



# PLAYING THE PASSION IN LATE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ROMNEY: THE PLAYWARDENS' ACCOUNT FRAGMENT

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*Drama, including plays of Christ's passion, became popular in Kent from at least the later Middle Ages. Nevertheless, very little is known about the format of these early dramatic performances. Evidence is particularly rare for the fifteenth century. However, a fragment of the New Romney playwardens' rough accounts has survived among other account fragments and memoranda at the end of the 1469-92 chamberlains' account book. This paper's assessment of the New Romney fragment is thus an important addition to the history of drama, especially the identities of the playmakers and the role of Christ's tormentors, for scholars studying Kent and late medieval plays more widely.*

Drama has been popular in Kent from at least the later Middle Ages and numerous references to players and playing can be found in the civic archives of the county's towns and cities. Parish records, too, contain evidence of such activities suggesting that plays were not solely performed by townsmen in urban settings, but equally were part of rural society. For example, in 1484-5 Dover townspeople could have seen the town's own players, as well as those visiting from Sandwich and from Boghton [Boughton].<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the high level of survival of these sources in Kent compared to many other counties means that it is hardly surprising the Canterbury diocese generated a three-volume compilation of records linked to drama whereas Sussex and Devon each comprise a single volume.<sup>2</sup> These compilations are part of the *Records of Early English Drama* [REED] series covering England, Scotland and Wales for the medieval period to 1642 (when the authorities closed the theatres), the Canterbury diocese volumes produced under the editorship of one of the authors, James Gibson. After the publication of these Kent volumes, he worked on compiling a comparable set of records for the Rochester diocese. Although not published at the time of his death in February 2018, it is likely that in the near future this will become an online resource for scholars and those interested in Kent's dramatic traditions.

Yet, even though these Kentish records offer valuable insights concerning which towns and villages performed plays, where they may have been performed and before whom, very little is known about the format of this drama or the names of those taking part. Furthermore, only on rare occasions does the evidence indicate

the name of the play or any other details and, unlike the sources for Chester and York, it is extremely difficult to ascertain how these plays were performed.<sup>3</sup> For example, as Spencer Dimmock has discussed in his study of Lydd, the town's St George play did comprise a written text in the form of a playbook in the early sixteenth century, but this is now lost.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, although there may never have been a playbook for Canterbury's St Thomas pageant from the same period, some details about the performance can be gleaned from the city's chamberlains' accounts.<sup>5</sup> Comparable evidence is even rarer for the previous century, which means this assessment of the New Romney fragment is an important addition to the history of drama in late medieval Kent.<sup>6</sup>

Only a few references to the town's medieval Passion play appear in the fifteenth-century court records and chamberlains' accounts for New Romney: a court case brought by the playwardens for recovery of debt in 1456,<sup>7</sup> a payment 'pro ludo interludij passionis domini' in 1463,<sup>8</sup> the election of playwardens in 1475,<sup>9</sup> payments for watching the town during the play performance in 1476,<sup>10</sup> a payment for hire of play garments in 1490,<sup>11</sup> repayment of play debts to various townspeople in 1497,<sup>12</sup> and an order regarding proclamation of the banns of the play in 1498.<sup>13</sup> Although these sporadic references in the civic records indicate several performances of the play during the second half of the fifteenth century, the detailed records of these performances at New Romney were clearly kept elsewhere and have not survived.

However, an undated fragment of the New Romney playwardens' rough accounts has survived among other account fragments and memoranda at the end of the 1469-92 chamberlains' account book.<sup>14</sup> Much of the text is difficult to read, for in common with other leaves at the end of this volume, the folios have suffered in the past from damp and mutilation, and many of the entries are incomplete or disorganised. Nevertheless, even given these limitations, the playwardens' account fragment does contain the recoverable names of forty-five New Romney residents who received money or raised revenue and does reveal certain clues about the administration and performance of the New Romney Passion play. In the *REED* volumes the fragment was tentatively dated c.1483-6;<sup>15</sup> however, further analysis of probate data has now narrowed that window for the composition of the account to spring 1486 and a probable performance date in the week beginning Pentecost Sunday 1486 (14 May).<sup>16</sup>

### *The Populace and Play Participation*

Each year New Romney residents were assessed for taxes known as *scots*, levied and collected at various times during the year; and *maletotes* which were usually due at the end of the financial year on 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady. During the financial year beginning 25 March 1486 and ending 25 March 1487, in addition to the annual *maletote*, one *scot* was levied on 20 July 1486, half to be paid before the feast of St Laurence (10 August) and the other half before the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September).<sup>17</sup> The custumal remains silent concerning who was liable to pay these taxes and how the taxes were calculated, except for stipulating that residents who were not freemen of the town should pay twice as much as freemen for their *scot*.<sup>18</sup> Not every resident was

assessed for *scots*,<sup>19</sup> and in the *maletotes* names were sometimes recorded but the assessment amount left blank. Nevertheless, even with their limitations these two assessments do give a valuable indication of the relative financial status of New Romney residents during the 1486-7 accounting year.

