

**ABSTRACT**

The Waits were civic musicians who, in the 1500s, played wind instruments, such as shawms and sackbutts, and also recorders. By 1600 they played a wider range of instruments including strings. They occupied an important role in the civic life of their respective towns, and theirs may well have been the only *concerted* instrumental music the general populace would hear.

Records relating to the Waits are primarily administrative or legal; they give us evidence of the instruments played, and of civic livery and badges of office, but they tell us little of the Waits' repertoire or of their musicianship. There are just a very few examples of laudatory comments on particular Waits groups. Lacking any direct evidence of the Waits' repertoire or skills, what, if anything, can be proposed about their musical capabilities?

The aim of this study is to show that a fuller understanding of the musicianship of the Elizabethan Waits can be gained from detailed examination of the records of the Waits in Liverpool, Rye, Coventry and Norwich. The claims of Thomas Whythorne, an Elizabethan musician and composer, about a supposed difference between a 'musician' and a mere 'minstrel', provide a critical perspective from the Elizabethan period itself. That leads to a consideration of the extent, and significance, of musical literacy among the Waits.

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**1**     **Introduction****1a**     **The Waits**

The designation *Waits*<sup>1</sup> was given to civic musicians in many towns and cities in England who were appointed to serve the Mayor, or whoever held a similar office. Having their origins in the 1300s and 1400s,<sup>2</sup> the Waits were probably at their zenith in the 1500s and 1600s, and in some cases they continued to function until they were disbanded following local government legislation in 1835, which brought to an end the practice of municipalities employing their own musicians. Similar groupings of civic musicians were to be found on the Continent: for example, in German and Dutch towns (Stadtpeiffers/ Stadpijpers) and in major centres in Italy (Pifferi). Even very small English towns might try to appoint at least one Wait, but by 1500 bands in the more populous towns and cities usually had three or four members, with a fifth or sixth performer often added by 1600.

This account concerns itself with the Waits during Elizabeth I's reign. The Elizabethans seem to have thought that any town worthy of serious notice should have Waits of some sort. Their attitude completely contrasts with the declaration of the incoming Leicester Corporation in 1836, who, having dismissed their Waits band, declared that: 'The true dignity of the Mayoralty does not consist in antiquated pageantry'.<sup>3</sup> For the Elizabethans, the attendance of a Waits band – or even a single Wait - upon the Mayor was important as an enhancement to his civic office.

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<sup>1</sup> I have used a capital for **W**aits to distinguish the title of the civic musicians from the commonly used verb.

<sup>2</sup> G. Richard Rastall, *English Minstrelsy* – forthcoming 2021. A chapter on 'Civic Minstrels' will examine the Waits prior to 1509. I am grateful to Professor Rastall for kindly sharing a pre-publication draft with me.

<sup>3</sup> John Brydson, 'The Minstrels and Waits of Leicester', in *The Musical Times*, May 1948, 142-144

As the formally designated civic musicians, the Waits had various duties. A simple enough task would be to play briefly for reveille or curfew; a more demanding task would be to present what we would now call a short concert on regular occasions, as was required of a number of bands. However, the Waits' primary role was to play music when civic ceremonies took place. Elizabethan towns and cities held various civic and traditional ceremonies throughout the year, for example, at the Mayor's election,<sup>4</sup> or at Midsummer festivities. Reform of religion meant that some of the older traditions ceased to be observed, but there were new ones, such as the celebration of Queen Elizabeth I's Accession. Musical ceremony would be called for on occasions when the Mayor and Aldermen, or their equivalents, processed in public, as they might in going to church on Sundays and Holy Days. At such times, then, and when welcoming any distinguished visitors to the town, the Waits' music would be intended as 'a spectacular and sonic resource to enhance the town's prestige'.<sup>5</sup>

The reasonable inference generally drawn from this, by those few scholars who have considered the topic at all, is that the Waits would need to be (at least) proficient musical performers, albeit not necessarily virtuosi.<sup>6</sup> There would be an element of civic stage-dressing involved, certainly, but the visual impact of the Waits in their liveries – often in striking colours – would have had to be complemented by an impressive aural impact. Wistreich is one of the most recent commentators (2019), writing that the 'Waits ... were in command of sophisticated performance skills'.<sup>7</sup> Wistreich was not undertaking a detailed study of the Waits as such, and my question is whether any more specific

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<sup>4</sup> REED, *Devon*, 168

<sup>5</sup> Rastall, 'Minstrelsy in the Towns' (see footnote 2 above).

