

**The Earls of Derby  
and the Early-Modern Performance Culture of North-West England:  
Introduction**

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This issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* is concerned with the 3rd to 7th Earls of Derby, their patronage roles and other involvements in performance cultures in the early-modern period. This forms one central strand of research into the early-modern theatrical history of the small town of Prescott (now in Liverpool City Region's Borough of Knowsley; formerly in south Lancashire). It is this history, and the connections between Knowsley and Shakespearean theatre which it evidences, that inform the current Shakespeare North Playhouse Project, a major, heritage-based, urban regeneration initiative that has been developing for over a decade and which is now coming to fruition. The project commemorates Knowsley's early-modern theatrical heritage by building the Shakespeare North Playhouse, a replica of Inigo Jones's/John Webb's Cockpit-in-Court theatre enclosed in a modern wraparound building housing community and education activities, and surrounded by a performance garden. Construction of the Playhouse began in 2019 and it will open in 2022 with a program of retained and associated companies performing both Shakespeare's plays and other forms of drama in the Cockpit-in-Court theatre, as well as educational programs based in the surrounding modern building but extending into the wider community and its schools, colleges and universities.

The project overall takes its impetus from knowledge of the little-recognised—and perhaps surprising—level of Knowsley's Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic activity and interests. Retrieval of historical understanding of theatrical activity in Knowsley has, over recent decades, revealed two centrally-intertwined stories. There is, firstly, that of the Lancashire-based Earls of

Derby: courtiers, local magnates and theatrical patrons, one of whose major residences, Knowsley Hall, bordered the town of Prescot (as it still does today, as the Merseyside home of the 19th Earl and Countess of Derby). Then, secondly, there is the history of the "play howse," "lusorium," or "theatrum" in Prescot itself—the earliest, known, Elizabethan, purpose-built playhouse outside London. The intersection of these two narrative strands also brings north west England, as a specific regional locality, into dialogue with the royal courts of the period and London as England's burgeoning metropolis, embodying national concerns and cultures. A similar dialogue between region and metropolis also relates to our contemporary world and the Shakespeare North project.

While the significance of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Earls of Derby, for whom dramatic patronage was, as Sally-Beth MacLean has put it, "a family tradition", has been relatively well established in the past, recent research has enriched, extended and reconfigured perception of their roles (MacLean, "Family"; Manley and MacLean). Such research informs the articles included in this issue. The story of the Prescot playhouse is perhaps less generally-recognised than that of the Earls of Derby. But it has been known since the 1950s, when the local historian, F. A. Bailey, brought its existence to light, that a purpose-built theatre existed from the 1590s to the early 1600s in the small (both today and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) town of Prescot (Bailey, "Playhouse"). While David George, both in his work as editor of the Lancashire volume of *Records of Early English Drama*, and in a separate essay, has directly considered the significance of this early theatre, and others have mentioned the Prescot playhouse in passing, little dedicated research into its existence, other than that related to the Shakespeare North project, has been published (REED. *Lancashire*; George, "Playhouse"; Graham and Tyler). Knowledge of the existence of this Prescot playhouse derives largely from

town records: the Prescott Court Leet records; the accounts of its Grammar School; and some miscellaneous letters and notes. And, since a particular feature of Prescott's history was (and still is) its relationship to King's College, Cambridge—as the town's advowson was held by the College—further information is found in its archives. (Henry VI had gifted the Manor and Rectory of Prescott to King's College as part of its endowment in 1447, so that the town was under the College's governance and paid rents to it both in money and in kind).<sup>1</sup> The Earls of Derby, however, had farmed the town and Rectory from King's College since 1453, serving as Stewards of the town, either in person or through their appointed proxies, the Deputy Stewards, taking a share of the town's tithes (Bailey, "Grammar School" 3). In particular, correspondence between members of King's College, Cambridge and Thomas Meade, the nominee of the Provost of King's College as Prescott's vicar, schoolmaster and chaplain to the Earls of Derby from 1583 to his death in 1616, relates to the key period for the playhouse (see Bailey, "Playhouse" and Graham and Tyler for more detail).

These archival sources give us some information about the playhouse itself. We know, for instance, the location of the playhouse and the size of the plot on which it was built. The relatively small dimensions of the site (29 ft. in the east; 57 ft. on north and south and 15 ft. at the west end, equalling 1,250 sq ft.), retrospectively recorded in 1615, along with other records of the conversion of the "theatrum" into a "Howse for habitacion" in 1609 (marking the end of the period of its operation as a playhouse), suggest the modest size—and presumably, operation—of the playhouse.<sup>2</sup> By mapping the geographical references contained in these records on to roads and fields marked on eighteenth-century maps of Prescott, it is possible to situate the site of the playhouse quite precisely: it stood on waste ground abutting High Street (now named Eccleston Street), at the further end away from the market place and St Mary's Parish church.<sup>3</sup> When read