The scot assessed on 20 July 1486 raised a total of £5 19s. 6d. from 109 people. The 8d. tax band containing eighteen people (16%) was the median assessment while forty-nine people (45%) fell below that point in the 4d. and 6d. tax bands and forty-two people (39%) were ranged above that point in the twelve tax bands rising from 10d. to 6s. The *maletote* collected later during the accounting year raised an almost identical total of £5 2s. 10d. from the same number of people, although in the *maletote* no tax was recorded after twenty of the names and not all the names were the same on both assessments. For the eighty-nine people who were assessed, the median was once again the 8d. tax band.

Comparison of the names in the 1486 *scot* with the forty-five names mentioned in the playwardens' account fragment reveals that the thirty-three residents involved with the play came predominantly from the higher tax bands. Twenty-nine people were assessed at or above the median tax rate of 8d., and only four people (12%) were assessed below (see **Table 1**).<sup>20</sup> Thus almost 50% of the sixty New Romney residents assessed at the median tax rate or above, were involved in some way with the Passion play.

TABLE 1. FINANCIAL STATUS OF PLAY PARTICIPANTS

Tax assessment bands 1486-7 scot	Less than 1s.	1s.-2s.	2s. 6d.-6s.
Total scot taxpayers	69	29	11
Taxpayers in Playwardens' account fragment	9	16	8
Recipients of play expenses only [Group a]	7	5	-
Donors towards play expenses [b]	2	3	1
Loan providers towards play expenses [b]	-	4	4
Money gatherers on play days [b]	-	6	3
Recipients of expenses and revenue raisers [b]	-	5	5

### *The Playmakers*

The level of involvement of individuals in the production of the play varied considerably; consequently, the people mentioned by the playwardens have been divided into two groups (see Table 1):

- a) those whose only role was to provide supplies or render services for which they were paid.
- b) people who also financed the production or exercised responsibility by collecting play receipts.

In the first group, those who only received payment for play expenses, are twenty-three of the forty-five names in the playwardens' account fragment, including all but one of those whose names do not appear in the tax assessments, such men as

John Bluett and William Bukherst, two of several mowers paid ‘for mowynge of grasse’ and ‘pro collecting de le Grasse’;<sup>21</sup> or John Castelake, who was paid 1½*d.* ‘for brede’;<sup>22</sup> or John Holle, who was paid 18*d.* ‘for j barell of bere’.<sup>23</sup> The twelve people in this group whose names do appear in the tax assessment fall in the low to mid tax bands from 4*d.* to 24*d.*

The second group, the raisers of play revenue, contains the remaining twenty-two people, all but one of whom also appear in the 1486 *scot*. Apart from two contributors in the median tax band, people in this second group of play participants were taxed in the upper tax bands between 1*s.* and 5*s.* Six people in the group made donations toward play expenses – George Halsnoth contributed 1*s.* 4*d.*, John Hamon, Laurence Norkyn, and Edmund Kelett gave 12*d.* each, and Margaret Burston and Richard Feldiswell 8*d.* each – while Margery, Stephen Baker’s widow, also contributed her late husband’s *maletote*.<sup>24</sup> A further nine men each loaned 3*s.* 4*d.* to the playwardens to meet initial expenses and were reimbursed from the play receipts: Dominus Richard, Thomas Bursell, Thomas Coupar, William Dobyll, William Gregory, William Melhale, Richard Randislowe, William Swan, and William Wodar.<sup>25</sup>

On the play day itself money gatherers worked in pairs to collect play receipts. Vincent Fynche and William Taylour gathered 21*s.*, William Melhale and John Adam 24*s.* 1½*d.*, Thomas Bursell and Thomas Galion 28*s.* 7½*d.*, and Robert Eve and John Melhale 20*s.* 6*d.*, making a total of £4 14*s.* 3*d.*<sup>26</sup> At the second play William Melhale and John Adam collected 10*s.* 7½*d.*, Thomas Galion and Edmund Kelett 8*s.* 5½*d.*, and Thomas Bursell 24*s.* 8½*d.*, making a further total of £2 3*s.* 8½*d.*<sup>27</sup> These revenue-raising activities were not mutually exclusive. Edmund Kelett gave a donation towards play expenses, but he also was a money gatherer. Thomas Bursell and William Melhale were money gatherers but also made loans to the playwardens. Because of such deep involvement of this second group in the play’s production, the remainder of this section will focus principally on these twenty-two playmakers who financed the Passion play and raised the revenue; and will seek to explore their motivation for working together to produce the play.

