes, which often show local parish practice that contradicts—possibly even subverts—official pronouncements concerning Christian drunkenness. I begin with close readings of two passages concerning heavy alcoholic consumption by Christians (*Wiv.* 1.1.157-82; *TGV* 2.5.46-52, both Arden). I examine Shakespeare’s comic and lighthearted treatment in light of theological treatments, particularly those of Luther and Calvin, who even in their disapproval of drunkenness show signs of slippage from official belief in their own tolerance and practice of drinking. But I turn for more immediate and local evidence to the *REED* documents’ records of the widespread practice of holding church ales. Despite official condemnation of drinking, I argue that Shakespeare adopts a remarkably latitudinarian attitude that is reflected in churchwardens’ and other accounts of drinking in local parish churches. In short, he argues that drunkenness promotes fellowship and is best practiced in the company of believers.

Nicola Boyle (Harlaxton College, UK)

“The Lady Elizabeth’s Men: travels and travails in Norwich”

The Lady Elizabeth’s Men was formed in 1611. This was a company that struggled to establish a firm commercial footing in London, although it often played at court. It struggled to retain players, but it managed to have many of the best writers write for it. In many ways the very ordinariness of the company exemplifies the playing conditions that all but the most famous of the Jacobean playing companies experienced, and because of this it illustrates many aspects of playing life for a company.

Like many other companies the Lady Elizabeth’s Men toured extensively throughout their existence. Their first recorded visit to Norwich was in 1613, just two years after their formation. Norwich seems to have been a location that was problematic for the company; they were refused permission to play on many occasions but in 1624 refusal to play was accompanied by a period of incarceration for two of the players. This paper will investigate the available records leading

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up to this incident and will show how the actions of one company might illustrate the difficulties of playing in the provinces that many companies faced.

David George (Urbana University)

“*Love’s Labor’s Lost* and Knowsley Hall”

Three mishaps over time have enveloped the date of composition and first performance of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in an obscuring mist. First, Robert Tofte described in his long poem *Alba* (1598) a visit with his beloved, E. C., to a small playhouse to see the play. She took him there so that his love’s labor would be lost (she dropped him after the performance). Her home was in Warrington, about 20 miles east of Liverpool. But Tofte failed to identify the playhouse and the date the couple went there. Almost certainly she took him to the playhouse at Prescott, ten miles west of Warrington, and the date was (provably from other evidence) 1594. Second, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is set in a park surrounding a hall. The 17th c. maps for Knowsley Hall and park, an estate which is about two miles from Prescott, were kept privately by the Earls of Derby, but were released to me last year. The match between the topographical details in the play and the maps is striking. The maps will be appended to my paper with the permission of the present Earl of Derby. Third, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* ends with a pageant of the Nine Worthies and the songs of Hiems and Ver (Winter and Spring). These were borrowed from the Chester pageant of c. 1578, a program of which was for a long time part of BL Harley MS. 2057 (f. 31), which Charles Knight saw in 1867. Others read it up till 1952, after which it vanished. The editors of *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (1979) and *Cheshire including Chester* (2007) have notes on BL Harley MS. 2057, but they have nothing on f. 31. Now that we know that *Love’s Labour’s Lost* dates from 1594, that it was almost certainly first performed at Prescott, and that Shakespeare had access to the Chester pageant of the Nine Worthies, we are much closer to accepting the “Lancastrian theory” of Shakespeare’s first employment with the Earls of Derby. The earl most likely to have launched his career was Ferdinando (?1560-1594), fifth earl, and the patron of Lord Strange’s men. The King of Navarre in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is named Ferdinand, but there never was a King Ferdinand of Navarre. When Ferdinando died in April 1594, much of the play’s allusiveness would have vanished, and indeed the 1598 quarto excises Ferdinand’s name from the dialogue.

Chris Highley (The Ohio State University)

“Reading the Parish Registers of St Anne Blackfriars”

My paper will examine the parish registers of births, marriages, and burials of St. Anne Blackfriars in London between 1538 (the year the priory was dissolved) and 1642 (the year the indoor playhouse was closed). For the cultural historian, parish registers might appear to be unpromising, prosaic sources—lists of disembodied names that primarily interest number-crunching demographers. I’d like to challenge this assumption by looking closely at three facets of the registers:

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- Form: what can we say about the organization and structure of the Blackfriars registers? Are they anything more than lists? What is significant about the list as a form?
- Content: what do the registers reveal about the Blackfriars as a neighborhood, including its residents, its economic life, and its fluctuating population? What do they tell us about the presence of the local playhouse?
- Affect: how might we characterize the experience of reading these registers? How is it similar or dissimilar to the experience of reading a ‘literary’ text?