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, 147

<sup>7</sup> Richard Wistreich, 'Music Makers', in *The Cambridge History of Sixteenth Century Music*, 316

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substantiation can be given to such claims about the Waits' musicianship? To put it in the language of the Elizabethans, is there any way in which we are able to judge whether the Waits were *minstrels* or *musicians*?

**1b    Minstrels or Musicians?**

One Elizabethan author who insisted on making a clear distinction between *minstrels* and *musicians* was Thomas Whythorne. Writing in his *Autobiography* of (circa) 1576, he complained of those who 'ywzurb on miuzik and ...kall þem selvz miuzicians', whereas they are simply 'minstrels'.<sup>8</sup> For Whythorne the term *minstrel* was one of opprobrium. It is impossible to determine whether his opinion, as such, was at all influential, but certainly he was not alone in denigrating *minstrels*. Citing the fiddler and piper especially, Thomas Lovell wrote (1581) that 'moste minstrels by ungodly meanes ther maintenance obtain', adding that their instruments 'intise to practise vice'.<sup>9</sup> William Fulke (1578) commented on the many 'practical' musicians in England, but bemoaned the fact that 'true musics' [ie: *musicians*] were rare.<sup>10</sup> The word *musician* was not new,<sup>11</sup> but its Elizabethan spelling seems particularly erratic: 'musicioner, mussyson, musickesoner'.<sup>12</sup> The terminology took some time to settle down, but the overall message was clear: *musicians* were in all respects superior to *minstrels*.

What might this imply for the Waits? In 1563 James Atherton, Wait in Liverpool, was specifically referred to as 'Wayte or town's musicioner'.<sup>13</sup> Use of the newer term is not,

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Whythorne, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. James M. Osborn, 246. I have followed Osborn's presentation of Whythorne's orthography as closely as possible.

<sup>9</sup> Marsh, 79

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 76

<sup>11</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of Etymology*

<sup>12</sup> Marsh, 76

<sup>13</sup> REED, *Lancashire*, 37

however, wholly consistent: in Chester in 1597-1599 various guilds paid 'mvsyssyons' and even 'musioners', but one guild cheerfully recorded a similar payment to 'mynstrelles'.<sup>14</sup>

However, in Norwich the references to the Waits under that designation come to an end in 1586; thereafter the same group are regularly referred to as 'the musicians of the City'.<sup>15</sup>

The terminology is inconsistent throughout the Elizabethan period, but there are signs of a trend towards using the term *musician*. Either the Waits themselves, or their civic masters, came to prefer the more respectable description.

In terms of their social standing in the Elizabethan polity the Waits could justifiably see themselves as ranking above *minstrels* whenever that term was used to demean, as it was in the 1572 'Acte for Punishment of Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars'. There it denominated itinerant musicians who were without the patronage of an aristocrat, gentleman, or civic authority. Such *minstrels* might be subjected to the same harsh penalties as the 'sturdy beggars'. Indeed, it may well have been this legislation that encouraged the more refined members of society to disdain the *minstrel*.<sup>16</sup> Waits, by contrast, were customarily liveried at the expense of the town, and some of them had impressive badges of office to emphasise their civic position.

The livery and escutcheon might still not have been enough for Whythorne, however. He encouraged his readers to think not only of the itinerant unlicensed musical performers as *minstrels*, but also to give no approval to those who 'do lyv by miuzik and yet ar no miuzisians at all'.<sup>17</sup> For Whythorne, the most significant mark of a musician was what we might term *musical literacy* – but for him this meant not only the ability to read notated

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<sup>14</sup> REED, *Chester*, 189-191