alongside the reference to the builder of the playhouse, found in a letter from the vicar, Thomas Meade, to Edward Orme, a solicitor from Childwall, commissioner for the Earl of Derby and clerk to the Prescott Court Leet (King xvi), these references also give a final date for the possible construction of the playhouse. Meade's letter contains a list of rents owing to the town's grammar school from "divers houses in Prescott toune, some ancient, some latly erected" (Walker Archive 1995.15.16.9). The rents included: "The play house bwilded vppon the wast by Mr Richard Harrington, now Master Stuardes, rent by yeare ijs. vjd" (cited Bailey 71; and George, REED. *Lancashire* 77). Since Richard Harrington was buried at Huyton on 7th February 1603, this sets the last possible date of the playhouse's construction as 1602. This reference to Harrington as the builder also suggests the earliest possible dates for the playhouse's construction. Prescott's regulations, administered by a governing group of townsmen, the "Four Men," stipulate that only Prescott property owners might build in the town, or on its waste. It was in 1595 that Richard Harrington, from the nearby town of Huyton, became active in Prescott, buying a cottage and garden, so becoming eligible to build in the town (Bailey, "Playhouse" 71). Harrington's older brother, Percival, then became Deputy Steward of Prescott in 1596 which would have further facilitated gaining permissions to build. Either 1595 or 1596 seems likely, therefore, to be the earliest date for construction of the playhouse.<sup>4</sup> The references to rents owing to the grammar school indicate that the playhouse was a separate institution. The school was supported by such rents, paid (unwillingly) by "divers tenants of divers lands" on which a number of unconnected buildings and establishments were situated (see Bailey, "Prescot Grammar School").

There are further, imprecisely-dated references to the playhouse, apparently from the 1590s, suggesting it was a new building (for example: a list of "divers houses in Prescott toune, some ancient, some newly erected" owing debts to the school and including the playhouse

[Walker Archive 1995.15.16.9]), but the majority of records alluding to it date from after its period of functioning. These occur intermittently throughout the seventeenth century, again in relation to rents owed to the school: 1685: "Samuel Ashton for Play house upon the wast 1s 3d"; 1686: "Mr[?] Ashton for the Play house On wast we conceive 1s 3d"; and from 1698, for one half year's rent: "Thomas Green for the Plea house 3d" ("School Accounts" KLS 57/P/F1; KLS 57/P/5, DDPs2/7; King's College KCAR/6/2/123/01-19/Pre 31/1-3). Even in the eighteenth century, occasional references in local records occur that show, as Bailey writes:

the playhouse remained in the possession of Harrington's descendants, and continued to be remembered as such. When a survey of the manor was taken in 1721, one of the properties in the possession of George Bradshaw, esquire, who had married Jane Roper, a great-great-great-granddaughter of Richard Harrington, was described as "a cottage in Eccleston Street formerly called the Play House, and a small garden thereunto belonging" (Bailey, "Playhouse" 7).

From such records, it is clear, memory of the building as a playhouse continued in official documentation for more than a century. Put together, the scattered references indicate, then, that the playhouse was built in the mid-to-late 1590s (and certainly no later than 1602) and operated until 1609. It was clearly recognised as a feature of the town both at the time, and in memory, and was built by the Steward of Prescott's brother. Disappointingly, however, from the point-of-view of theater history, the nature of the Prescott documents that have survived—particularly records of the Court Leet which was largely concerned with recording names of tenants and undertenants; hearing charges of unlawful behaviour; nominating town officers; and noting property transactions—means that there are no currently-known references to performances at the Prescott playhouse; who played there; or who made up its audiences (King xvi-xvii).

Nevertheless, it is evidence of the unexpected existence in Prescott of this small playhouse that forms one strand of the story (still being further researched) that is commemorated by the Shakespeare North project (see Bailey; George; Graham and Tyler; Tyler *Prescot Town* and Graham *Elizabethan*, both forthcoming, for fuller accounts of Prescott's playhouse).

A further aspect of the story of the playhouse's existence might be provided by tantalising hints of connections between the Harringtons and the Earls of Derby, also contained in town records. Prescott Hall, at times home to both Percival and Richard Harrington, was owned by King's College who had granted a tenancy to John Layton and his heirs in 1568. The Laytons occupied the Hall until 1600 when the Layton rights, in their entirety, were transferred to Michael Doughty of Roby, who in turn transferred them almost immediately to Richard Harrington. And Doughty is an especially interesting figure. Officially named as Clerk of the Kitchen, he was a highly trusted member of the household of Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby, and one of the four trustees named in the 4th Earl's will (Bailey, "Playhouse" 72; Coward 90-91). He remained a "confidential servant" to the 4th Earl's second son, William Stanley, when he became 6th Earl of Derby (Bailey 72), acting for him in the protracted lawsuit that followed his succession to the earldom in 1594 (Coward 91). And it is, of course, the roles of the Earls of Derby that forms the second and thickest, strand of the story of Knowsley's and Prescott's history of theatrical involvements that is the subject of this issue.