William Ingram (University of Michigan)

“How to Leave Property to Your Parish Church”

My paper deals with the complexities attendant upon any effort to bequeath one’s property to a parish. I take as my example the case of Thomasyn Symonds, who – so we have always been told – left the Little Rose property on the Bankside to “the parish of St Mildred Bread Street”. I aim to demonstrate that this is simply wrong, that the property upon which Philip Henslowe built his Rose playhouse was not bequeathed to, and was never owned by, the parish of St Mildred Bread Street, despite what our theatre history textbooks say. It was bequeathed to other people, in perpetuity, and we know their names. There are instances of this practice in other parishes as well. This strategy was required because of the Statute of Mortmain (1279), which effectively prohibited people from leaving goods or property to the Church. (Leaving it to a parish is the same as leaving it to the Church). Mortmain is a term used to describe the status of lands held inalienably by an ecclesiastical body, a situation resented by the Crown from early times and finally outlawed by Parliamentary statute under Edward I. There were ways to work around this prohibition, and Thomasyn Symonds took advantage of them

David Kathman (Independent Scholar)

**“St. Botolph Aldersgate:
 A Forgotten Entertainment District in Sixteenth-Century London”**

In the summer of 1530 or 1531, the parish of St. Botolph without Aldersgate in London hired Henry Walton to produce plays in the churchyard to raise money for the parish, as Walton had recently done for two other parishes in the city. Over the next few decades, the area around St. Botolph Aldersgate became one of London’s most popular districts for plays and other forms of entertainment. By 1543, professional plays were being performed at Northumberland House, a short walk south of St. Botolph, and they continued to be performed there for at least another two decades. From at least 1557 through 1568, and possibly longer, plays were performed in Trinity Hall, just north of the St. Botolph parish church. This entertainment district around Aldersgate, apparently quite popular in its time, declined after purpose-built playhouses were built in the suburbs in the 1570s. It has been almost completely forgotten by theatre historians today, part of a general neglect of London playing before 1575.

Sally-Beth MacLean (University of Toronto)

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“Professional Acting Troupes in Parish Records: a REED Retrospective”

After 36 volumes in print and two digital collections published online, it seems timely to review what evidence REED editors have collected for professional performance troupes appearing in historical parish records before 1642. In the course of their research, REED editors routinely search surviving churchwardens’ accounts and vestry minute books for details about local and touring entertainment practices. My intention is to survey their discoveries for professional performance troupes and their use of parish spaces and to report on the results, not only from the published collections but also from several more, at various stages, submitted for editorial attention and/or final production at the REED office in Toronto. As part of this interim assessment, reference will be made to other publications where use of churches for professional performance has been described and where predictions have been made about the evidence still to be discovered for widespread use of churches by performers. I should note that parish register entries are not routinely included in REED collections, so that category of record will not be part of the survey.

Geoffrey Marsh (Victoria and Albert Museum, UK)

“Shakespeare and the Parish of St. Helens, City of London”

Since the 1840s, it has been claimed that Shakespeare lived in the Parish of St. Helens in the City of London c.1597/98. The evidence is his listing in a tax record for the 1598 Lay Subsidy preserved in the UK National Archives at Kew. Despite the limited number of documents mentioning Shakespeare, it is perhaps surprising how little study has been made of this record.

This paper will consider five questions:

- If the document is genuine, can we be sure Shakespeare’s entry is genuine?
- If it is, how long might Shakespeare have lived in the Parish?
- Is it possible to say where he lived in the Parish?
- Who were his immediate neighbours?
- Does the knowledge of his time in the Parish and his neighbours provide any insights into his life and work?

Using a variety of sources, it has been possible to identify about a hundred families living in the Parish in the 1590s. In addition, runs of leases for the 1590s have been located for about fifteen properties and some information on another ten. While these do not mention Shakespeare, they identify some interesting individuals who must have been close neighbours. Other data shows the impact of the 1593 plague when c. 10% of the parish population died.