<sup>15</sup> REED, *Norwich*, 383

<sup>16</sup> Marsh, 79

<sup>17</sup> Whythorne, *The Autobiography*, 246

music, but also to compose and write music. 'Non wurþi of þat nam [*musician*] except þei can maꝅ songs of ij, iij, iiij parts ... akkording to þe trew rewls þerof.<sup>18</sup> In other words, only those who could compose polyphonic music (such as himself) should be called *musicians*. This is why Whythorne is dismissive even of 'singingmen and players' among whom 'few or non kan maꝅ A good lesson of deskant' (ie: counterpoint).<sup>19</sup> In his terms they are wholly inferior to musicians who have attained a degree in Music. Ironically, we may now think, such a degree was not awarded after a course of study and examination, but at the recommendation of the University because of proven musical ability.<sup>20</sup> (There is more than a suspicion that you had to be the right kind of person in the right place to qualify for such an award.) Among the lower-ranks of Whythorne's catalogue are the organists of churches, and perhaps also the teachers of pricksong (notated music), singing and instruments, whose status he leaves rather indeterminate.<sup>21</sup>

Whythorne's censure of *minstrels* is forthright: 'þe Raskall and of skumm ... who be, or owht to be kalled minstrels (alþoh now A daiz many do nam þem miuzisions).<sup>22</sup> Such trenchant denigration of the practical performer-musician was not wholly new.

Distinctions between musical practitioners and those who had an academic and theoretical understanding of music, go back to Boethius (early 500s), who classed those 'dedicated to instruments [as] servants (slaves?) ... who do not make any use of reason'.<sup>23</sup> That kind of thinking was still highly influential in the 1500s, when, for example, Andreas Ornithoparcus

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 245

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 245

<sup>20</sup> Barra Boydell, 'Cathedral Music, City and State', in Fiona Kisby, ed., *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, 139

<sup>21</sup> Whythorne, *Autobiography*, 233

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 244

<sup>23</sup> Oliver Strunk, revised Leo Treitler, *Source Readings in Music History*, 142, provides an English translation of the relevant passage from Boethius. See also: Roger Bray, 'England, 1560-1600' in *European Music 1520-1640*, ed. James Haar, 498.

tells us that '*Harpers, and Organists, & all others which approue their skill by Instruments ... are removed from the intellectuall part of Musicke*<sup>24</sup> (John Dowland's translation of this treatise was published in 1609). In Whythorne's case the chief motive for deprecating non-literate musicians was probably because he was trying to distinguish between the kind of musician he was - someone who could become Master of Music to the Archbishop of Canterbury – and other musicians who lacked his own level of musical literacy.

Whythorne was by no means alone in his wish to distinguish *musicians* from *minstrels*, nor was it only an English preoccupation. Writing in 1600, Zenobi declared that 'one should call *Musico* those musicians who are expert in counterpoint ... and compose like Masters'.<sup>25</sup> One suspects, however, that Whythorne, and the others like him who had (in his case a slightly tenuous) claim to gentlemanly status, wanted to distinguish themselves socially as much as musically from those whom they regarded as their social inferiors. That would include the Waits, and, for that matter, the church singing-men. Musicians like Antony Holborne or John Dowland, who were undoubted gentlemen, were careful to ensure that their names appeared in their published music with the appellation 'Gentleman' appended, and (since publishing your music was somewhat akin to public performance, and thus seen as rather vulgar) they often made efforts to indicate that they had only published at the request of a patron, or to ensure that their music was properly recorded rather than circulated in pirated editions.<sup>26</sup>

The Waits, then, were performing their civic music in a context in which the term *musician* was a contested one. It could be problematic for any *gentleman* to be seen as

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<sup>24</sup> Andreas Ornithoparcus his *Micrologus*, Introduction (see Bibliography: internet resources)

<sup>25</sup> Richard Wistreich (quoting Zenobi), 'Music Makers', 290

<sup>26</sup> David C. Price, *Patrons and Musicians of the English Renaissance*, 192



some kind of public musician – and certainly he could not be a *minstrel*. The term *minstrel*, having remained a 'comparatively neutral designation' until around 1560, had become disreputable<sup>27</sup>. Even so, Whythorne's animadversions on inferior musicians are open to objection. Examining the Waits' musicianship, is it possible to accord them a greater honour, even on Whythorne's own terms, than he might have expected?