The playmakers may have viewed the play as a devotional event within the town’s liturgical calendar, as well as perhaps being especially public-spirited residents on Romney’s behalf, but it appears many of them also stood to gain financially from the large influx of visitors into the town on the play days.<sup>28</sup> For example, among the seven vintners of the town taxed in the 1486-7 *maletote*, five made contributions or loans toward play expenses – Margaret Burston, William Dobyll, George Halsnoth, Richard Randislowe, and William Swan – and a sixth, John Melhale, served as one of the money gatherers.<sup>29</sup> Among the thirteen vintners assessed the previous year in the 1485-6 *maletote*, twelve were involved in the play at Pentecost 1486.<sup>30</sup> For the publicans and innkeepers of the town this represented a major financial opportunity, and they banded together to support the play. Moreover, ten men, mostly at the upper end of the 1486-7 tax assessment, not only took a leading role in financing the play and collecting the play receipts, but also themselves received one or more payments for their expenses or rewards for their work on behalf of the play: Thomas Bursell, William Dobyll, Robert Eve, Vincent Fynche, William Gregory, John Melhale, Laurence Norkyn, Richard Randislowe, William Swan, and William Wodar. To cite just one example, Thomas

Bursell, himself a vintner in previous *maletote* assessments and a playwarden for the Pentecost 1476 performance, not only provided a loan to the playwardens and gathered money on both play days; but was also rewarded or reimbursed six times for services ranging from providing food and drink to building scenery.<sup>31</sup> Thus, for these leading residents of New Romney, the Passion play was good for business, yet seemingly also provided a means to express individual and collective religious piety.

In an age that viewed such performances as pious acts, the scenes concerning Christ's Passion potentially enhanced the spiritual lives of both actors and audience through their emotional response to Christ's suffering.<sup>32</sup> Even though there are methodological problems using the last will and testament to ascertain personal devotions, the testamentary records of the eleven playwrights whose extant wills pre-date 1500 do yield some indication of the nature of their piety.<sup>33</sup> Most of them requested burial in their parish churchyard or, if they were of St Lawrence's parish, in the hospital churchyard of St John the Baptist.<sup>34</sup> In 1486, however, Thomas Coupar sought burial inside St Lawrence's church.<sup>35</sup> Similarly three of his peers from the other New Romney parishes desired interment within their respective churches: William Gregory in 1487 in the chancel of Our Lady in St Nicholas' Church, Thomas Galion in 1490 before the image of St George in the same church, and William Taylor in 1495 before the pulpit in St Martin's church.<sup>36</sup> In part this is likely to reflect their socio-economic status locally, but equally may reflect devotion to a particular saint or a concern for another aspect of the parish's liturgical life.

Many of the playwrights similarly made pious bequests in their wills. In addition to the universal gifts to the high altar, just over half of this cohort made further bequests to the work of at least one New Romney church. William Dobyll's *post mortem* gifts of twenty ewes to the church work at St Lawrence's and another twelve ewes to St Martin's may imply that he had similarly aided his own parish of St Nicholas before his death, because his will contains nothing for St Nicholas' beyond 12*d.* to the high altar.<sup>37</sup> In this he is the exception, for almost all of the other ten testators made multiple bequests to their home parish church, including Thomas Coupar's bequest of a girdle decorated with silver to the fraternity of Our Lady in St Lawrence's church. Notwithstanding such testamentary giving might be considered standard in this period, as a group the playwrights were more generous than their peers among the town's leading citizens. For during the same period only 60% of New Romney's testators included bequests of this type. Even more striking is the playwrights' interest in the provision of new vestments. Four of the eleven gave between 5*s.* and £10 towards the making of new copes and other vestments at St Lawrence's and St Nicholas' churches, a wish that was apparently shared by only one other local testator from outside this group.<sup>38</sup> Although this desire to enhance the liturgical life of the parish may merely suggest parochial concern, it does seem to reflect a considerable interest in church ritual and performance especially appropriate for those deeply involved in the 1486 play production.<sup>39</sup>

Business interests and religious piety were not the only common denominators amongst these prosperous residents of New Romney who were primarily concerned in the Passion play's production. Another important factor uniting the playwrights was seniority in civic governance and the related issue of age. In New Romney the

twelve jurats together with the bailiff formed the highest level of local government. In 1486, eight of the jurats – Thomas Coupar, Thomas Bursell, William Dobyll, Thomas Galion, William Gregory, William Melhale, Richard Randislowe, and William Wodar – were directly involved in the play’s finances, and a ninth jurat, John Castelake, received several payments for play expenses.<sup>40</sup> Vincent Fynche had recently held the bailiwick, represented New Romney in Parliament in November 1485, and in 1487 was elected as one of the jurats.<sup>41</sup> Fynche was one of several playwrights who were not natives of New Romney, having originally come from the Kentish parish of Brabourne,<sup>42</sup> but his relatively recent status of freeman by gift in 1481 is worth contrasting with that of fellow jurats Lawrence Norkyn, who had become a freeman by redemption in 1456, or William Gregory and Thomas Galion, who had become freemen by birth in 1465 and 1468 respectively.<sup>43</sup> In addition, this cohort of senior civic officers included Thomas Bursell and William Dobyll, who as treasurers were ultimately responsible for the Passion play, their selection perhaps a reflection of their long service to the town. Both men had served as jurats for at least a decade, although not continuously, a distinction they shared with Thomas Coupar, William Gregory, Lawrence Norkyn, and Richard Randislowe. Moreover, these same men had also been members of the Cinque Ports’ court of Brodhull, which, as well as bringing them into contact with the barons of the other Ports, would have meant that they were well informed about regional and national politics.<sup>44</sup> The Cinque Ports had been implicated in many of the political events involving the houses of York and Lancaster, and Henry VII’s recent *coup d’etat* had meant that in the months before the play’s performance representatives from New Romney had sought royal confirmation of the town’s liberties.<sup>45</sup>

