

[Essays in Medieval Studies 4](#)

[Page numbers of the printed text appear at the right in bold.]

page 119

Sounds and Sweet Airs: City Waits of Medieval and Renaissance England

Cheryl Glenn Seitz

Ohio State University

The isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight ...
The Tempest III, ii, 146

At the close of the seventeenth century, as the public conscience reacted to the excesses of the Restoration, and moral reform grew fashionable, tavern keeper Ned Ward published *The London Spy*, a Hudibrastic sketch of London life. On his way home from a long evening of carousing, the humorous and satirical Ward and his companion meet a group of nocturnal musicians:

We heard a noise so dreadful and surprising that we thought the devil was riding on hunting thro' the City, with a pack of deep-mouth'd hellhounds.... At last bolted out from the corner of a street ... a parcel of strange hobgoblins.... Of a sudden they clap'd [their instruments] to their mouths and made such a frightful yelling that I thought the world had been dissolving and the terrible sound of the last trumpet to be within an inch of my ears.

Under these amazing apprehensions I ask'd my friend what was the meaning of this infernal outcry? "Prithee," says he, "... Why, these are the city waits, who play every winter's night thro' the streets to rouse each lazy drone to family duty! ... These are the topping tooters of the town, and have gowns, silver chains, and salaries, for playing *Lilliburlero* to my Lord Mayor's horse thro' the city." (Ward 25-26)

page 120

A curious reader of Ward's text who wishes to find out more about these revelers will be hard pressed, for the waits are hardly mentioned in medieval and Renaissance scholarship. And a trip to the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals a wide variety of definitions for wait: a watchman, a wind instrumentalist, and the wind instrument itself. In the past forty years, only a handful of articles on wait musicians has been published.¹ Recently, however, scholars working on the *Records of Early English Drama (REED)* have made accessible to us the city records of medieval and Renaissance English towns. These painstakingly collated and edited records provide us with the raw data necessary for accurate-reconstructing the pattern of waits lives and for taking a fresh look at these musicians, not only as individual representatives responsible to a particular community, but as a professional group of multitalented musicians who shared a larger civic and social tradition.²

All surviving guild, civic, and church records (1450-1675) contain numerous and intriguing references to the waits: as municipal employees, the city waits guaranteed that music, and often drama, would be a part of every civic and ceremonial occasion. The evidence of the earliest accounts, suggests that the history of these professional musicians can be traced back to the watchmen of castles and walled towns who, during hours of darkness when nobody else was allowed abroad, patrolled the streets or stood guard in the watch towers, prepared to defend the townsfolk from fires, from prowlers, or from surprise attacks. One of the first references to waits occurs in the *Liber Niger Domus Regis Angliae*, a 1483 account of the household establishment of Edward IV (1461-1483), which contains instructions to a typical wait in a nobleman's castle:³

A WAYTE, that ny3tly, from Mighelmasse til Shere Thursday, pipeth the wache within this court iiij tymes, and in the somer ny3ghtes ... iij tymes; and he is to make bon gayte,⁴ and euery

page 121

chambre dore and office, as well for fyre as for other pikers or perelliz. (Myers 132)

: Although their history can be traced back to the watchmen, the later waits were not considered efficient in protecting the citizens from night marauders. Scholars concur that the position of wait soon evolved from watchman with a noisemaker to that of a versatile, highly skilled musician. Walter Woodfill's convincing argument sheds more light on the subject: by the sixteenth century, the primary duty of a wait was to entertain, even while he kept his so-called watch. In *Musicians in English Society*, Woodfill contends:

the constabulary ... must have done far more to keep order than the musicians, whose playing must have warned housebreakers and brawlers of their approach. The waits, instead of weapons, carried valuable instruments and insignia easily lost, damaged, or even stolen in a scuffle. (45-46)

Musicianship, then, not strength or agility, was the principal quality required of a candidate for a city wait, at least from about 1550 on, when the position of wait was fully defined and firmly established.

Since no history of the waits based on a full study of the available sources had been published,⁵ and since civic records are not "complete," we cannot yet establish when these musical retainers were first appointed by civic authorities. We can, however, establish the "first mention" in each locale. The Coventry records contain the earliest record of payments to town waits together with a reference to earlier unrecorded transactions:

Leet Book I

6 October 1423:

... thei haue retained Mathew Ellerton Thomas Sendell William howton & Iohn Trumpere Mynstrells as for the Cite of Couentre and þat

page 122

þei haue as oþer haue Afore them Allso þat thai aue of euery hall place j d & of euery Cottage ob. euery quarter & after þer beryng better to be rewardyd And also þai orden þat thei shall haue ij men of euery ward euery quarter to help them gathur þer Quarterage. (*REED Coventry* 8)

It seems that, like other waits before them, Sendell, Howton, and Trumpere had a standard license to collect a tax for their salary; there was as yet no direct town subsidy for their support.