### **1c     The Musicianship of the Waits**

In the past comments about the musicianship of the Waits have tended to be generalised and may have been founded on unexamined assumptions. Langwill's remark that 'The waits as a class were very far from incompetent' is a case in point.<sup>28</sup> The use of litotes has the effect of damning the Waits with faint praise. It is by no means clear (as we shall see) that the Waits can be understood as a 'class'; nor does Langwill do much to establish exactly what kind of musical competence the Waits needed to have. Waits' researchers owe Langwill a debt of thanks for having written one of the first serious explorations of the topic of the Waits, but this judgement on them is, ultimately, unsatisfactory. Likewise the comment that 'Some waits were highly skilled', as claimed by Harley in his book on *Orlando Gibbons*.<sup>29</sup> Admittedly, Harley was not setting out to focus on Waits as such, but the only substantiation he gives to his claim about the Waits is that Orlando's father William, and his brother Ferdinand, were Waits, a kind of reverse (or sideways) reflected glory that is not entirely convincing.

Questioning these evaluations of the Waits, or the comment of Wistreich noted earlier, led me to want to examine the topic more closely, seeking firmer grounds on which

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<sup>27</sup> Marsh, 76

<sup>28</sup> Lyndesay Langwill 'The Waits: a Short Historical Study', in *Hinrichson's Musical Yearbook*, 1952, 6

<sup>29</sup> John Harley, *Orlando Gibbons and the Gibbons Family of Musicians*, 14

to found these quite bold claims. I think that it can be shown that Elizabethan sources do provide relevant, if indirect, evidence, and that this allows for further reasonable inferences to be made, concerning the musicianship of a number of individuals among the provincial Waits; this offers the possibility of putting comment on the Waits' musicianship on stronger foundations than heretofore.

There are, of course, difficulties to be encountered in such a project. We cannot experience the Elizabethan Waits' music 'live'; there are no recordings to listen to, and only a few surviving comments on the proficiency or otherwise of the Waits. The task becomes one that Kisby has described as involving a 'search for evidence of musical culture even if no music survives'; it must, to some extent, endeavour to show that 'sound can be reconstructed from the silence of the archives'.<sup>30</sup>

#### **1d    The scope of this account**

The focus in what follows will be on the provincial Waits, those in cities and towns beyond the metropolis. London's musicians, including its various Waits bands, were in close contact with the Court and would have had a distinct advantage in terms of responding to new musical tastes and developments. The various Waits groupings in London, and the difficulty at times of disentangling references to different groups, and to minstrels and musicians in general, mean that they merit a separate study in their own right.

Instead of attempting to examine the London Waits, therefore, I have chosen to give quite detailed attention to the Elizabethan-era Waits in Liverpool, Rye, Norwich and Coventry; these towns and their Waits represent small, medium/large and very large towns,

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<sup>30</sup> Fiona Kisby, *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, 7

and (*contra* Langwill) what may be called different *classes* of Waits. Whythorne's gradation of different kinds of *musician/minstrel* will serve as a way to keep in mind an evaluative standard that belongs to the Elizabethan period, even if its presuppositions might now seem questionable. Occasional references will be made to Waits bands other than those selected for detailed comment. There will also be an outline account of the musicianship of the Waits in terms of skills of improvisation, memorization and embellishment: skills which were almost certainly essential to them, even though the balance between those elements was unlikely to be the same in 1600 as it had been in 1500. The aim is to examine evidence for the level of musical literacy among the selected provincial Waits, and also to consider their musicianship in a wider context, which may point up the limitations of Whythorne's perspective.

## **2 Elizabethan Waits in Liverpool and Rye – two port-towns**

Although I shall argue that evidence is available from which it can be inferred that some, and possibly many, of the Waits were musically literate, it would be disingenuous to ignore those Waits who were not – or, at least, who are highly unlikely to have possessed any such musical literacy. Judgement will for now be reserved as to whether higher levels of musical literacy (such as reading notation, being able to perform sophisticated improvisation and embellishment) were found among the Waits. The records of Henry Halewood, a Liverpool Wait, and of Angel Shaw and Philip Fairfield, Waits in Rye, Sussex, demonstrate that it would have been entirely possible, in certain circumstances, to become a Wait without any formal musical literacy. These musicians would need a repertoire of well-known tunes that could be played from memory, but they would not need to read

musical notation. That is not to say they were without musical skills, as may reasonably be inferred from what we can find out about them.