The idea that Shakespeare was connected to the Lancashire-based Earls of Derby has been proposed in various forms, and with various historiographical rationales, for over a century. Theories have included: the proposal that the 6th Earl of Derby, William Stanley—or W. S.—was actually the author of Shakespeare's plays (Abel Lefranc); and the controversial Catholic Shakespeare arguments, suggesting that Shakespeare spent the "lost years" of his life between his

documented early life in Stratford and his appearance in London in Lancashire (Honigmann; Wilson *Secret* and "Jesuits"; see also Winstanley for a critique of these theories.) Recently, however, Lawrence Manley's and Sally-Beth's MacLean's authoritative *Lord Strange's Men and Their Plays* which aims "to reexamine and add to the grounds for a direct association between Shakespeare and Lord Strange's Men," presents Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange and later 5th Earl of Derby, as the patron of the company which included core members of the later Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company at the Globe (Manley and Maclean "Introduction and Ch. 1, esp. 2). *Strange's Men* clearly emerges, through their work, as the precursor company to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, as well as a company of high significance in its own right. Focalised through the history of the company and its patronage by Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, the wider history of the Stanleys and their theatrical patronage, is evidenced in their account of the importance of *Strange's Men*. The articles in this issue aim to further extend and deepen knowledge of the theatrical and performance interests of successive Earls of Derby in relation to this, and in the context of the particular Knowsley story.

If scholarly work on the Prescott playhouse and the patronage activities of the early-modern Earls of Derby underpins two strands of performance history that form the basis of the Shakespeare North project, a further three stories are also associated with it. A third strand, alluded to here, is that of Shakespeare himself. Then, since the original Prescott Playhouse, as the details given above might suggest, would not have been an especially interesting space to reconstruct for modern theatrical experiment, it is London's Cockpit-in-Court that the Shakespeare North project is re-creating on the site of Prescott's Elizabethan cockpit, a few hundred metres from the site of the original playhouse, as the commemorative focus of the town's theatrical heritage. The narrative of the Cockpit-in-Court theatre, and the changes in its

use and built fabric, from its initial construction as a cockpit for Henry VIII and Ann Boleyn, then its material and cultural adaptations through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, forms another of Shakespeare North's braided strands or stories.<sup>5</sup>

And the fifth, final, story produced from work in relation to Shakespeare North, is that of the project itself. The nature of research into early north-western theatrical activity, the broader culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lancashire and the town of Prescot, and the theoretical underpinning of the approaches taken, are part of this. But so, too, are the decisions made in relation to the contemporary project to build a theatre in Prescot to commemorate the town's Shakespearean theatre heritage. The modern context of the project, its aims, and the path taken, the difficulties and enablements encountered in the course of bringing the project to fruition, constitutes a story to be told in its own right (see Graham, "Place" for one aspect of this.)

### **The Earls of Derby: a historical summary**

Since this issue is specifically concerned with the theatrical and performance interests of several Earls of Derby, it is perhaps helpful to summarize the biographies and historical roles of these Earls and other significant members of the Stanley dynasty to which they belong, as a general context to the articles contained here. It is the marriage in 1385 of John Stanley, second son of William Storeton, Master Forester of Wirral to Isabel Lathom, eldest daughter of Sir Thomas Lathom, the “richest landowner in south-west Lancashire”, “prominent in the public life of mediaeval Lancashire”, that can perhaps be seen as the moment of dynastic inauguration (Bagley 1). John Stanley—despite early convictions for an attack on Thurstaston Hall in Cheshire (1369) and the murder of his second cousin (1378) for which he was pardoned by Richard II—

operated adroitly through several monarchies. He was knighted by Edward III, won “the acclaim and confidence” of Richard II as a soldier in France and Ireland (Bagley 1), and was given additional estates and titles (including the Forest of Macclesfield and the Isle of Man) by Henry IV (Coward 3-4). These, combined with inheritances coming from a series of unexpected deaths in the Stanley and Lathom families, made him the richest and most influential Stanley landowner. Overall, the successes of his career are usually taken to mark an originating point for the family’s overall rise to prominence (Bagley 1). It was Sir John Stanley who adopted the heraldic devices and mottoes of the Lathom family including the badge or crest of the eagle and child (still used by the Earls of Derby today.)

The next step in the family’s elevation was taken in the life of John Stanley’s grandson, Thomas, who had a significant role as Chamberlain and Comptroller of the Royal Household and who was raised to the peerage, as Baron Stanley, by Henry VI in 1456. A more decisive leap to prominence, however, was famously (or notoriously) achieved by his son, Thomas, 2nd Baron Stanley who had married Eleanor Neville, the Earl of Salisbury’s daughter, for his role in the final major engagement of the Wars of the Roses, the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. The position of Lord Stanley throughout the Wars had been fraught: his hereditary ties were Lancastrian; but through his marriage he was allied with the Yorkist Neville family of the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick, a connection further strengthened through the marriage of his son, George, to Joan, niece of Elizabeth Woodville, queen to the Yorkist Edward IV who, by 1461, had seemed to be victorious. Negotiating different allegiances at different moments during the Wars produced some fluctuations of fortunes for Thomas, Lord Stanley, but allowed his, and his family’s, long-term survival. With characteristic canniness—or lack of principles and “political opportunism,” depending on point-of-view (Coward x, 13)—Lord Stanley (now married to his second wife, Lady

Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond) acted decisively at Bosworth Field where the Yorkist Richard III met the Lancastrian Richmond's challenge. Although Lord Stanley had previously had an alliance with Richard III, supporting him against the earlier rebellion of the Duke of Buckingham on behalf of Henry Tudor, and having been rewarded by the gift of many of Buckingham's estates, he switched his support to Henry Tudor in a battle-changing volte-face. (Cunningham 220-21; c.f. Stanley and MacLean 26). Although it seems (from modern historical accounts, at least) that Lord Stanley himself took no part in the battle, the Stanley troops intervened, at the last moment, in support of Henry Tudor, when he, a military novice, appeared to be in personal danger. It was, of course, in this—particularly bloody—conflict that Richard III was killed. And it was for Stanley support at Bosworth Field, that Lord Thomas Stanley was enobled by Henry Tudor (now Henry VII), becoming 1st Earl of Derby. He was further rewarded with estates across England, which had been confiscated from supporters of the late king Richard, vastly expanding Stanley power and influence across England and parts of Wales (in spite of the execution of his brother, Sir William Stanley, for treason in 1495 as a supporter of the pretender Perkin Warbeck).<sup>6</sup> The 1st Earl, particularly focussed on rebuilding the core Lancashire residences: Lathom House, near Ormskirk, and Knowsley Hall, bordering the town of Prescot. He died in 1504. It is this period of English history, continuing into the reign of Henry VIII, of course, that forms the matter of Shakespeare's history plays; the roles of the Stanleys, as has been frequently remarked, is especially prominent in Shakespeare's accounts.

The 2nd Earl of Derby (grandson of the 1st Earl), another Thomas Stanley was, as J. J. Bagley puts it, "an astute courtier" who "knew how closely Tudor and Stanley fortunes were bound together" (Bagley 29-30). Henry VIII rewarded him for this with further, subsidiary titles, and gifts of lands across southern England and in Derbyshire. In his Lancashire homelands, he

further established Stanley dominance of the region, although he was known "for arbitrary decisions and high-handed treatment of inferiors" (Bagley 34), and flaunting his power in the north west (Coward 21). The 2nd Earl died in 1521, in debt to the Crown, leaving his son, Edward Stanley, to inherit the title and the Stanley estates when he was only eleven years old. The 3rd Earl [Fig. 1] was, consequently, brought up in the family of Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop of York, Lord Chancellor and the most powerful advisor of Henry VIII. During the 3rd Earl of Derby's minority, most of the Stanley estates were in the crown's control; it has been estimated that Henry VIII "may have taken nearly £5,500 from the Stanley estates" (Coward 21). By the end of his life, however, he had largely overcome the financial difficulties produced by this period of his minority and had consolidated both the Stanley estates and the dynasty's power, especially in the north west of England and in Wales. With the same canniness in navigating difficult political alliances displayed by Sir John Stanley and the 1st Earl, Edward Stanley as 3rd Earl negotiated the politico-religious shifts of the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth adroitly. He also kept one of the largest and most illustrious households in England: 150 servants were based in the Lancashire residences; he is said to have fed 60 of the poor every day and 3,000 poor people at Christmas (Raines; Bagley 50). And importantly for the articles contained in this issue, it is the 3rd Earl who is first especially strongly associated with the tradition of maintaining players (of all sorts: minstrels, musicians and stage players) as members of the Stanleys' "Northern Court." This tradition was sustained through the lives of the 4th to 7th Earls (see Manley and MacLean 15 ff.).

**[Intro Fig. 1 here.]**

Fig. 1. Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8-1543). "Edward Stanley, 3rd Earl of Derby (1509-1572) c.1532-43."

Black and coloured chalks, pen and ink, and brush and ink on pale pink prepared paper.

The 4th Earl [Fig. 2] further consolidated Stanley power both at the Elizabethan Royal court (where he was a privy councillor, ambassador and participant in the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots) and in Lancashire and Cheshire. But perhaps the most significant element of his biography in the context of this issue, is his marriage and its consequences. In 1555, in a court ceremony of great splendour, Henry Stanley had married Margaret Clifford, the only daughter of Henry, Earl of Cumberland. This had important dynastic implications. Margaret Clifford's maternal grandparents were Charles Brandon, 1st Duke of Suffolk and Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VII, sister of Henry VIII (and briefly, the third wife of Louis XII of France.) In Henry VIII's will she was named as being eighth in line to the throne. Following the deaths of her mother and her cousins, Lady Mary Grey and Lady Jane Grey, and issues over the legitimacy of the sons of Lady Catherine Grey, she unexpectedly became first in line to the throne, if she outlived Elizabeth I. She did not. But her and Lord Derby's eldest son, Ferdinando, Lord Strange, remained a potential claimant to the throne through her. The sharing of royal bloodlines naturally enhanced further the status of the Stanleys from this point onwards. And the importance of his genealogy to Ferdinando Stanley, 5th Earl of Derby, is clearly suggested by the recently re-discovered heraldic, family-tree panel that is described in Stephen Lloyd's article in this issue (see Lloyd's article here, Fig. 2). But it may, too, have led to his untimely and shocking death in April 1594, six months after he inherited the earldom. Although the cause of his death is still controversial, contemporaries attributed it to poisoning (see Manley and MacLean 322–25; Daugherty *passim*; Jeffcoate *passim*).