In Nottingham, waits appear in the earliest surviving Chamberlains' Accounts in 1461,⁶ shortly before the waits of London and of York become prominent in the civic records of their towns.⁷ In the Chamberlains' Account Book of Newcastle Upon Tyne, a 1503 transaction refers to "the wattes in party payment off ther ffee" (*REED Newcastle* 12). In 1524, the Leicester Chamberlains' Accounts detail provisions for the waits' liveries (Brydson 143); soon afterwards, the records of Newark⁸ and of Norwich (*REED Norwich* 3) also refer to waits. In the 1540 accounts of Chester,⁹ the waits are ordered "to serue and sappleie their facultie with diligent attendaunce in goode order for the worship and pleasure of the Citie..." (*REED Chester* 43). Thus by the turn of the sixteenth century, the waits had established themselves as an essential musical institution.

Following in the tradition of the earlier, roving night watchmen, the waits retained the ritual--but not the original protective--function of a musical procession about the streets of town as one of their primary duties. That the typical orders of waits speak of playing morning and evening but say nothing of "the dead time of night" or of "night walkers and robberies" (Woodfill 76) indicates that, for the waits, these watches had lost all of their original protective function:

Mayors List 5

April-November 1540:

page 123

... wherby it is ordeyned that form hensforth euery sonday monday tuysday thursday and saturday the said waits shall

goo About and play in the evenyng in such circuite placys and Owres as hath beyn accustomed in tymes past / And every monday thursday & saturday in the mornynge they shall goo and play in lyke maner / And this rule and ordre to be kept contynually herafter except that special sickenes or extreme weddur lett them or ellz that Appon some other their resonable sute to be moved vnto the Mair....[10](#)

Apparently, the waits were to play at hours that were neither disturbing to the townsfolk nor inconvenient for themselves--and at times when their fingers were not numb with cold. "In other words," writes Woodfill, "not during the hours when watchmen are most needed" (77).

Like the records of other towns, the Norwich records indicate that, as an institution, the waits were primarily musical and useful in providing musical services for their townsfolk:

Mayors' Court Books VI

3 May 1553:

This daye It is Agreed by this house that the waytes of the cittie shall haue libertye and lycens every Sondaye at nighte and other holly dayes at nighte bytwixte this and Michaelmas nexte comyng to come to the gyldehall And vpon the nether leades of the same hall nexte the counsaill house shall betwixte the howres of vii & viij of the clok at nighte blowe & playe vpon their Instrumentes the space of haulf and hower to the Reyoyng and comfote of the herers thereof. (*REED Norwich* 33)

The London waits, too, were expected to give a regular series of evening concerts. In 1571, the court of aldermen ordered the waits "to play upon their instruments... every Sunday and holiday towards the evening (Woodfill 50). According to the records of

page 124

several towns, however, these musical recitals fell into remission during the dangerous fever of the plague (ca.1600), but they reappeared, only to die out from the even more deadly fever of puritanism in 1629. These Sunday evening offerings were vulnerable for two other reasons: their purpose was merely and solely entertainment, and the records indicate that the waits received the same annual base salary, regardless of their concert playing.

In addition to marching and playing, the waits soon assumed the duties of all-round corporate musicians, glorifying the city and entertaining the townsfolk whenever and wherever music was desired. For example, during the elaborate annual ceremonies inaugurating the Lord Mayor, the waits--especially in London and Norwich--were on center stage.[11](#) What is especially interesting in the civic records of both towns are the implicit references to the theatrical performances of the waits on this civic holiday filled with music, dancing, and pageantry. The waits followed a cavalcade of music makers, standard bearers, masqueraders, sword bearers, the Sheriff, and the Lord Mayor. They played music and sang, performed interludes and created a *tableau vivant*, indicating that they were singers, actors, and instrumentalists of more than ordinary ability.[12](#)

