

RECORDS OF EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

Pre-publication Collections

DISCLAIMER: The material below is offered in pre-publication form. It has not received editorial attention from REED's paleographers and Latinists, nor have the notes and other editorial apparatus been checked for completeness and accuracy. Please see the REED Pre-publication homepage for full details about this pre-publication project, as well as copyright information and instructions on how to cite these materials.

Bramley, Hampshire **Peter Greenfield**

Bramley is a village situated about five miles north of Basingstoke, close to the Berkshire border. The manor of Bramley came into the possession of the Paulet family in 1428, and continued to be owned by the lords of the manor of Basing until John Paulet, fifth Marquess of Winchester, sold it to Edward Pitt in 1642. The church of St James dates mainly from the twelfth century, though the existing brick tower replaced a wooden one only in 1636.¹

The church ale was an annual event at Bramley in the sixteenth century. Receipts from the ale, or 'at Whitsuntide' appear in every year with itemized receipts from the first year covered by this account until 1590. After six years of unitemized receipts, the 1597 accounts record no ale, but those rendered in 1598 mention 'other charges about their Whitsontyde ale' (p. 129). In 1599 the language changes to 'Whitsontyde feaste' (p. 130) until 1605. In 1606 the accounts become summary, but receipts from the 'Whitsuntide gaines' persist up to 1614 (p. 139). The accounts rendered in 1615 do not mention Whitsuntide receipts, and instead include a memorandum of 29 October 1614, which states that at a meeting of the parishioners, it was decided to introduce a rate of a half penny an acre (pp. 140-41). The memorandum is signed by the churchwardens and the vicar, Thomas Shereman. The proceeds from the rate in 1617 amounted to 3li. 7s. 4d. (p. 142). This rate was no doubt intended to replace the Whitsun ale as the parish's main source of revenue, but in 1626 the 'gaineinges at Whitsunday' show up again, and yield an amount very similar to those seen before 1615--about 4li. (p. 173). The accounts then again give less detail until 1635 and 1636, when they do not mention Whitsuntide.

Only the detailed accounts of 1531-32 indicate that Bramley's ale was a king ale--that is, an ale held in conjunction with some form of king play or game. However, given the popularity of

kingales in northern Hampshire, many or all of Bramley's ales may have been such king ales. (Andover, Wootton St Lawrence, Newton Valence, Crondall, Stoke Charity, Weyhill, and even Winchester St John's all had some form of king game.) The equally detailed accounts of 1532-33 call the event only a 'Churche Ale', but the items in the accounts are very similar to those of the previous year, including payments to a minstrel for contributing to the entertainment. Nearby parishes (Pamber and Stratfield Saye in 1531-32, Silchester and Hartley Wespall in 1532-33) contributed to the profits of the ale and no doubt participated in the feasting and entertainment.

For further reading:

Greenfield, Peter H. "Parish Drama in Four Counties Bordering the Thames Watershed," in *English Parish Drama*, eds. Alexandra F. Johnston and W.N.M. Hüsken. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996. 107-118.

Greenfield, Peter H. "The Carnavalesque in the Robin Hood Games and King Ales of Southern England," in *Carnival and the Carnavalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre*, eds. Konrad Eisenbichler and Wim Husken. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998. 19-28.

Williams, John Foster, ed. *The Early Churchwardens' Accounts of Hampshire*. Winchester, 1913.

¹ 'Parishes: Bramley', *A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 4* (1911), pp. 140-145. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56765> Date accessed: 18 April 2014.