Even though the current senior civic officers constituted a minority among the playwrights, others such as John Melhale, William Swan, and the late husbands of Margaret Burston and Margery Baker had been freemen since the 1460s.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Dominus Richard, whether he had been an earlier incumbent at St Nicholas’ or the long-serving warden at St Stephen and St Thomas’ Hospital, was presumably a man of at least middle age.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, John Adam was the exception. He was apparently far younger than any of his fellow contributors to the play, having become a freeman by birth as recently as 1482, thus making him comparable to several of those whose sole play participation was payment for services.<sup>48</sup> His *scot* assessment at 16*d.* and *maletote* at 2*s.* were also lower than those of most of the playwrights.<sup>49</sup> His age and junior status may explain his more limited role compared to most playwrights, for on the two occasions he acted as a money collector he was paired with William Melhale, a leading citizen who had held the office of town chamberlain three years earlier.<sup>50</sup>

As senior and perhaps relatively elderly men, some of the playwrights may have considered that the time was ripe to produce a new performance of the town’s Passion play. From the civic archives it appears that the play had been performed in New Romney at about ten-year intervals, and the last known staging before 1486 was 1476. Such men as Thomas Coupar, William Gregory, and Richard Randislowe may feasibly have believed this would be their final opportunity, a sentiment perhaps shared by Robert Eve, who made his will in 1485, although he did not actually die for another decade.<sup>51</sup> Those seemingly slightly younger

men among the playmakers (many of whom became freemen by redemption in the 1470s and died in the 1490s) may, too, have believed that 1486 was an auspicious year, both because of the time lapse since the previous performance and because of the opportunity to celebrate the overthrow of Richard III for whom there had been little popular support in the county, as evidenced by the Cinque Ports' involvement in Buckingham's Rebellion three years earlier.<sup>52</sup> Thus, as well as financial gain and religious piety, many of the playmakers may have been influenced by political and age-related factors.

Even though New Romney by the late Middle Ages had a population of little more than a thousand souls, place of residence within the town may still have played a role in the creation and maintenance of networks amongst the playmakers. The importance of neighbourliness has been discussed by several social historians, and the residential pattern of the playmakers in 1486 does seem to substantiate such an idea. It is possible to ascertain with some degree of confidence the ward and parish for eighteen of the twenty-two playmakers. Topographically, the greatest concentration (five people) was in Bocherie Ward and St Lawrence's parish, an area slightly to the west of the town centre but one of the commercial foci and close to the site of the early guildhall.<sup>53</sup> Thomas Coupar lived to the east of Bocherie Ward in central Holyngbroke Ward, the location of the town's second guildhall and the western end of the 'new' High Street.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps as many as five of Coupar's ward neighbours resided in the adjacent south-eastern parish of St Nicholas. In total probably fourteen of the playmakers lived within this west-central sector. Furthermore, from the 1381 poll tax returns it seems this area was synonymous with the town's most prosperous and complex households, an observation that tallies with the financial status of the playmakers outlined above.<sup>55</sup>

Of the four people outside this sector, Thomas Galion and William Gregory lived in Olberd Ward in St Nicholas' parish, another area close to the 'new' High Street,<sup>56</sup> while William Taylour and Vincent Fynche were in Sharle Ward. These latter two wealthy men may have been viewed somewhat as 'outsiders' because of their considerable interests beyond Romney Marsh,<sup>57</sup> which may partly explain William Taylour's sole contribution to the play production as a money gatherer with fellow ward member Vincent Fynche on the performance day.<sup>58</sup> The relationships fostered by place of residence are corroborated by the testamentary sources that also indicate relationships of regard among some of these playmakers. For example, Richard Feldiswell chose Thomas Bursell as one of his executors, and Bursell also acted as a feoffee for William Dobyll.<sup>59</sup> Thus, whether bound together by geographical relationships, the shared responsibility of civic office, religious piety, or business interests, this tightly knit, small group of influential people at the top of New Romney society were the playmakers who organized and produced the Passion play.

### *The Play Performance*

The playwardens' account fragment contains over seventy payments for play expenses. Because of the loss to the folios, some of these payments are irrecoverable, such payments as, 'Item payd to a<...> mayew for <...> ij d,'<sup>60</sup> where the recipient can be identified from the 1486 *scot* as Andrew Mayew but



not the reason for the payment, or '*Item solutum* <...> vj d.,'<sup>61</sup> where neither the person nor the purpose can be known. Even when the whole entry does survive, a frustrating lack of detail can leave the purpose of some payments enigmatic, such as the 16*d.* paid to the common serjeant Richard Fuller 'in a reward,'<sup>62</sup> or the 3*s.* 4*d.* to the common clerk John Humfrey 'for his labour,'<sup>63</sup> or the unusually large sum of £3 18*s.* 4*d.* paid without comment to Thomas Vsborn, who was chosen to be one of the playwardens in 1475, but who had held no other significant town office during the intervening decade.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, even with the limitations of an incomplete and damaged manuscript and the laconic style of many entries, the account fragment does offer fascinating and often tantalizing glimpses into the play-world of the 1486 Passion play.