Perhaps the most intoxicating of their public duties was welcoming and entertaining distinguished, often royal, visitors. In Coventry's Leet Book I of 1474, note was made of the fanfare "with mynstrallcy of the Waytes of the Cite" to welcome Prince Edward (*REED Coventry* 53). English chronicler Raphael Holinshed recorded the visit of Queen Elizabeth to Norwich in 1578: "Hir maiestie drew neere the gates of the citie called St. Stephan's gates... [wnere] the waites of the citie were placed with lowd musicke, who cheerfullie and melodiouslie welcomed hir maiestie into the citie" (Langwill 174). After Elizabeth's death, the York magistrates made elaborate preparations to welcome King James, and it was the waits who suffused the occasion with energetic entertainment--both dramatic and musical:

page 125

House Books

11 April 1603:

Also it is agreed that the waits shall play at Micklithbarr at the receiveing of tile kinges maiestie to this cittye, and after they shall have done ther then ... to go over the Water at lendinge & thorowe the mintgarth to Bartholomew Applebyes house and so to Bowthome barr, and that ther shalbe a scafeild maide within Barr for them to stand and playe on.

(*REED York 507*)

The York waits, then, were to greet their king at Micklithbarr, disband, and race across their relatively small town, ahead of the king's procession, to welcome him once again.

These municipal musicians were called upon to provide public spectacle and ceremony at other times of celebration as well: Christmas, Coronation Day, Annunciation Day, Guild Day, Perambulation Day, Thanksgiving, Michaelmas, Defeat of the Spanish Fleet Day. Throughout their history, the waits entertained on the saints' days as well, depending on the number of days a Catholic or an Anglican England would feel compelled to honor. For such outdoor performances, the waits used woodwind and brass instruments supplied by their city, robust instruments such as trumpets, sackbutts, hautbois, recorders, cornets, and drums. Since there was hardly a sport or festival that did not have music as part of it, the waits had no trouble finding outside employment as they met many other musical demands. The well-to-do could afford the honor of the waits' entertainment; that each "appearance" was profitable to the waits should not be overlooked. They were talented, motivated, and busy. They seemed to be everywhere, performing at social and religious events. Found in all the available guild, civic, and church records are entries of payments to the waits for their "pains" on such festival days as St. George's Day, Midsummer, and St. Peter's Night.¹³

page 126

Besides their civic musical duties, the waits appeared--with the blessing of the civic authorities--at weddings, at funerals, and at private parties. For the amusement of private patrons, the waits often played "indoor" instruments--viols, violins, virginals, lutes, citherns, harps, flutes--that they provided for themselves. In *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, W. Chappell tells us that on a wedding day, the duties of the waits included awaking the bride with "bon gayte," entertaining her to and from church, furnishing music at the wedding dinner, and providing for singing, dancing, and merrymaking throughout the evening. Even at funerals musicians were in request; the waits sang dirges and played their reedy, soulful recorders as a solace for grief.¹⁴ The *REED* documents provide us with further instances of the waits' involvement in private entertainment:

Cordwainers and Shoemakers' Records

11 November [1572]:

Item payde vnto the menstreles at Rawfie hylltons drynkynge xii d. (*REED Chester 94*)

Coopers' Records

20 November [1573]:

Item spende on the Menstrelles at Iohn Ioanson maryge iiij d. (*REED Chester 99*)

In short, the waits were the woof of the town's fabric, crossing at right angles the warp of daily, weekly, and seasonal activities and, thereby, creating a pleasing pattern of life.

And just as they did for all these public and private occasions, it was these professional corporation musicians--not the church musicians--who supplied most of the music required in the civic-religious dramatic activity and festivity.¹⁵ At York, Chester, Norwich, and other cities where civic religious drama was performed, waits supplied the essential music for the cycle plays. At York, for example, most references to dramatic minstrelsy are

page 127

to the performances of the city waits on Corpus Christi Day; at Chester, waits performed on Corpus Christi Day and in the Whitsun Plays:

E Memorandum Book

28 November 1578:

Fynallie it is further ordeyned and by the consent of all the good men of the said art of Sciens fullie agreed that the said fellowship of minstrells of ther proper cherges shall yearelie frome hensforth when the play shalbe played bringe furth and cawese to be plaid the pagiant of corpus christi.... (*REED York* 388-89)

Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers' Records

18 October 1572:

for Whissone playes.... Item payde to the mynstryles ij s. (*REED Chester* 91-92)

According to the Mayor's Court Book, the waits of Norwich in 1576 appeared before the Mayor's court and

Craved that they myght haue leve to playe commodies ... and [act] vupn Interlutes souch other ... places and tragedies which shall seine to them mete, which Peticion by the hole concent of this courte is graunted to them so farre as they do not play in the tyme of devine service and Sermones. (*REED Norwich* 57)

In addition, the House Book of York indicates that the waits were granted permission in 1561 to "yerely bryng forth the pageant of herod Inquiryng of the iii kynges for the child Iesu" (*REED York*).

