

John Adson (1587?-1640)

John Adson (bap. ?Watford, Northants., ?24 Jan 1587; d London, 29 June 1640). English wind player and composer. He was perhaps the Johannes Adson baptized at Watford, Northamptonshire, on 24 Jan 1587, though nothing is known of him for certain before 1604, when he is recorded as a cornett player at the court of Charles III of Lorraine in Nancy. Charles died in 1608, and Adson was back in England by the end of 1613, when he joined the Waits of London. He married Jane Lanerie in about February 1614 and settled in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate. At least two of his sons, Islay (or Islip; bap. 30 May 1615) and Roger (bap. 24 June 1621), became musicians. In November 1633 he became a royal wind musician, and on 18 January 1636 he was paid £4 15s for a treble cornett and a treble recorder. In February 1634 he organized the wind players who played in the procession for the second performance of Shirley's masque *The Triumph of Peace*, thereby incurring the displeasure of the Master of the King's Music, Nicholas Lanier. Adson had evidently preferred theatre musicians to members of the Royal Music, and his association with the King's theatre company is confirmed by references to him in plays put on by it in 1634 and 1639–1640. He died on 29 June 1640, and was buried at St Giles Cripplegate the next day. He was succeeded at court by William Lanier and in the Waits of London by James Hinton.

Adson is best known for the collection *Courtly Masquing Ayres* (London, 1621; ed. P. Walls, London, 1975–6), which he dedicated to the Duke of Buckingham, a frequent and enthusiastic masquer. It consists of 31 lively dances for 'violins, consorts [mixed ensembles] and cornets', and divides into three sections. The first 18 pieces seem to be genuine masque dances (14 have concordances in masque sources), using the five-part single-soprano scoring associated with violin bands. The next three pieces, also in five parts, are marked 'for cornets and sackbuts', while the remainder are probably intended for the same instruments, since they use the six-part scoring with two sopranos associated with wind bands. It has been generally assumed that the collection is Adson's own work, but he did not have a court appointment when he published it, so the masque dances, at least, are likely to be his versions of pieces originally composed by royal musicians. Only four other pieces by him are known: a six-part air with one part missing (GB-Cfm Mu.734), two two-part corants (US-NH Filmer 3), and the bass part of another corant (GB-Ob Mus. Sch.D.220). In 1636 a book containing music by 'Edsons' was in the collection of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle.

The following two quotes are taken from *'The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642'*, by Andrew Gurr.

Quote 1. Page 84.

Of the musicians who were actual company members, only a few can be distinguished from the hired men as regular employees. After the individual musician–players like Kemp and Phillips, we can identify among those who belonged to the Blackfriars consort John Adson and Richard Balls in the 1620s and 1630s, both of them City **Waits**, probably Francis Balls and John Rhodes, plus Ambrose Beeland, a 'fiddler' who later became a royal violinist, and another fiddler, Henry Wilson. William Tawyer must have played the trumpet when leading the mechanicals on stage in a pre-1623 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, since he is named in the Folio text. Some others may be included on the list of the twenty-two 'musicians and other necessary attendantes' set down by Henry Herbert on 27 December 1624.⁷³ John Wilson was a singer, playing Balthasar in a performance of *Much Ado about Nothing*, since the Folio text identifies him there as 'Jacke Wilson'. He was also possibly the 'cunning Musition' who organized a performance on 27 September 1631, a Sunday, at the Bishop of Lincoln's house, according to a complaint that the bishop was misusing his Sundays.

Quote 2. Page 217.

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Hired man and musician, c. 1634; played the cornett for the Duc de Lorraine in 1604, when aged nineteen; a city **wait** in 1614, probably one of the Blackfriars consort; in *The Late Lancashire Witches* in 1634 a stage direction specifies 'Enter an invisible spirit. J. **Adson** with a brace of greyhounds'; lived in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate; wrote *Courtly Masquing Ayres for Violins, Consorts, and Cornets* (1621); played in Shirley's masque *The Triumph of Peace*, 1634; m. Feb. 1614, one child (1615).