As well as the revenue-raising activities of the playmakers, the numerous references in the fragment to the pre-performance crying of the banns presumably also offered ways to advertise the play.<sup>65</sup> Thus, receipts from the bann-criers formed an important source of finance during preparations for the play: 3*s.* 4*d.* each from the nearby parishes of Brookland and Ivychurch, 5*s.* from the parish of Folkestone, and 6*s.* 8*d.* each from the towns of Lydd and Hythe.<sup>66</sup> On the debit side of the ledger, however, were the expenses incurred in raising this revenue: for example, an unspecified 20*d.* to John Castelake 'for the Banys';<sup>67</sup> 1½*d.* reimbursed to George a Gate 'for shoyng of his mare whan he proclaymed the banys';<sup>68</sup> 4*d.* paid to Robert Eve 'pro shoyng equi thome Sedle & Iohannis ffermour';<sup>69</sup> 3*s.* 1*d.* 'in expencis apud ffolkstone quando Bannarij fuerunt ibidem';<sup>70</sup> and another 9*d.* 'in expencis apud apoldore pro le horsmete'.<sup>71</sup> The payments of 2*s.* to John a Forde 'pro labore suo <...> vsque Sandwiche' and 3*s.* 4*d.* to Dominus Iacobus '<...> labore suo vsque winchilse' may be related to expenses of bann-criers traveling to the Cinque Port towns of Sandwich and Winchelsea.<sup>72</sup> Not only the bann-criers but also the money gatherers on the play days were paid as well for their expenses, as suggested by the damaged entry '*Item solutum* in e<...>*cis super Collectores pro labor* <...>'.<sup>73</sup>

There are also payments in the account fragment for minstrels and musicians: 3*s.* 4*d.* 'for the expencys of the Ministrall & reward',<sup>74</sup> and a defective payment to William Swan 'pro Mensa Ministrall<...>'<sup>75</sup> at the first play day and reimbursement of 20*d.* to William Swan 'for the expencys of the Ministrallis',<sup>76</sup> and a defective payment 'in expencis super Iohannem a fforde pro Ministrall<...> vj d.',<sup>77</sup> at the second play. An incomplete payment 'to Robert Cokke for h (blank)' may also indicate a performance by the New Romney minstrel Robert Cokke.<sup>78</sup> Although his name is not listed in the town *scots* and *maletotes*, it does appear in the White Book of the Cinque Ports in a memorandum dated 27 July 1456: '*Item* it is graunted & assented by this present Brodhull that Robert Cokke of Romene Luter shall were & beare the whole Armes of the portes'.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to generic payments for copious amounts of wine and beer, bread and pasties, and such supplies as nails, pins, and paper, other payments for certain stage properties and costumes provide clues to the content of the Passion play. The payment for 'ij. halters for the asse j d.'<sup>80</sup> suggests staging of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. Payments to Thomas Bursell 'pro le pasch lambe xij d.'<sup>81</sup> and 'pro assacione (roasting) agni pascallis in domo Iohannis humfrey ij d.'<sup>82</sup> and a defective payment to William Dobyll 'pro vino pro le maundy & pane <...>'<sup>83</sup>

indicate staging of the Last Supper. The payment to John Mylefe ‘for makyng of skochynnys ij d.’<sup>84</sup> and two payments for carrying ‘harneys from the Ness’,<sup>85</sup> presumably to array the Jewish and Roman soldiers, indicate staging of the Arrest of Jesus and the Crucifixion. Payments of 3s. 4d. to Thomas Taylour ‘for makyng of the Tormentours garmentys’,<sup>86</sup> 4d. to William Bukherst ‘for makyng of the Tormentours hodys’<sup>87</sup> and 8s. to Thomas Sedle for ‘vj yerdys of Blankett of Ba for the Bisshoppys gownys’<sup>88</sup> indicate the staging of the Trial before Annas and Caiaphas, who were traditionally portrayed as bishops.<sup>89</sup> A sixteenth-century memorandum for building of the stages confirms that the tormentors in the New Romney Passion play did indeed appear on stage with Annas and Caiaphas.<sup>90</sup> The payment to Thomas Bursell ‘pro Campanis pro inferno v d.’<sup>91</sup> suggests devils with morris bells strapped to their arms and legs during a performance of the Harrowing of Hell, and the further payment to Thomas Bursell of 2½d. for ‘garnysshyng de heven & pro le takyng down’<sup>92</sup> implies that the play ended with the Ascension performed on the heaven stage.