**[Intro Fig. 2 here.]**

Fig. 2. *Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby*, by an unknown artist,  
oil on panel, late 16th century. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

The unhappiness of the 4th Earl's marriage to Margaret Clifford had further financial and familial consequences. Margaret, Countess of Derby was known as a reckless spender and her increasing level of debt not only placed a financial burden on the Stanley estates but also contributed to the acrimonious breakdown of the marriage (Coward 31). After this, the 4th Earl of Derby entered into a long-term relationship with a local Knowsley woman, Jane Halsall, with whom he had at least four children whom he acknowledged. Their daughter, Ursula Stanley, married into the Welsh Salusbury family who have links to the Knowsley story both through association with Shakespeare himself and through the performance of the *Twelfth Night Masque*, written by Sir Thomas Salusbury, Ursula's grandson, in 1641/2. The masque and the Salusbury family are discussed by Rebecca Bailey in her article here. And the 4th Earl's and Jane Halsall's son, Henry Stanley, also has a general connection to the Prescott playhouse story: he replaced Percival Harrington as Deputy Steward of Prescott in 1605 (Bailey 74), providing links between townspeople's activities and neighbouring Knowsley Hall in the period of the playhouse's functioning (Raines 76 for his presence in his father's household; Trans. Lancashire Cheshire Antiq. Soc. 31 for presence in neighbouring towns). The 4th Earl of Derby, as his clear affection for his children (legitimate and illegitimate) might suggest, had a reputation for affability, and perhaps irresolution. On the occasion of his embassy to Paris to invest Henri III with the Order of the Garter, on behalf of Elizabeth I (discussed in Elspeth Graham's article), it was reported that "my lord of Derby, for though he is so good a natured man that he will be ruled, he is too good a natured man; for...every one of his men can over-rule that which anybody hath done with him" (Sir Edward Stafford, permanent English ambassador in Paris, to Walsingham, cited Flynn 160).

His conviviality also manifested itself in his maintenance of a household that equalled that of the 3rd Earl's in size, comprising 149 members in 1590 and, in the words of Dennis Flynn, "a Court second in size and splendour only to the Queen's" (Flynn 172). He was also the patron of a troupe of players, Derby's Men, from at least 1563, as well as of minstrels, poets and other performers (see Manley and MacLean 17-20). It is the relationship of the 4th Earl with neighbouring gentry and the hospitality, including performances, offered at his "Northern Court" that informs William Shannon's article in this issue.

The 5th and 6th Earls of Derby [Figs. 3 and 4] sustained this family tradition of patronage even more enthusiastically. The role of Ferdinando Stanley, particularly as Lord Strange (the title given to the eldest son of the Earls) as a theatrical patron is, with hindsight, the most illustrious of all the family's. The association of Strange's Men with Shakespeare, their performances at the Rose and their overall importance to performance history gives the 5th Earl of Derby a prominent place in any account of early modern theatre. But the activities of his younger brother, William Stanley, who unexpectedly became 6th Earl after Ferdinando's premature death, is differently important, as Edel Lamb's and Sally-Beth MacLean's articles demonstrate. The 6th Earl's succession was fraught, however. As Barry Coward describes it:

...the descent of the earldom to Ferdinando's brother, William, as collateral male heir was undisputed; but the new earl's title to the Stanley estates was contested by the heirs general, Ferdinando's daughters...and their formidable mother, Countess Dowager Alice (Coward 41).

The protracted "Great Lawsuit" was costly, generated intense animosity between William and Alice, daughter of Sir John Spencer (also claimed as a kinswoman by Edmund Spenser), and produced a split between the household servants who had been named as trustees of the Stanley

estates in the 4th Earl's will. William Farington, comptroller of the 4th Earl's household—and an important figure for theatre historians, as he authored the *Derby Household Books*, a main source of information about performances in the Lancashire residences—sided with Alice (see Shannon's article in this issue and his Fig. 1). Michael Doughty, who entered tangentially into the Prescott playhouse story, sided with William. As well as the financial effects of the dispute, and the complex administrative and legal demands it produced, the antagonism between Alice, as Dowager Countess, and William as 6th Earl of Derby, led to the emergence of two separate channels of Stanley cultural patronage. William's theatrical involvements are discussed in essays here. Alice, mentioned in Julian Bowsher's essay, went on, more broadly, to acquire "a formidable reputation as a patron of poets and writers, including Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene, John Marston and John Harington. Milton wrote *Arcades* for her, and *A Masque at Ludlow Castle* for her stepson and son-in-law, the Earl of Bridgewater." (Hadfield 20).

**[Intro Fig. 3 here]**

Fig. 3. *Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange and 5th Earl of Derby (c.1559-94)*, by an unknown artist. c.1590-94, oil on canvas. Reproduced by kind permission of the Rt Hon. the Earl of Derby, 2020.

**[Intro Fig. 4 here.]**

Fig. 4. *William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby (1561-1642)*, by a follower of Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (c.1561/2-c.1635/6), c.1601, oil on canvas. Reproduced by kind permission of the Rt Hon. the Earl of Derby, 2020.