## **2a Henry Halewood – Liverpool's wayward Wait**

In the Elizabethan period Liverpool was a small port-town, with a population between seven hundred and one thousand,<sup>31</sup> far less important than it would begin to be a hundred years later.<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps surprising to find that the town had a Wait at all. We may reasonably suppose that civic pride lay behind the appointment of a Wait in Liverpool: 'Mayster Mayre shall command the wayte at all tymes'.<sup>33</sup> The way in which civic ceremony might enhance social status was probably the greatest reward most Mayors or senior office-holders would gain from their time in office.<sup>34</sup> (The honour could be costly to the office-holder, who received no payment as such, and would usually have to disburse his own money on entertainment.) In keeping with Mayoral dignity, the Wait held a silver scutcheon, or badge of office.<sup>35</sup> In 1583 Henry Clennes was admitted as Wait and also as 'free burges of this towne' in return for which rank he was to 'paye for the fashioning or making newe of the Towne's skutchion'.<sup>36</sup> Not only did Liverpool offer no emolument to its Wait, but in at least this one case, it expected him to provide his own badge of office! Liverpool's Wait was granted permission to 'receyve the rewarde of the townspeople'.<sup>37</sup> In 1576, when Nicholas Forber was serving as a Wait, it is noted that he is to 'have the Scotcheon and have the benevolence of the towne vpon his good behaviour' which rather suggests he would be dependent on a kind of quasi-voluntary tax that was difficult to

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<sup>31</sup> REED, *Lancashire*, xiv

<sup>32</sup> Peter Clark, and Paul Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, 47, 98

<sup>33</sup> REED, *Lancashire*, 36

<sup>34</sup> Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen', in Peter Clark, ed., *The Early Modern Town: A Reader*, 110.

<sup>35</sup> REED, *Lancashire*, 36/38/39

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

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collect in.<sup>38</sup> Despite making repeated appointments of successive Waits, Liverpool seems to have had difficulty finding someone reliable. In some years, eg. 1585-1587, the town recorded a wish to appoint a Wait, but there is no record that anyone was actually appointed. Only a year after his admission as a freeman, Henry Clennes was fined because he did not play music at the doors of all the past and present office-bearers of the town.<sup>39</sup> Liverpool was, perhaps, asking more of its unpaid Wait than he was prepared to give.

The first record of Henry Halewood as Wait occurs in 1571/2, in the Liverpool Town Book (2): 'This daye henrie halewood bagpiper was admitted wayte of this Towne'.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, over a period of almost twenty years, he was dismissed, re-appointed, again dismissed, and again re-appointed.<sup>41</sup> His dismissal on one occasion was for 'lewdness' but the ambiguity of that term at the time leaves us uncertain as to the offence.

Halewood had the advantage, for a lone Wait, of playing the bagpipes. The drone/s provide a basic accompaniment to melody, and the overall timbre would probably be quite loud enough to make an impression, even if not necessarily being as dominating as the Highland bagpipe. In this period the various others who were appointed in Liverpool, at those times when Halewood was out of favour, were also lone musicians. One, Thomas Brookfield, was described as a 'piper', but it would be disingenuous to claim that this proves the case for all the lone Liverpool Waits being bagpipers. *Piper* is a notorious catch-all word at the time, capable of referring to anyone playing a wind instrument, whether shawm, flute, recorder or bagpipes.<sup>42</sup> On balance, however, it seems highly probable that the other

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 45

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>40</sup> Changes in the dating of New Year mean that the occasional ambiguity about dates is inevitable. It is a problem familiar to historians of the period, but this form of reference will suffice to identify the record in the relevant REED volume.

<sup>41</sup> REED, *Lancashire*, 39, 40, 45, 47

<sup>42</sup> Merryweather, 'Henry Halewood, Bagpiper and Liverpool Town Wait', in *Chanter* (Spring 2004) 19.

individual Liverpool Waits played the bagpipes, as, apart from the fife-and-drum duo to be met with in Rye, it is the best instrument that a solo performer could use and still make a significant impression.

At least we know that Halewood played (specifically) the bagpipe. What would that imply about his musical competence and literacy? Bagpipes certainly require skill in controlling the airflow into and out of the bag, and in maintaining an even pressure on the bag, thereby avoiding the occurrence of squawks and shrieks rather than musical notes. Bagpipes also need fingering in such a way as to resolve potential problems of intonation. However, the bagpiper can play only such tunes as remain within the ambit of a drone-note: there is no scope for melodies that have any marked chromaticism, or modulation. There was (and still is) little need for a bagpiper to read from musical notation; the repertoire has traditionally been passed on orally/aurally. A Wait-bagpiper in Liverpool would need a stock of well-known tunes, presumably some more solemn, some more cheerful. For this, someone like Halewood did not require musical literacy, whether of the modern kind or of Whythorne's more demanding type. And, as Marsh points out, the historical record is wholly silent about anyone giving bagpipe lessons.<sup>43</sup> By Whythorne's standards it is doubtful that even his civic appointment would raise Halewood above deprecation as a *minstrel*.