Looking at the sources and the light they can shine on how the play was performed, most of these expenses might be found in any staging of a Passion play. However, it is the reference to the ‘Tormentours hodys’ and the possible making of masks which is important and may indicate that one of New Romney’s unique contributions to the medieval Passion play genre was already part of the play by the late fifteenth century. Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter note that in the mystery plays masks were usually reserved for God or the devils, but were occasionally worn by such wicked characters as Herod or the tormentors.<sup>93</sup> Calling attention to the expenses for masks and face painting by the Smiths, who played the *Passion* in Coventry,<sup>94</sup> and the Shoemakers, who played most of the *Passion* in Chester,<sup>95</sup> they conclude, ‘The presumption is that the Tormentors and Herod were masked or painted in order to make them look sub-demonic’. They also comment that:

Putting human characters in masks clearly involves different problems and effects from the masks of devils. Since devils, like God, clearly belong to a different order of being, it seems neither surprising nor disconcerting that their non-human quality should be demonstrated in masks. But Herod and the gaolers, being human, offer a different case. A mask will inevitably set the wearer apart from the unmasked players. The interactions of a mobile human face with a static mask or inexpressive face-paint, whether grotesque or naturalistic, tend to produce striking and often sinister effects. If Herod and the tormentors are so distinguished, they are apparently given a different status from the other characters.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, the sinister masked or hooded tormentors in the New Romney Passion seem to have been playing something other than the traditional buffeting game noted in the Gospels and developed with devastating cruelty in such English biblical plays as the Towneley *Buffeting* and the York Trial plays, as well as elsewhere in the continental Passion plays.<sup>97</sup> Although no text of the New Romney Passion survives to compare with other plays, the mid sixteenth-century players’ recognizances identify the New Romney tormentors as personifications of psychological torment: Mischaunce, Falce at Nede, Vntrust, Faynthart, Vnhappe, and Evyll Grace.<sup>98</sup> Through their ‘Tormentours garmentys’ and their ‘Tormentours hodys’, and no doubt through their speeches, these personified tormentors must have portrayed mental and emotional torture strikingly different from the physical

blows and beatings in other dramatizations of the trial scene. Thus, if another instance in medieval religious drama of personified tormentors were identified, it might provide a clue to the source of the now lost New Romney Passion play, as well as perhaps casting light on the ways these characters were deployed within performances in different cultural eras.<sup>99</sup>

In conclusion, even though the playbook of the New Romney Passion play is not extant, the fortunate survival of the fragment of the playwardens' accounts does provide valuable information about the 1486 performances of the Passion play. If the entire account had survived, or if the manuscript had not been damaged by damp, or if the damage had been more expertly repaired, then much more would be known about the play and its playmakers. Nevertheless, even with its limitations the playwardens' account fragment does reveal many clues about the funding and performance of the play and gives a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the playmakers who administered and performed the New Romney Passion. In addition, and perhaps even more significantly, these references to the portrayal of the tormentors, especially when considered alongside later sources for the play, may point to a more sophisticated staging of certain scenes within the Passion sequence. Yet, as Diane Wyatt has warned regarding the Beverley plays, it is important not to speculate where the evidence cannot sustain such analysis.<sup>100</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.M. Gibson, ed., *Kent: Diocese of Canterbury, Records of Early English Drama [REED]*, 3 vols (Toronto and London, 2002), 2, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> C. Louis, ed., *Sussex, REED* (Toronto and London, 2000); J.M. Wasson, ed., *Devon, REED* (Toronto, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> For an example of just how much can be achieved in terms of York, see P. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Cambridge, 2006); whereas Diane Wyatt demonstrates the problems of interpretation of the fragments from early Tudor records for Beverley, *eadem*, 'The Untimely Disappearance of the Beverley Cycle: What the Records Can and Cannot Tell Us', *Medieval English Theatre* 30 (2008), pp. 26-38.

<sup>4</sup> S. Dimmock, *The Origin of Capitalism in England, 1400-1600* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 350-62.

<sup>5</sup> S. Sweetinburgh, 'Looking to the Past: the St Thomas Pageant in early Tudor Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, CXXXVII (2016), pp. 163-4, 170-3.

<sup>6</sup> For an assessment of the New Romney Passion Play when it was performed almost a century later, see J.M. Gibson and I. Harvey, 'A Sociological Study of the New Romney Passion Play', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 39 (2000), pp. 203-21. For an early examination of the late medieval drama records, see Canon Scott Robertson, 'The Passion Play and Interludes at New Romney', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XIII (1880), pp. 216-26.

<sup>7</sup> Kent History and Library Centre [hereafter KHLC]: NR/JB 2, f 23v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 737.

<sup>8</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 50v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 738.

<sup>9</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 105v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 739.

<sup>10</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 119; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 740.

<sup>11</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 275v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 751.

<sup>12</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 5, fol. 77; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 755.

<sup>13</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 5, fol. 80v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 755.

<sup>14</sup> KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fols 310r-2r; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 745-50. The following textual corrections should be noted: Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 747, line 26 Castlelake] Castlake; 2, p. 748, line 34 ffoldiswell] ffdiswell; 2, p. 749, line 2 viij d] viij s; 2, p. 749, lines 12, 24 Ebe] Eve; 2, p. 749, line 16 fauendo] formando; 2, p. 750, line 2 mamnay] maundy.