All references to waits indicate that they led extremely busy lives. There are even instances of waits who combined music with other trades, as innkeepers, water-bailiffs, tailors, weavers, blade-smiths, and barbers. But those instances are not so common; most managed to support themselves well by music alone. They would not have--could not have--

page 128

spent a major span of their life working as civil servants if they had not been able to so support themselves.

Because the waits were such an integral part of community life, most towns found some means to ensure theirs with a guaranteed yearly income. In their heyday, the waits of Norwich were paid--out of city coffers--twenty-five pounds a year in fees and were rewarded extra for their "pains" on a minimum of seven public holidays. Other towns, such as Leicester, Coventry, and Newark, taxed their residents: "It is agreed that every Inhabitant or housekeeper in Leicester (being of reasonable ability) shall be taxed ... what they shall quarterly give to the waytes towards the amending of their living" (Bridgde 80). Nottingham, however, initiated a more complex, prorated assessment: Coldewey writes that in 1565 "the rate for the Mayor and Aldermen was 4s apiece; for the coroners and sheriffs, 3s; for members of the Council, 2s 6d" (43); and so on, down to the commoners, who were urged to make free-will donations. In reality, the waits were able to "farm the fee," taking a lump-sum payment from someone who was willing to collect the tax in exchange for the profit off the difference.

In early medieval England, serving on the "watch" was traditionally a regular civic duty: it was "customary to select the citizenry by rows of houses according to a roster kept by a city official."¹⁶ By tradition, then, the watch continued, although the music of the waits surely preceded them In their turn around the town. Still, those citizens were willing to "donate" taxes towards the waits' salaries, for the waits were keeping "watch" in the citizens' stead.

As part of their contract with the city, town waits were provided distinctive liveries,¹⁷ costly badges, and valuable "outdoor" instruments. The liveries, supplied semiannually, biennially, or annually, appear to have been "for keeps," but the badges, collars, and chains were loaned to the waits on bond only for the term of their contract, as were

page 129

their instruments. In fact, in many towns, these expensive silver adornments and the town's musical instruments were accounted for annually in the city's inventory of goods. Their "chains" were usually escutcheons, or large metal badges enameled with the town device, and chains or "collars" with which to hang them.¹⁸ The few examples of this regalia in existence were rescued from the fires of the Municipal Corporations Act, which swept through England in 1835.¹⁹

Kindling for the flames of radical reform, many of these badges were auctioned off as outdated symbols of papist pageantry.²⁰ Probably the most apparent of the waits' fringe benefits was their protected status. By wearing the livery of a town--a clear mark of distinction, achievement, and pre-ferment--the waits were ensured good welcome and higher rewards wherever they traveled, so long as they behaved in a respectable and honest manner. And travel they did. Those waits who had leave to journey often went "on tour" in search of or to fulfill other job opportunities. On the occasion that a nobleman, a gentleman, or a town official summoned the waits of another town, home-town officials could hardly forbid their waits to absent themselves. In the 1622 records of Coventry, for instance, are entries of payments to no fewer than five groups of waits who had been invited to "play."²¹

In 1589, the five waits of Norwich, considered by some scholars to have been unparalleled in all the realm, achieved unique distinction when they were invited to accompany Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Norris on what would be the ill-fated voyage to Lisbon.²² As Alfred Noyes would write, Drake invited them "not from vanity, / But knowing how the pulse of men beats high / To music; and the hearts of men like these / Were open to the high romance of earth" (267). Drake's letter of request to the corporation of Norwich has been missing from the Corporation Archives for many years, but the proud and generous civic reply can be found in the *REED* documents:

page 130

Mayors' Court Books XII

This day [it is agreed] was redd in the court A letter sent to mr Maior and his brethren from Sir ffrauncys Drake wherby he desyreth that the waytes of this Citie may bee sent to hym to go the new intendid voyage the waytes beeyng here called doo all [therto] assent whervpon it is agreed that they shall haue vj cloakes of Stamell cloath made them redy before they go And that A wagon shalbe provided to carry them and their instruments And that they shall haue iiij li. to buye them [certeyn] "Three" new howboyes "& one treble Recorder" and x li. to beare their chardgys And that the citie shall hyer the wagon and paye for it Also that the Chamberleyn shall paye Peter Spratt x s for A [Sackbutt] Saquebutt Case And the waytes to delyuer to the Chamber-leyn before they go the Cities cheanes/ (*REED Norwich* 93)