In the case of John Prynne, for example, it is possible to identify precisely where Prynne(e) lived. We also know that Prynne had lodgers in his house at a later date but, so far, no record of Shakespeare. It would be tempting to suggest that Shakespeare was Prynne’s lodger, but there are several other residents who had associations with London’s theatre world and might have provided accommodation.

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**“Rescuing a Parish Document:
 St. Mary Aldermanbury Vestry Book I (1569-1609)”**

Though much of the first surviving Vestry Book of the parish of St. Mary the Virgin Aldermanbury, London (1569-1609), is legible, pages have been torn in some places, some paragraphs are seriously faded, and the paper has been attacked in many places by a fungus. Parts of the text are consequently nearly or entirely illegible, and are potentially lost to historians. I have attempted to “rescue” the first Vestry Book by transcribing the entire text to the extent possible, sometimes inferring missing words, including names. Having transcribed all of the first book, I have transcribed the far more legible second book up to about 1620.

The parish of St Mary Aldermanbury was the home of several individuals with playhouse connections. John Heminges and Henry Condell appear with some frequency in the Vestry Books; more prominent in the life of the parish was William Leveson, a trustee for the site of the Globe Playhouse on Bankside. Socially prominent were members of the Digges-Russell family (Thomas Russell esq. was an overseer of Shakespeare’s will; Leonard Digges wrote about Shakespeare on at least three occasions). Gregory Donhault, a Master of the Rolls, recorded Shakespeare’s purchase of the Blackfriars Gatehouse in 1613. Information in the Vestry Books is directly supplemented by the Parish Register; and by Lay Subsidy Rolls from 1582 and 1599. Further information, not necessarily novel, is available from neighboring parishes: Thomas Savage, goldsmith, from St. Albon Wood Street, served as second trustee for the site of the Globe; William Shakespeare lived for a time in the parish of St. Olave Silver Street; Humphrey Dyson, Notary Public and collector of books including the first edition of *Troilus and Cressida* (1609), and a known acquaintance of John Heminges, lived in St. Albon Wood Street; while Leonard Digges’s friend and fellow admirer of Shakespeare, James Mabb, was baptized in St. Matthew Friday Street. As one example of this accumulated evidence, an argument can be made that the acquisition and preservation of the 1599 lease for the Globe Playhouse owed at least as much to John Heminges as to William Shakespeare.

Kara Northway (Kansas State University)

**“Yow waded very low with hatred against us’:
 Nathan Field’s Epistolary Defense of Actor-Parishioners”**

Edward Gieskes’s *Representing the Professions: Administration, Law, and Theater in Early Modern England* cites three “public debate[s]” about theatrical vocations: Thomas Heywood’s *Apology for Actors*, the anonymous *Actors’ Remonstrance*, and Nathan Field’s *Remonstrance*. While the first two examples were published during the period, Field’s *Remonstrance* (1616) is not listed in the *STC* and remained in manuscript until J. O. Halliwell’s 1865 *Shakespeareiana* transcription. Field’s text, a letter, was less a “public” than a *parish* debate. Field, already a famous actor, wrote to preacher Thomas Sutton complaining that sermons were used to “point att me and some other of my quallity and directly to our faces in the publique assembly to

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pronounce us dampned.” Launching a defense grounded in economics, politics, and the Bible, Field created an in-group identity of actor-parishioners, an “us” likewise offended by Sutton’s humiliation, and distinguished this group from a second, “corrupt” group of actors. St. Mary Overie token books suggest names of those other actors Field possibly felt he represented. Ultimately, his letter shows actors employing rhetorical and epistolary skills extra-theatrically for two purposes deemed important enough to require action: consolidating relationships among actors within the parish and strengthening reputations in church as respectable parishioners.