<sup>15</sup> Gibson, *Kent* 3, pp. 1356-7.

<sup>16</sup> KHL: PRC 32/3, fols 74, 116, 127, 142, 186, 196, 204, 248, 250, and 258. KHL: NR/FAc 4, fol. 119; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 740, 746; KHL: NR/JB 6, fols 215-16; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 779-82; KHL: NR/JB 7, fols 40, 67v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 783, 794.

<sup>17</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fols 247v-50v.

<sup>18</sup> KHL: NR/LC 1, fol. 11v.

<sup>19</sup> For example, during the 1486-7 financial year neither Richard Fuller, the common serjeant, nor John Humfrey, the common clerk, was assessed, although they may have been exempt because of their office. In some years servants were assessed, in other years, including 1486-7, they were not.

<sup>20</sup> Only thirty-three of the forty-five names in the playwardens' account fragment appear in the 1486 *scot*. As noted above, Richard Fuller and John Humphrey may have been exempt as part payment for holding civic office. Dominus Jacobus and Dominus Ricardus may have held clergy exemptions. John a Forde, former New Romney resident and jurat from the 1460s to the early 1480s, was no longer included in the tax assessments after 1484 because he had moved to the neighbouring town of Hythe at the beginning of 1485. Nevertheless, he did take part in the play at Pentecost 1486, and his name appears four times in the playwardens' account fragment. John Fermour is included in the 1486 *maletote* in a list headed '*Nomina aduocantium hoc anno*'; however, the significance of this list, which appears in some but not all *maletotes*, is not certain. Why the other six names do not appear in the *scot* is not known.

<sup>21</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fols 310r, 310v, 312r; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 745, 747, 750.

<sup>22</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310r; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 745.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> HLC: NR/FAc 4, fols 310, 311v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 746, 748.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fols 311v-1; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, pp. 748-9.

<sup>27</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310v; see Gibson, *Kent* 2, p. 746.

<sup>28</sup> The play day receipts of £4 14s. 3d. and £2 3s. 8½d. listed above represent an audience of 1,655 at a penny a head or 3,311 at a halfpenny a head.

<sup>29</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fol. 250.

<sup>30</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fol. 240v.

<sup>31</sup> KHL: NR/FAc 4, fols 231v, 240v, 310v, 312.

<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the most vivid contemporary example of such responses to the torment of Christ is to be found in: S.B. Meech and H.E. Allen, eds, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society [EETS], old series 212 (London, 1940).

<sup>33</sup> There is a sizeable literature on the value and use of these sources. For example, R. Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (Woodbridge, 2006); R. Lutton and E. Salter, eds, *Pieties in Transition: Religious Practices and Experiences, c.1400-1640* (Aldershot, 2007); C. Burgess and C.M. Barron, eds, *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England* (Donnington, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> S. Sweetinburgh, 'The Social Structure of New Romney as Revealed in the 1381 Poll Tax Returns', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxxi (2011), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 127. Although no longer resident in New Romney in 1495, Edmund Kelett wished to be buried in the churchyard of St Nicholas' church rather than at Appledore where he was then living; KHL: PRC 17/6, fol. 139.

<sup>36</sup> KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 142 (Gregory); KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 258 (Galion); and KHL: PRC 32/4, fol. 45 (Taylor).

<sup>37</sup> KHL: PRC 32/4, fol. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Coupar bequeathed £10 (KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 127); Galion, 20s. (KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 258); Randislowe, 6s. 8d. (KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 186); and Halsnoth, 5s. (KHL: PRC 32/3, fol. 196).

<sup>39</sup> Although charitable rather than devotional, the symbolic importance of clothing was well understood in medieval society; S. Sweetinburgh, 'Clothing the naked in late medieval east Kent', *Clothing Culture, 1300-1600*, ed., C.T. Richardson (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 109-22.

40 KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fols 98v-9.

41 A mandate from Archbishop Bourgchier, dated 19 June 1482, required the archbishop's town of New Romney to obey Vincent Fynche the younger, who had been appointed bailiff. See F.R.H. Du Boulay, trans. and ed., *The Register of Archbishop Bourgchier, 1454-1486* (Oxford, 1957), p. 46; KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fols 232v, 237v, 251.

42 For an assessment of the extent of the town's hinterland in terms of those becoming freemen, see A.F. Butcher, 'The Origins of Romney Freemen, 1433-1523', *Economic History Review* 2nd series 27 (1974), pp. 16-27.

43 KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 26v (Norkyn), fol. 54 (Gregory), fol. 58v (Galion), fol. 93v (Fynche).

44 F. Hull, ed., *A Calendar of the White and Black Books of the Cinque Ports, 1432-1955*, Kent Records 19 / HMC Joint Publications 5 (1966), pp. 68-96.

45 See KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fols 242, 245v, for memorandum about sealing the 'Indentures between the Kyng and the Barons of Romene' and payments to John Castelake, William Gregory, and Thomas Bursell for taking them to London.

46 Melhale became a freeman in 1469 (KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 61v), Swan in 1466 (KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 52), Richard Burston in 1468 (KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 58v), and Stephen Baker in 1462 (KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 34).