The waits thus can be seen to have held an elevated and enviable position in medieval and Renaissance society. Besides a cash income, a livery, and prestige, a wait enjoyed divers fringe benefits, not the least of which was a pension for his dependents and for himself. For example, Widow Spratt of Norwich drew a pension until her death some thirty years after her husband had died "in chains":

Assembly Minute Books V

15 January 1610:

whereas there was hertofore grauted to Peter Spratt an annuttie of iiij li. payeable quarterly by even porcions to the said Peter And whereas the said Peter dyed of late a little before the ende of a quarter fully expired. It is agreed neuertheles that his wiffe shall enjoye & be paid xx s for the said quarter/²³

The *REED* records of Norwich, Newcastle, and York indicate that waits who could no longer work drew

page 131

old-age pensions; waits who were "lyinge sick" took sick leave:

House Books

4 October 1468:

Assembled acceptid and admittid ... Robert sheyne being in so grete age and soo decrepid that he may no further attend toccupacion of waite ... In consideracion of wheof and of the long continued seruice that he haithe done in ... the space if .xl. yeres and more It is determind that the saide Robert Sheyne yerely during his life ... shalhaue in name of a pension ... thertene shelinges and ... four penys tobe payde wharterly without deley.... (*REED York* 143)

The York entry above also accounts for Robert Sheyne's housing benefits: "Robert Sheyne shuld haue in his reliefe during his life a house of the Commons with charge of Reparacion without eny other forme paying, for the same/" (ibid.). Assistance with housing is a custom that can be traced back to the time of Henry III. The beginning of this custom, in the thirteenth century, was between the king and the castle-waytes: the exchange of land holdings for keeping the watch. As servants of the corporation, the later waits were provided with subsidized housing at nominal fees, another of their fringe benefits. Bristol allowed its waits L1.6.8 yearly towards the rent of the houses they occupied (Woodfill 99). Although the amount of rent collected has been left blank, the Coventry records indicate that the Corpus Christi Guild rented one of its properties to wait William Androwes (*REED Coventry* 151). The waits of Norwich were granted long-term, low-rent leases for suffragan's tenements of the 1580s; and for fifty years, they paid yearly fees of twenty shillings.²⁴

Undoubtedly, many musicians aspired to live the financially secure and comfortable life of a wait, but competition was keen and requirements were

page 132

stiff. They were expected to perform expertly on several instruments and to compose music as well. At times of royal visits and pageants, they also apparently tailored their pageantry to the occasion, performing both their original songs and interludes. Often they were called upon to support the *cantus firmus* in the local church, either by singing or by playing their instruments. That they had to be able to read music (pricksong) goes without saying. In the private sector, the waits often also served as music teachers and as dancing masters. The Treasurers' Account Rolls of November 1613 show that wait George Callie "hath heretofore and at his presente professed musicke and the arte and facultie of teaching to daunce" (*REED Chester* 290). Thus, in every way, a wait was the consummate musician.

Indeed, the waits were on to a good thing, and they used monopolistic practices to ensure their hold on their jobs. The available civic records are fraught with the successful endeavors of various groups of waits to protect their livelihoods. The waits had united, like the tailors and butchers, to form the Worshipful Company of Musicians,²⁵ which denied the right of any outsider (with the exception of royal or noble players) to perform, to teach, or to receive pay for any activity relating to music. In Leicester, like many other towns, an order was made that no other musicians--not even other townsmen--should be suffered to play for pay within the town: "no estrangars, viz waits, minstrels, or other musicians should be suffered to play within the town... Although they do or shall dwell within the town of Leicester [unless they be] of the company of the town waits" (Brydson 143). Strangers who trespassed were thrown out of town.²⁶ By reason of the Worshipful Company of Musicians, the waits had two great privileges: upon his appointment, a wait automatically gained the right to become a freeman;²⁷ and each wait had the right to keep two apprentices at a time.

The waits had considerable job security, for they were employed for terms of "life or pleasure,"

page 133

unless, of course, they were found to be unsuitable, which occasionally they were. The House Books of York, for example, record the ousting of the city wait for "vnthrify gamyng" (*REED York* 333):

30 October 1566:

Assembled in the Consell Chambre ... the day & yere abovesaid whan & wher / the common waytes of this cite for their mysdemeanour / are discharged of their office ./ And haue presently delyuered in their Syluar Coilers to the Chambrelaynes and one Shalme / (*REED York* 348)

Coventry and Norwich, too found reason to discharge their waits, but for the most part, the musicians found only security in their positions. In most cities, it was the incumbent waits who chose the new members for their own group. The vigorous competition to fill a vacancy culminated in auditions, usually before the full-fledged members, often before a jury of city officers, and occasionally, as was the case in London, before all of Queen Elizabeth's musicians. Although musical skill was the foremost criterion, no wait was guaranteed his post until he had proved himself meritorious in personal conduct.²⁸