Both Alice, Dowager Countess of Derby, and William Stanley's wife, Elizabeth de Vere, disparaged the 6th Earl, suggesting eccentricity and perhaps incompetence. He proved, however,

to be an able administrator, stabilising the family's fortunes. But once his son, James, Lord Strange, reached his majority, the 6th Earl handed over many of his political and administrative duties to him, semi-retired to his residence in Bidston, just outside Chester, and died in 1642. James Stanley, the 7th Earl [see Bailey in this issue, Fig. 1], in turn, sustained the theatrical interests of the dynasty, hosting performances both in Lancashire (as Rebecca Bailey's article here shows) and the Isle of Man, over which the Earls had lordship. The wider history of England in the 1640s, and the changes brought about by the Civil Wars, necessarily limited any full participation in theatrical patronage in the manner of his predecessors. And, indeed, the Civil Wars brought greater misfortunes to the Stanleys. Lathom House, vigorously and famously defended by the 7th Earl's wife, Charlotte de la Trémoille, was twice held under Parliamentary siege (from February to late May 1644; then in a second siege, a year later, from July to December 1645) and finally destroyed. The 7th Earl, himself, known in the family to this day, as the "Martyr Earl," was executed as a royalist in Bolton in 1651. Nevertheless, in spite of the disasters of the Civil Wars, as this biographical outline suggests, members of the Stanley dynasty, from its origins to 1651, were both prominent figures in successive Royal courts, on the one hand, and firmly established as the great magnates of north west England, on the other. Their lives connect the national, sometimes the international, and the regional in different ways at different moments; each of them enacted—culturally as well as politically—a particular relationship between metropolitan and regional concerns (see Wilson *Worldly* for a subtle analysis of Shakespeare, internationalism, the world and the worldly). And it is those articulations of the national and the north west region that is the particular concern of this issue.

### **This Issue: Methods, Concepts and the Articles**

Richard Dutton has written critically of a past, scholarly "assumption that London was the natural goal for anyone in the theatre business and that touring was always a second-best option, the recourse of those denied a base in the capital or driven away by plague" (Dutton 75). Barbara Palmer makes the same point even more robustly: "Myopically focused on London and the London playhouses, the outdated picture [of theater history] paints the professional troupe driven out of London by plague and political disfavor" (Palmer 259). Suzanne Westfall, in more positive terms, however, points to a growing body of work on non-metropolitan theater history:

early modern theater history has been enjoying a healthy turmoil during the last fifty years, with scholars offering various and divergent narratives to explain the mounting piles of primary source documents emerging from local record offices and family archives. Nowhere is this revisionism more evident than in patronage studies, particularly when those patrons are not royal households but rather members of the nobility and landed gentry whose seats are in the provinces far from London (Westfall 263).

In taking members of the Lancashire-based Stanley dynasty as focalizers of early-modern performance history, this issue responds, and aims to contribute further, to such calls for recognition of regionality. It reverses the older, London-based outlook: by taking Knowsley and Prescott as a viewpoint and looking outwards from north-west England towards other regions, London, and beyond, it adds to work offering new perspectives on the place(s) of theatre in the early-modern period. Lancashire, as it were, writes back to the metropolis here. Locatedness, consequently, is implicitly or explicitly addressed in all of the articles, as—perhaps more importantly—are issues concerning the relationship *between* the metropolitan, the national and the

regional. The idea of place and place-based identities (addressed directly by Rebecca Bailey, Elspeth Graham and William Shannon in their essays; implied in others) is, as Robert W. Barrett has suggested in relation to Cheshire, inevitably dialogic (Barrett "Introduction", esp. 17). Although the conventional theater-historical adjective, "provincial," is used in some of the articles here, the conscious use of the word "regional" in this Introduction serves to highlight the politico-historical implications of such terminology. The long process of establishment of England as a nation state, with London as its metropolitan center, begins in, and is developed through, the period covered here. It is that same process that produces the collateral concept of the provinces. In the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, however, the idea of non-metropolitan subordination to London was unevenly recognised; the notion of the provincial can be more fully recognised in the eighteenth century.

The period of development in performance history that is covered in this issue is, perhaps, most fruitfully described as one of multiple transitions: political, religious, economic and cultural. Most importantly, in specific relation to dominant performance forms, the late sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries establish what would become our modern concepts and demarcations. Louis Montrose usefully summarized this in relation to dramatic performance when he wrote,

The professional drama of Shakespeare's London had its roots in the late medieval civic religious drama...and in the hodge-podge of popular entertainments—juggling and clowning, singing and miming, dancing and fencing, cockfighting and bearbaiting – from which it was still in the process of separating itself...(Montrose 19).

In the sixteenth century, drama remains, at least partially, enmeshed with its neighbouring forms. More recently, Andreas Höfele has, in the specific context of the physical proximity of play

houses and bear-baiting arenas, demonstrated how "Play-acting and bear-baiting were joined in active collusion," producing "a vital spillover (semantic, but also performative, emotive, visceral) from the bear-garden [into the playhouse]" (Höfele 3). Residual aspects of an entanglement of forms, and the experience of them, this suggests, endure well into the seventeenth century. The single, polysemantic term *jig*, instances this further:

[p]opular music and balladry, the crude combats of mummers' plays, the semi-dramatised antics of a subversive fool, and the leaping and vigorous stepping of morris-men, fed into the robustly physical gestures and comic business that were part and parcel of the playhouses of Tudor and Stuart London (Clegg and Skeaping 1).