Indeed, as Halewood's civic employment brought no emolument it is unsurprising that we find evidence in the records of him travelling around the locality, bagpiping. In 1591 Halewood was arraigned in Walton-on-the-Hill (Archbishop's Visitation) for 'piping before a wedding in the church at the time of the offering of the wedding'.<sup>44</sup> Then, in the 1592

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<sup>43</sup> Marsh, 6

<sup>44</sup> REED, *Lancashire*, 93

Chester Diocesan Visitation proceedings, one 'henricum hale de leuerpoole' (almost certainly Halewood) was excommunicated for 'piping upon the saboath Day & in the churchyard.<sup>45</sup> It was by no means his first (or only) altercation with the authorities. In 1576, he seems to have been apprehended taking lead off the roof of the civic hall.<sup>46</sup> His final dismissal as the official Wait for Liverpool resulted from his involvement in a violent altercation in 1590. He happened to come off worst on this occasion, but it seems that this misbehaviour was the 'final straw' for Liverpool's civic authorities. Given his various misdemeanours, so often overlooked before, it is not entirely tongue-in-cheek to suggest that he must have been a more-than-proficient bagpiper, otherwise his continued reappointment in the role of Wait would be almost inexplicable.

Henry Halewood is one of the more colourful of the Waits recorded in the Elizabethan period. However, we should not confuse his possible character defects with any specific failings of his chosen instrument. Evidence from the Low Countries shows freelance bagpipers in regular demand, performing, for example, in processions in Dendermonde.<sup>47</sup> Henry VIII employed bagpipers among his musicians, the last of whom, Richard Woodward (in 1545), continued in service with Elizabeth I's musicians until 1570.<sup>48</sup> The denomination *bagpiper* was accorded him only in the first reference to him in Elizabeth's reign, but, although he remained among her musicians, he is never again designated as a bagpiper, which might perhaps indicate that this aspect of his service became less important under Elizabeth. There seems little doubt that the instrument was becoming more associated with rustic celebrations than with more sophisticated musical

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 313

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 323

<sup>47</sup> Keith Polk, *Tielman Susato and the Music of his Time*, 97

<sup>48</sup> Katherine Butler, *Music in Elizabethan Court Politics*, 200

entertainments.<sup>49</sup> Even so, it was not that the instrument in itself was inappropriate to a Wait: it was more the case that its exponent, in the case of Halewood, had proved himself unequal to the task of maintaining the dignity of Liverpool's Mayor and his associates.

## **2b Philip and Angel – Rye's 'Waits'**

Visiting Rye today one finds a charming village far removed from the busier world of commerce and active business. Any comparison to Liverpool might seem fanciful – but at the time they were by no means as different as they are now. Rye is now stranded some way from the sea - a matter of a shifting coastline – but it was an active Port in the 1500s, and of historical significance as one of the Cinque Ports.

The Assembly Book for Rye in 1573 records a payment to 'Philip fairfild and Angell Shawe ... in consideracion of their paines taken this sommer with the drome and Phife when the quenis maiestie was here'.<sup>50</sup> In this record, from January, they are not referred to as Waits, but in the Chamberlain's Accounts for the same year both men were named and described as 'the waytes of the towne'. Further quarterly payments to the Waits were made that year, although these men's names are not repeated until the following year. In subsequent years (eg: 1576-1577) they were again named and paid, but they were no longer being designated as Waits. That title was apparently given to them only for the years immediately following the Royal visit. Not long afterwards they are simply referred to as 'the drome and Phiff' and in the next year's accounts Philip is replaced by Thomas Strong ('Angell shawe and Thomas Stronge ... viz. the drome and Phif'). Payments to both men continued for some years, but in the Chamberlain's Accounts for 1582-1583 only Angel

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<sup>49</sup> Polk, 'Susato and the Repertory and Performance Practices of his time', in *Tielman Susato*, 196