It must have been especially painful to the gifted musician longing for an appointment as a wait, knowing that his skill and talent were not enough, knowing that unless he was a wait, he could not earn money from his music. In most cases, the waits came up through the ranks of apprenticeship, an entry-level position. And like the union operations of the Bath Iron Works of today, for example, the best way for a young man to obtain and maintain such an apprenticeship was to be related to an incumbent wait. In fact, in the Norwich records alone, of the thirty-nine waits listed, twenty-two share various family names. It was by way of the apprenticeship system, then, that the Worshipful Company of Musicians was able to expand the base of its power and control.

page 134

Clearly, the waits were exceptional, highly visible civic musicians, but one wonders if they--even the distinguished Norwich waits--deserved the celestial praise heaped on them by William Kemp in 1600. On a wager, Kemp had "morris danced" from London to Norwich, his "nine dales wonder." Exhausted when he pranced into Norwich, he was energized by the battery of waits who welcomed him:

Passing the gate ... I got ... into the open market place. Where on the ccross, ready prepared, stood the Citty Waytes, which not a little refreshed my wearines with toyling thorow so narrow a lane as people left me: such Waytes (under Benedicite be it spoken) fewe Citties in our Realme have the like, none better. Who besides their excellency in wind instruments, their rare cunning on the Vyoll and Violin: theyr voices be admirable, everie one of the[m] able so serve in any Cathedral Church in Christendome for Quiristers. (n.p.)

Despite Kemp's report, the waits did not enjoy a divine dispensation; they were, instead, a familiar but significant part of daily life. It is tempting to forget that the waits were merely human beings, their only fortune being their music. Like everyone else who took breath in medieval and Renaissance England, they had their faults and their troubles. Interspersed in the records are tantalizing tidbits of life behind the livery. In the Nottingham records, for example, there is mention of public bickering among the waits that led to a showdown: in 1632, three of the waits "bought out," for the enormous sum of twenty pounds, the contract of the other, discordant wait (Coldewey 42). Among the records are accounts of waits who gambled (*REED York* 333), waits who argued (*REED Coventry* 437), and waits who disappeared (*REED Chester* 280). But references to praise and admiration of the waits far outweigh the mentions of disciplinary action.

That the waits played an integral part of the

page 135

civic and social fabric of society cannot be denied. They were popular performers, part of the retinue of the mayor, who added picturesqueness and vivacity to civic and religious ceremonies--more evidence that the artistic life of the time was conducted on a high level. And because they entertained on countless occasions, the long history of their sweet musicmaking represents a colorful pattern in the tapestry of medieval and Renaissance life.

[For the online reader's convenience, the list of Works Cited (pp. 135-36 in the printed edition) appears at the end of the notes, where the page numbers are out of sequence.]

page 137

Notes

1. A search of the relevant literature reveals only four articles; see Joseph Bridge, John C. Brydson, John C. Coldewey, and George Stephens.
2. Lawrence M. Clopper, who uses *waits* and *minstrels* interchangeably, as did the original record keepers of Chester, writes: "Minstrels seem to have been present at every ceremonial and social function in the city ... election days, meetings, dinners, and drinkings, on feast days like Corpus Christi when there was a procession, and ... in the Whitsun Plays" (*REED Chester* lix). The State Papers of Henry VIII include this entry: 1540-1, To the Waytes or Mynstrelles At Chester ij s. (*REED Chester* 44) William Kelly writes: "Most of the corporate towns also had their companies of minstrels, termed waits ... (125) possessed their bands of minstrels or 'waits' ..." (131).
3. Alluded to in both primary and secondary sources, needing to be fully explained--but unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper--is the entire world of waits, the waits of all European towns as well as the waits of noble and royal households. For an overview of *Stadtpfeifer*, the German

town piper, see both the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and the article by Annaliese Downs. The *REED* documents and the available household accounts are replete with mentions of payments to and entertainments by the waits of other towns and of both royal and noble households.

4. I.e., by awaking people with soft music at their chamber doors; see Bridge (64).

5. The most comprehensive study of any waits is Stephens' article, "The Waits of the City of Norwich through [F]our Centuries," which is available through *Records of Early English Drama*, 85 Charles Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1K5. Coldewey writes that it is clear from other

page 138

sources that the waits existed during the first half of the fifteenth century. See Coldewey (41-41, 48, n.5).