47 Richard Bargrove became vicar at New Romney in 1474 but resigned the living three years later, when he moved the short distance to Newchurch; see Du Boulay, *Register of Archbishop Bourgchier*, pp. 319, 329. Richard Berne was appointed as warden of the hospital in 1458; see *ibid.*, p. 249.

48 KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 94v.

49 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fols 248, 249v.

50 KHLC: NR/FAc 3, fol. 96v.

51 KHLC: PRC 32/4, fol. 55.

52 M. Mercer, 'Kent and national politics, 1461-1509', *Later Medieval Kent, 1220-1540*, ed. Sheila Sweetinburgh (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 261-5.

53 For the relationship between parishes and wards, see Sweetinburgh, 'Social Structure', p. 18. For the site of the guildhalls, see G. Draper and F. Meddens, *The Sea and the Marsh: The Medieval Cinque Port of New Romney*, Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd, Monograph 10 (London, 2009), p. 24.

54 Draper and Meddens, *New Romney*, p. 24.

55 Sweetinburgh, 'Social Structure', p. 18.

56 Draper and Meddens, *New Romney*, pp. 16-18.

57 KHLC: PRC32/4, fol. 45. Fynche was a member of an armigerous family, originally of Netherfield in Sussex, his interests stretched across Kent.

58 In addition to Taylour and Fynche, Stephen Baker before his death had also lived in Sharle Ward in St Martin's parish, and his widow presumably continued to reside there.

59 For Feldiswell see KHLC: PRC 32/3, fol. 248; for Dobyll, KHLC: PRC 32/4, fol. 64.

60 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.

61 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 749.

62 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 745.

63 *Ibid.*

64 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fols 105v, 310; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, pp. 739, 745.

65 For an assessment of the meaning and value attached to these banns, with special emphasis on their revenue-gathering purposes, see M. Sergi, 'Beyond Theatrical Marketing: Play Banns in the Records of Kent, Sussex and Lincolnshire', *Medieval English Theatre* 36 (2014), pp. 3-20.

66 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 748. In addition to collecting 6s. 8d. at Hythe toward play expenses, the New Romney banncriers were suitably entertained by the men of Hythe, for the 1486-7 Hythe accounts include a payment of 7d. 'in expensis panis & seruisie in domo Willelmi lunce pro lusoribus de Romene' ('in expenses of bread and ale in the house of William Lunce for the players of Romney'). See, Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 621.

67 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.

68 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 745.

69 KHLC: NR/FAc 4, fol. 312; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 749.

- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 *Ibid.*
- 72 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, pp. 748-9.
- 73 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 312; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 750.
- 74 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 745.
- 75 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 312; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 749.
- 76 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 745.
- 79 KHLc: CP/B1, fol. 25; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 737.
- 80 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.
- 81 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 312; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 749.
- 82 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.
- 83 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 312; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 750.
- 84 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 745.
- 85 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fols 310v–11; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747. Dungeness, the coastal headland where the men of Romney regularly mounted their watch of the English Channel, evidently had a store for the town's armour.
- 86 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.
- 87 *Ibid.* The defective payment to John Castelake 'for makyng of peccys' (KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 748) and the payment to Thomas Bursell 'pro ij hominibus laborantibus a formando le peccys' (KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 312; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 749) may also have been payments for making masks or moulds for the masks of the tormentors.
- 88 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 311; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747
- 89 See, for example, stage directions for Annas and Caiaphas in Play 26 in: S. Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, 2 vols, EETS old series 11-12. (Oxford, 1991), 1, pp. 252-3, where the clerical costume is described in detail.
- 90 KHLc: NR/JB 7, fol. 68; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 794.
- 91 KHLc: NR/FAc 4, fol. 310v; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 747.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 M. Twycross and S. Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 191-232.
- 94 R.W. Ingram, ed., *REED: Coventry* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 59, 93, 96, 104, 111, 177, 181, 200.
- 95 L.M. Clopper, ed., *REED: Chester* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 50, 60.
- 96 Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, p. 218.
- 97 In 'Suffering and the York Cycle Plays', in his *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 141-67, especially pp. 152-4, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315255293> Clifford Davidson sets the violence and brutality of the buffeting and scourging depicted in the English cycle plays within the European tradition generally.
- 98 KHLc: NR/JB 6, fol. 215; see Gibson, *Kent 2*, p. 780.
- 99 For even though England was once again Catholic under Mary when the Passion play was performed at Pentecost 1556, for the townspeople of New Romney and its hinterland, the intervening period had brought considerable changes, albeit some influential townsmen and their neighbours from Lydd had seemingly sought to retain the 'old faith'; Gibson and Harvey, 'Sociological Study', pp. 211-12, 214, 218. See also, S. Sweetinburgh, 'Eternal Town Servants: Civic Elections and the Stuppeny Tombs of New Romney and Lydd', *Negotiating Heritage: Memories of the Middle Ages*, eds, M. Baum *et al.* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 149-72.
- 100 Wyatt, 'Untimely Disappearance', pp. 26-7, 37-8.