A corresponding web of later-separated play forms similarly characterises performances in the early modern period's royal and regional courts, just as musical performance—the playing of minstrels and waits, the development of polyphony, and the use of different instruments—changes slowly and unevenly across the period, in different regions. Our own prevailing understanding of theatrical drama; differentiated popular and elite musical forms; circus; and dance as distinct performance arts are inherited from the separations between these that are occurring across the long early-modern period. Seen synchronically, from the perspective of the period itself, this process of separate development of drama and other forms was not yet complete. Overlap of, and interaction between, now-separated forms often characterises the performance events discussed in the articles here.

If, then, this issue is characterised by interest in formal intersections and geo-political dialogism, it is also concerned with methodological inter-relationship. The collection contains both interdisciplinary approaches in some individual articles (again, Bailey's and Graham's) and, overall, a multi-disciplinary variety of approaches that, read together, form an interdisciplinary

conversation. Several varieties of history, with their respective methodologies, are represented. Stephen Lloyd's article, shaped by his background in art history and curatorial studies, focuses on the estates and residences of the Earls of Derby as the earls' identity-marking locations in the past, along with the artefacts kept within them that represent and memorialize their dynastic history. Deborah Cavendish, who died in 2014 as Dowager Duchess of Devonshire, speaking of another historic, noble residence, Chatsworth House, wrote, "The house looks permanent; as permanent as if it had been there, not for a few hundred years, but forever. It fits its landscape exactly" (Cavendish 15). These words, and the title of her biography of Chatsworth, *The House*, precisely suggest how historic noble residences serve as metonyms of their owners, embodying splendour, long dynastic continuity, and naturalized situation in landscape and place as components of noble identity. The pastoral poems of the seventeenth century (Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" or Æmelia Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham", for instance) provide a further layer of inscription of aristocratic identities and values into aristocratic estates and residences. Such understandings form a backdrop to Lloyd's article, then, as it inserts present findings from recent archival and conservation research at Knowsley Hall into a broader account of Knowsley, Lathom, the Earls of Derby and the theater patronage that forms a cherished aspect of Stanley history.

Sally-Beth Maclean's article embodies a pure form of archival theater-history. From her extensive knowledge of, and research into, local and national archives, she produces (for the first time) an account and map of the touring routes and performance spaces used by the 6th Earl's Company, Derby's Men. Considerably more attention has been paid to the King's Men and other royal troupes based in the London theatres after James I ascended the throne, when the best of the companies were adopted by royal patrons: the Lord Chamberlain's became the King's Men

and Queen Anne took on patronage of Worcester's Men. MacLean's article, by tracing the itineraries of Derby's Men both in the south of England before 1610, and after their change in focus to northern routes from 1610 until 1637, and in considering the range of venues in which they performed, redresses scholarly inattention to this company, adding further texture to our understanding of early-modern theatrical activity in different regions of England.

Julian Bowsher's article similarly addresses places of performance. But his focus is broader: he investigates and describes the numerous venues available to the various playing companies under the patronage of successive Earls of Derby. Using the twin methodologies of archaeology ("desk-top study" and science-based excavation), he is equally concerned with the sources of our knowledge of these venues. His article, in bringing together archival and empirical evidence for these various Derby-linked playing venues, raises questions about evaluation of the nature of the acting companies—and even their plays—in the context of these diverse venues.

A further form of archival research is embodied in William Shannon's contribution. His central concern is the constitution of an audience for performances in the "Northern Court" of the 4th Earl of Derby. He introduces the importance of attention to what may appear to be a purely administrative, late-sixteenth-century document, that has been recently recovered, into thought about the nature of spectatorship of local performances. This article, then, instances a further dimension of interdisciplinarity: the bringing into dialogue of historical research into different roles occupied by the Earls of Derby, as performance patrons owing hospitality to their regional affinity and as important local and national administrators, responsible for relating regional to national governance. These, he suggests, are inseparable aspects of sixteenth-century regional life.

Shannon's essay can be read alongside Elspeth Graham's essay which shares some concerns but situates issues of the multi-faceted nature of aristocratic life, and the culture associated with it, in a broader context. She considers the place of performance itself in relation to the performative nature of elite identities in the period and the dynamics of patronage. The idea of "entertainment" that emerges from both her and Shannon's articles reminds us that this word, commonly used in descriptions of early modern performance, does not necessarily carry the connotations of leisure that it has in a post-industrial world. Entertainment, in the early-modern context, has a crucial functional role. If power inheres in inter-personal and inter-rank structures, entertainment is one form—a key form—in which the "inter" of those relationships is enacted. In courts, performance occurs as part of the fabric of relationship in which monarchical and rank-based power and responsibility is clothed. If entertainment occasions pleasure, it binds the amusement and interests of monarchs or lords to those of their courtly subjects. It is structurally important: a serious matter in this sense. Its seriousness may also be evident in its content: in its thematic explorations of issues of power, cultural values, occasion, and history.