Matteo Pangallo (Virginia Commonwealth University)

**“There Has Been a Scandal’:
 Foreign Performers and the Strangers’ Churches of London”**

Despite E. K. Chambers’s 1923 claim that Tudor and Stuart England was a net exporter of dramatic culture, records in London and the provinces demonstrate that numerous cultural performers from across Europe and beyond appeared frequently in early modern England. These performers included actors, dancers, minstrels, musicians, music and dance teachers, animal acts, puppeteers, tumblers, and more. Many were high-profile cultural diplomats who appeared at court; others were itinerant professionals seeking new economic opportunities across the Channel; and many others were settled immigrants who had made England their indefinite home and who were either professional or amateur performers. This short paper intends to review the few references to such foreign performers in the records of the so-called “strangers’ churches” of London (the Dutch church at Austin Friars, the Italian church at Mercer’s Chapel, and the French church at Threadneedle Street), or who were otherwise apparently associated with or connected to those churches. It will also hypothesize—as far as it is possible to—about the nature of the relationship between those performers and their parishes.

Gerit Quealy (Independent Scholar)

“Fulke Greville II’s Missing Tomb & the Parish Record of Alcester’s St. Nicholas church”

The parish register of Alcester’s St. Nicholas, Warwickshire, begins with the burial of its most illustrious citizen, Sir Fulke Greville, Knight, in 1560. The burial of Lady Elizabeth Greville (née Willoughby), is even more prominently recorded on the same page two years later. The couple’s imposing tomb is the dominant feature in the diminutive St. Nicholas parish church. Their grandson, Elizabethan courtier poet and statesman Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, has a commanding monument in the Chapter House of St. Mary’s Collegiate Church in Warwick. But the middle Fulke Greville is almost overlooked in the Alcester parish record. His burial gets a cramped notation in the margin of the 1606 list, anomalous in the neat linear records of the volume spanning many decades. The unusual parish-record afterthought seems to reflect a bigger mystery: the man who was, according to Dugdale, even more beloved and revered in the county than both his father and his son, is also missing a tomb. Perhaps the parish record interlineation is indicative of his son’s preoccupation in 1606 with writing plays, preparing his *Life of Sidney*, and trying to regain government employment, to attend to a proper burial for his father. Or

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perhaps his father's financial arrears and working to reclaim lost family estates left the third Greville resentful over the expense of a tomb.

Paul Whitfield White (Purdue University)

“Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn in Parish Politics and Service”

I argue that Henslowe and Alleyn were deeply involved in parish culture and finely tuned to the political dynamics of St. Saviour's Church vestry, the assembly of lay leaders in the parish. Moreover, while they did not hold office in the 1590s—indeed, were possibly shut out of it—they undoubtedly were affected by antitheatrical sentiment voiced by the vestry at this time and, this, in turn, may have factored into their professional decision-making around the time plans were afoot to build the Fortune in the north London parish of St. Giles without Cripplegate, secured in part by Alleyn's charitable donation to the parish's poor rate. When they were finally elected to church office at St. Saviour's, they quickly emerged as leaders, cultivating a reputation for godly service that countered the stigma that many civic and clerical leaders associated with life in the theatre. Moreover, they left an important legacy to the parish, in joining the elite group of wealthy vestrymen in a historic struggle to win back the church's sizeable tithing revenue in 1614 from a suspected Catholic nobleman to whom King James awarded the lease of the rectory nearly a decade earlier.

Emily Yates (Michigan State University)

“Performativity, Performance, Preachers, Pamphlets, and Puppets”

In 1603, Henry Crosse, an English minister, wrote *Virtue's Commonwealth* where he proclaimed that, “a Play is like a sincke in a Towne, whereunto all the filth doth runne.” This sentiment towards plays and playgoers was shared amongst many of those known as “anti-theatricals” in the early modern period. As Sarah Dustagheer notes in *Shakespeare's Two Playhouses*, there is a similarity between “[c]hurch and playhouse as open spaces in which the people of early modern London could ‘flock’ to consume a cultural product, the sermon or the play” (52). I look at the similarities of sermon and play and of preacher and player/playwright by examining the antitheatrical writings of Henry Crosse and Stephen Gosson alongside Ben Jonson's play, *Bartholomew Fair*; I show how both reflect theatricality *and* antitheatricality as well as a complex understanding of performativity. Scholars have noted Jonson's mocking of antitheatricals as well as the theatricality of the writings of antitheatricals, but few have noted Jonson's own antitheatricality, and not enough attention has been paid specifically to the idea of performativity as used by Jonson and antitheatricals as it intersects with identity, the social, and the political.