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*Lincolnshire* (review)

Victor I. Scherb

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## Reviews

**James Stokes, ed. *Lincolnshire. Records of Early English Drama*. 2 vols. Toronto: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2009. Pp. x + 913 + 4 maps. \$425.00.**

James Stokes's two substantial volumes of records of early music, dance, performance, ritual, ceremony, and entertainments have the virtues of the Records of Early English Drama series as a whole, bringing together an impressive array of primary documents, most of them previously unpublished and others only available in rare volumes, in a coherently organized, nicely produced, and attractive edition. Volume 1 contains the records themselves, while the second volume is comprised of a lengthy introduction, a select bibliography, four maps, six appendices, translations of the Latin records that appear in volume 1, a Latin and an English glossary, and a full index. As might be expected from such an experienced REED editor (his excellent Somerset volume came out in 1996), the bibliographic entries are meticulous, and the translations from the Latin and French (the latter by the late Graham Runnalls) expertly done, while the lengthy chapters at the start of volume 2 on the Historical Background, Drama, Music, and Popular Customs, the Documents, and Editorial Procedures, do a masterful job both of placing the records into significant contexts and in drawing out noteworthy patterns that a less experienced eye might easily overlook in the welter of detail.

Stokes's volumes offer a number of dramatic texts and documents that merit further study, including several that have already produced illuminating scholarship, often by Stokes himself. Particularly intriguing for future scholars are the sets of speeches "crying Christmas" by the mayor's officers from Lincoln in 1564–65, the quick (and expensive) response of Lincoln to King James I's visit in 1616–17, and the extensive account of the litigation between the Earl of Lincoln and Sir Roger Dymmock from the first decade of the seventeenth century. Some of the highlights achieve a remarkable immediacy, such as the terse but moving account from the 1566 Stallingborough Inventory of Heathenish Church Goods: "the crose was meltid the said fyrst yeare and turnd to thuse yat the candestickes wear. And the crose clothe was sold to players, who defaced it" (1:315). Even after nearly four and a half centuries, the writer's sense of violation remains apparent.

In addition to many individual highlights, Stokes's Lincolnshire volume also invites readers to perceive larger historical patterns in the changing nature of

dramatic activity between c. 1235 and 1642 while emphasizing its variety. Early records, dating back to Robert Grosseteste's letters from the thirteenth century, prohibit clerical participation in "miracula," as well as the use of churches and churchyards for a diverse array of indecorous activities. The multifaceted nature of mimetic and musical activity from this large, highly varied, and populous region of England suggests a continuing and complex tradition. The volumes compile evidence about "religious drama, liturgy, and ceremony [often] co-produced by communities and church and combining elements of ritual, worship, and play" (2:404), but the collected documents also detail more secular forms, including tournaments, at least some with pronounced mimetic elements, wrestlings, bull and bear baitings, Rogation ceremonies, waits, wakes, ales, and other festive folk customs. As Stokes observes in his introduction, the wide range of evidence does not imply a straightforward evolutionary development. "Rather, from the earliest records on, one can see the simultaneous presence of festive folk customs, liturgical and quasi-dramatic ceremonies, church drama, and civic-sponsored rituals and enactments, all coexisting and influencing each other within the rich culture of Lincolnshire, until a perceptible decline in the later sixteenth century based on many different local and national factors" (2:404).

According to Stokes, the chief characteristic of much Lincolnshire town drama from the later Middle Ages was their processions, "following locally meaningful routes that served to connect parish church and town and often culminating in some combination of religious service, feasting, wrestling matches, baitings, plays, and other popular diversions" (2:406). What the surviving records do not support is the existence of the cycle play pattern familiar from Chester, Norwich, and York, or "the lord and troupe pattern of the West Country" (2:406). Instead, in terms of content, form, and playing conventions, Stokes links Lincolnshire dramatic traditions to those of East Anglia, even somewhat tentatively putting forward the idea that "[o]ne might argue that in the surviving records and play texts from the region between the River Humber and East Anglia can be seen the outlines of a single distinctive playing tradition that was unique to the region" (2:406–7).

As the chief city in the county, Lincoln provides the lion's share of records, totaling nearly a third of those Stokes prints here. Copious entries refer to Christmas and Easter plays in the fourteenth century, while in the fifteenth these were supplemented with Whitsuntide tournaments, Paternoster Plays, saint plays, Corpus Christi plays, and a major dramatic ceremony focusing on the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin. As is so often the case with early dramatic records, there is often a frustrating lack of detail about important recurring dramatic entertainments such as the Paternoster play. Presumably because of the Virgin's associations with Roman Catholicism, the Assumption and Coronation disappear from the records after 1555, with civic religious drama reappearing in a version of the Old Testament story of Tobit (performed on four occasions in the 1560s), before being replaced by other types of civic entertainment.

Town and parish drama outside of Lincoln seem to have been particularly prevalent during the late fifteenth and in the first half of the sixteenth century. Many Lincolnshire parishes had plays or players, and they often formed networks of mutual support by contributing to (and perhaps providing additional audience members for) each others' plays. As the sixteenth century drew to a close, religious drama comes under occasional criticism as it is gradually supplanted by professional troupes under the patronage of particular aristocrats, and by the increasing importance of other traditional forms of entertainment, such as the civic musicians known as waits and various forms of animal baiting.

Stokes does a good job when it comes to the task of balancing the presentation of data along with his interpretation of it. Occasionally, I found myself puzzled about why a particular record had been included (e.g., 2:618). The glossaries are useful aids, but could perhaps be more complete and can be rather cumbersome to use in practice. Nonetheless, the volumes will be a valuable addition to any research library, filled as they are with a wealth of material for both teachers and students on theater history, music and musicians, dance, religious history, women's history, and, of course, local history.

While some records remain opaque, one is struck—with surprising frequency—by how often they convey a sense of presence. For example, in the records of the Household of Holles of Grimsby, Gervase Holles gives a strikingly moving account of a mother he never knew:

I haue heard many say yat shee playd Excellently well vpon a lute (according to ye way of Musique in those times) and sung as Excellently. Shee wrote an hand far better then most weoman vsually write, and (which in yat sex is strange) exact Ortography, as will appeare by seuerall of hir lettres to my grandfather Holles, which I yet haue; hir stile was better than hir hand, weighty and vnaffected. And to proue that a great fancy may sometimes accompany great virtues, shee compiled in verse the passages of hir whole life, which my vncke Holles (after hir death) borrowed from my father with Importunity, and lost as negligently. (1:363).

While the passage was included, in accord with the scope of the REED project, because of its references to music and musical instruments, the passage as a whole seems worthy of study for attitudes towards gender, literacy, orthography, and even historiography, poignantly expressing as it does the struggle of any historian to reconstruct an absent presence from incomplete sources. As is true of all recent REED editions, these two Lincolnshire volumes are weighty and expensive, but they are nevertheless a highly recommended purchase for all large research libraries, as well as others who can afford to make such an investment.

VICTOR I. SCHERB  
*University of Texas at Tyler*