Rebecca Bailey's article, focused on a mid-seventeenth century masque performed at Knowsley Hall on the brink of civil war, reveals how political conflicts, kinship, household and regional affinities come together in a quite particular instance of the use of the masque form. Her article depends on the absorption of cultural-geographical thought and methods into a literary and performance-history analysis. Through looking at material details of the manuscript copy of the masque, and by addressing the historical context of the 1640s and Stanley-Salusbury kinship networks, this article exemplifies the inter-relational aspects of the Stanleys' theatrical concerns in a particularly tense moment.

Just as Bailey's article is concerned with a single text, so Edel Lamb's article considers a particular company, the Children of Paul's, and the role of William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby as its patron. Reference to Stanley's support for the "playes of the children in Pawles to his great paines and charge" has been interpreted by some scholars as crucial to the revival of this company as a commercial entity in 1599 (cited in Wickham et al. 313). From a general scrutiny of the practices of managing, financing and writing for a children's playing company, this article moves on to re-evaluate this key moment in the history of early modern children's performance. It asks what the Earl's relationship to the company might have been via an evaluation of the necessity of such support for Paul's revival and of the benefits of such patronage to the 6th Earl. The article, then, brings together literary and performance history as focused through the specifics of children's performance.

The issue is organised so that the more general, transhistorical articles precede predominantly single-focussed contributions which are then arranged chronologically. Several of the articles were first given as papers at a symposium and re-enactment/performance event, organized by Elspeth Graham and Stephen Lloyd and hosted by the Earl and Countess of Derby, that was held at Knowsley Hall on 18th and 19th October 2016. The symposium, "Shakespeare, the Earls of Derby and the North West," brought together a group of international scholars interested in questions about early-modern drama in north west England. On the evening before the symposium itself, Lady Derby hosted a banquet which also included a re-enactment, directed by Kathy Dacre, of the Salusbury masque, first (and last) performed at Knowsley Hall in 1641/2 (as described in Bailey's article) and the musical and dance performance, for the first time since 1600, of a pavane composed by the 6th Earl of Derby, and transposed and played for the occasion by the early-music scholar, Jim Wrightson. I should like to thank all those who

contributed to the occasion and all those who attended, and particularly to acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the Countess of Derby who first conceived of the occasion, and both the Earl and Countess of Derby for their generosity, enthusiasm and—in keeping with their family tradition—patronage of the event.

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### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> An eighteenth-century evaluation by King's College of the Prescot estates referred to an annual rent of £55 6s 8d, plus 40 quarters of wheat, 53 quarters of malt, valued at £80, plus £53, and 12 oxen valued at £29, although the College insisted that if the oxen were delivered in lieu of money, the College was to allow £1 11s 8d for each ox delivered (KKC PRE/97). Thanks to Patricia McGuire, King's College Archivist, for discussion of this information.
- <sup>2</sup> LA: DDCs Court Rolls [parchment] 1615 single mb 16th June; LA: DDCs Court Rolls [paper] 1609, sheet 1d [16 Jun]; see also REED. *Lancashire* 80.
- <sup>3</sup> Bailey, and following him, George, situate the playhouse on the town's moss. This appears to have arisen from a confusion between the town's waste ground and its moss. Very specific reference in the Court Rolls to Churchley Field Gate, and identification of this field and the town waste on later maps, indicate the location given here.
- <sup>4</sup> George's 2003 article "The Playhouse at Prescot and the 1592-94 Plague" places its construction in 1593; in the earlier REED. *Lancashire*, however, he dated the construction of the playhouse to a slightly later period: between 1595 and 1603 which coincides with dates suggested here.

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- <sup>5</sup> The overall designs for, and the architectural conceptualisation of, Shakespeare North were produced by the project's Design Architect, Nicholas Helm of Helm Architecture. He has worked in collaboration with Peter McCurdy (builder of Shakespeare's Globe and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse) who is building the replica Cockpit-in-Court for Shakespeare North. Helm's forthcoming two volume monograph, *The Whitehall Cockpit 1532-1674: A "New Old" Shakespearean Theatre in the North*, which traces the fluid history of the theatre, and analyses the concept of a historical replica, is in the process of being finalised. He has also collaborated with the architects Austin-Smith: Lord as the design implementers.
- <sup>6</sup> Perkin Warbeck claimed to be Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, the second son of Edward IV and one of the "Princes in the Tower" (commonly believed to have been murdered by Richard III) and therefore, assuming his older brother was dead, the rightful monarch.
- <sup>7</sup> Hans Holbein the Younger became prominent in England from 1532 when he was under the patronage of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell. By 1535, he was King's Painter to Henry VIII. The provenance of this drawing indicates both Holbein's and Henry Stanley's status at court: "Henry VIII; Edward VI, 1547; Henry FitzAlan, 12th Earl of Arundel; by whom bequeathed to John, Lord Lumley, 1580; by whom probably bequeathed to Henry, Prince of Wales, 1609, and thus inherited by Prince Charles (later Charles I), 1612; by whom exchanged with Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke, 1627/8; by whom given to Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel; acquired by Charles II by 1675" (The Royal Collection website,

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<https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/912243/edward-stanley-3rd-earl-of-derby-1509-1572> ).

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