6. Walter L. Woodfill based his chapter "The Waits of London" on manuscripts in the archives of the city of London (33n.). See also *REED York* (135).

8. See Coldewey (41, 48, n. 10).

9. Bridge places the earliest Chester waits at 1484-5 and includes a listing, for Doncaster waits at 1457. Lyndesay G. Langwill has a listing for some eighty-two "first mentions" of waits in various towns (Exeter in 1362, York in 1369), but he does not list his sources (Bridge 64; Langwill 181), leaving us without convincing documentation.

10. *REED Chester* (43). The York records have a similar entry: House Books, 1 December 1570: ... it was ordryd & agreyd by the said presens / That the Common waites of this Citie for dyvers good causes & considracions shall forme henseforth vse and kepe there Mornyng Watche with there Instrumentes acustomyd every day in the weyke / excepte onely Sondays in the mornyng and the tyme of the Crvstenmas / (*REED York* 362).

11. For a descriptive list of Lord Mayors pageants in London, see John Gough Nichols (93-122); an account of a Lord Mayor's show in Norwich can be found in Carole A. Janssen (57-64).

12. Janssen states that around 1550, the waits of Norwich performed their Lord Mayor's pageant upon a scaffold of their own build, which was designed to look like the "pavilion" of St. Peter. There the waits created a *tableau vivant*, in emblem-book fashion, reciting epigrammatic mottoes, providing music at appropriate moments, and thus providing a link between their own performance and subsequent Merchants' shows.

13. The *REED* documents provide us with innumerable examples of the waits' involvement, for example: Carpenters' Account Book I 1454:

page 139

Item paid to Mynstrels for Corpus christi day Midsomer night & seint petir nyghs ij s viij d. (*REED Coventry* 28); City Chamberlains' Books 1554: Item payd to the waites for Rydyng & playng before St George and the play xx d. (*REED York* 318).

14. In their private and public celebrations, the waits proved to be composers not only of music but of words to accompany the music as well. By connecting epideictic oratory with contemporary Renaissance music, they drew upon a venerable bond: that between rhetoric and poetics.

15. Given the information available at the time (1928), it is not surprising that Bridge declared: "Although Chester was the home of one of our greatest series of Miracle plays, the waits were not much employed as the city could draw on a large fraternity of minstrels and the musicians form the monastery" (81). Bridge's conclusion has been corrected by new data, specifically the *REED Chester* Volume, where we can see specific entries both to waits and to "the minstrels" on Corpus Christi Days. In the *York* Volume, there is the following entry: York Minster Fabric Rolls 1623: Item to the Waytes of Yorke for playenge in the quire 5 Services this yeare xxxij s. iiij d (568). In addition, Woodfill lists the payments of Chester Cathedral to the city waits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (150); thus, Chester, like many cathedrals of time, paid waits to support the music in the church. We must disregard, then, Bridge's statement; a cathedral that could not supply itself with music could not be expected to supply the town with music.

16. G.T. Salisbury, *Street Life in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1939) 135. Cited in Bowles (91).

17. Scholars are divided on the colors and the cut of

page 140

the various liveries. For a full description of them, see Woodfill, Bridge, Langwill, and the introduction to *REED's Norwich*.

18. For a complete description of the various silver collars, see Woodfill (89-90), Bridge (75-76, 78), and Langwill (175-76).

19. For a full statement of this act, see G. M. Young and W. D. Hancock (190-93).

20. Bridge writes: 'It is extraordinary to read of the proceedings of civic authorities of the period. They seem to have lost their heads entirely In 1836 [Leicester] resolved that 'the true dignity of the Mayoralty does not consist in antiquated pageantry,' and so they proceeded to sell five maces, the silver plate, the waits' collars and other reliques. They were no worse than many other towns however" (76, n. 22).

21. Among the eight groups of musicians and players accounted for in this record, for example, are the following: Chamberlains' and Wardens' Account Book II, 4 December 1622: Paid which was given to Sir John dancing his wayte-players the xxiiijth of November. 1621. xijd. Paid which was given to the Weightplayers of the Earle of Northampton the Nynth of August as appeareth by Bill vnder Maister MaJores hand ij svjd. Paid which was given to the Weightes of Nottingham the the vjth of August 1621. as appeareth by a Bill vnder Maister Maiores hand ijs vj d. (*REED Coventry* 414)

22. Bridge refers to the Norwich waits as the "most celebrated of all" (83). Percival Hunt, on the other hand, writes that the "Waits of London were the best there were" (70). Drake's voyage was a failure, for it accomplished little beyond the burning of Corunna, and the mortality was enormous. Thus, the very fame of the Norwich waits was indirectly responsible for the death of three of their own.

page 141

23. *REED Norwich* (133). In Chester and Newcastle, for example, provision was made for children: Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers' Records 18 October 1591: Item deliuered to Robert waytes wief to helpe her child v s. (*REED Chester* 166). Chamberlains' Account Book I week October 1596: paide and geuen in rewrd to robert askew waite lyinge sick his wife and children commanded vjs viii d. (*REED Newcastle* 113)

24. When they finally lost their lease, for not taking care of their rented properties, each of the Norwich waits was financially able to buy a house in the city.

25. The Worshipful Company of Musicians was established before 1500. For a comprehensive discussion, see Woodfill (5) and Robert W. Wienpahl (153, n. 13). In exchange for a granted monopoly, waits were often prevented from traveling abroad to other towns to earn extra money; they were expected to remain in the service of their town.

26. The following entry from Norwich supports the notion that a wait is a "roguish minstrel" only when he is not at home: Mayors' Court Books XV, 17 May 1617: Thomas Spratt Minstrell havinge A wife in Colchester ys ordered forthwith to depart this Cytty & not returne to make abode here at any tyme hereafter or to vse the roagishe life of Minstrelsey vpon payne of being punished as A vagrant./(*REED Norwich* 150)

27. The common council ordered that the waits be admitted freemen of the fellowship of minstrels without any charge. Until that ruling, the fellowship had forbidden the waits to occupy, buy, or sell in the city because they were not admitted freeman in the minstrels' "craft." It was a "Catch-22" situation: unless they were freemen, they would never be wealthy enough to buy their freedom. See

page 142

Woodfill (40, n.9).

28. The following entry is representative of many attesting to the personal integrity of the municipal Musicians: House Books, 25 June 1557: And now Robert Husthwait by this presens is taken to ... be mete to remain one of the common waytes of this Citie vpon his good behaviour & dyligens. (*REED York* 324)

page 135

Works Cited

Bowles, Edmund A. "Tower Musicians in the Middle Ages." *Brass Quarterly* Spring 1962: 91-103.

Bridge, Joseph C. "Town Waits and Their Tunes." *Proceedings of the Musical Association's 54th Sess.* Leeds: Whitehead, 1928.

Brydson, John C. "The Minstrels and Waits of Leicester." *The Musical Times* (May 1948): 142-44.

Chappell, W. *Popular Music of the Olden Time*. vols. I, II. London: Cramer, 1861.

Coldewey, John C. "Some Nottingham Waits: Their History and Habits." *REED Newsletter* 1 (1982): 40-49.

Downs, Anneliese. "The Tower Music of a Seventeenth-Century Stadtpfeifer." *Brass Quarterly* (Fall 1963): 3-33.

Hunt, Percival. *Fifteenth Century England*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962.

Janssen, Carole A. "The Waytes of Norwich and an Early Lord Mayor's Show." *RORD* 22 (1979): 57-64.

Kelly, William. *Notices Illustrative of the Drama; and Other Popular Amusements at Leicester*. London, 1865.

page 136

Kemp, William. *Nine Daies Wonder*. London, 1600.

Langwill, Lyndesay G. "The Waits." *Music Book VII*. Ed. Max Hinrichsen. London: Hinrichsen, 1952. 170-83.

Myers, A.R., ed. *The Household of Edward IV; The Black Book and the Ordinance of 1498*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959.

Nichols, John Gough. *London Pageants*. London, 1837.

Noyes, Alfred. "Drake." *Collected Poems*. vol. I. New York: Stokes, 1913. 246-426.

REED. Chester. Ed. Lawrence M. Clopper. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

---. *Coventry*. Ed. R.W. Ingram. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

---. *Newcastle Upon Tyne*. Ed. J.J. Anderson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.

---. *Norwich 1540-1642*. Ed. David Galloway. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

---. *York*. Ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

"Stadtpfeifer." *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 1978 ed.

Stephens, George A. "The Waits of the City of Norwich through [F]our Centuries to 1790." *Norfolk Archaeology*. XXV (1933): n.p.

"Wait." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 1971.

Ward, Ned [Edward]. *The London Spy*. 1698. London: Folio Society, 1955.

Weinpahl, Robert W. *Music at the Inns of Court*. N.p.: University Microfilms, 1979.

Woodfill, Walter L. *Musicians in English Society from Elizabeth to Charles I*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953.

Young, G.M. and W.D. Hancock. *English Historical Documents 1833-1874*. London: Eyre, 1956.