<sup>50</sup> REED, *Sussex*, 121



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Shaw was paid, and there he is usually described by some such designation as 'Angell Shawe Drome'.<sup>51</sup>

There had been town minstrels in Rye for a long time. The first unequivocal reference to 'the Town Minstrelles' (who were liveried) was in 1487-1488, but some earlier references to minstrels could reasonably be interpreted as references to the town's minstrels rather than to random minstrels.<sup>52</sup> Subsequent references to town minstrels occur often enough to suggest an established band, who in 1515 were finally referred to as 'the Waytes of the Townn'. (In passing one notes an early instance of the term *minstrel* being discarded in favour of another term that warranted these musicians as licensed.) In 1558/9 there was reference to 'the waites cotes'. However, there was a significant change in 1562, when John Strong was paid for 'going about as the wait' (note the singular).<sup>53</sup> Thomas Strong, who replaced Philip (see previous paragraph) is quite likely to have been John Strong's son; as Thomas was a fife-player, it is conceivable, although not certain, that his father was a fifer too. At all events, there had been Waits in Rye well before Queen Elizabeth's visit, but the impression given is that they had declined from the more usual three-man band of the later 1400s, to a duo, and then to a solo drummer. The lack of civic support for music was possibly a result of the town's Puritanical disposition.<sup>54</sup>

There is no indication whatsoever that Angel played anything other than the drum or that Philip (and subsequently Thomas) played anything other than the fife. Neither instrument would require advanced musical skills: a sense of rhythm on the part of the drummer, and an ability on the part of the fifer to play tunes on the fife, would suffice.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-132

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 59

<sup>53</sup> REED, *Sussex*, 118

<sup>54</sup> Marsh, 126

Whatever the musical effectiveness of this duo, neither needed to be capable of reading music from notation: nothing more than monody and rhythmic accompaniment was required. No ability to improvise counterpoint was entailed, and someone like Whythorne might well think that, although Angel and Philip might be called Waits, they should not be called *musicians*.

Yet it was Angel and Philip who found themselves named as Waits and anticipating the arrival of Elizabeth I in 1573, on one of her periodic progresses. Given that there is no record of designated Waits in the years immediately preceding Elizabeth's progress in 1573, it is reasonable to think that the custom of appointing Waits in Rye had lapsed, but had then been hastily revived for the Royal visit. Certainly, the decision was taken to present Angel and Philip under the appellation of *Waits* even though that designation, as noted above, was only temporary.

No comment about the ability of Angel and his companion survives, but the drum-and-fife duo had a more honourable place in the 1500s than we might perhaps assume. Drum-and-fife was a well-established combination - most often in a military context. In German-speaking territories 'one kind of transverse flute was coupled with the field drum'.<sup>55</sup> In the early 1500s, Emperor Maximilian I had a drum and fife (possibly transverse flute), known as the 'Swiss Pair', in his court entourage. Wurtemberg and Munich had Swiss Pairs at that time too, as did the Brandenburg and Bavarian courts.<sup>56</sup> A similar pair were later employed by Charles V among his Burgundian musicians. This combination 'brought with it a certain cachet' because of its association with the dreaded Swiss infantry.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Keith Polk, *German Instrumental Music of the late Middle Ages*, 41

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 101, 102

<sup>57</sup> Paul Coelho and Keith Polk, *Instrumentalists and Renaissance Culture, 1420-1600*, 26, 33, 283

Such drum-and-flute combinations were known in England too. Elizabeth had her own corps of drums-and-fifes.<sup>58</sup> Lord Arundel went to great expense in entertaining Elizabeth in 1559, and the feast was complemented by a 'maske with drums and flutes, and all the musyke that colde be.'<sup>59</sup> A diary entry by Henry Machin in 1553 notes firstly 'the whets [*waits*] playing', after which 'came on drume and a flutt playing'.<sup>60</sup> Another contemporary Wait who was paid for playing on the flute alongside a drummer was Robert Askew of Newcastle.<sup>61</sup> Although we might today assume it was a rather lowly music, this instrumental combination was held in honour because of its association with soldiers and sailors. It was widely accepted at the time that the music of drums encouraged soldiers' combative instincts and bolstered their morale.<sup>62</sup> This type of duo, then, was widely known, but associated primarily with 'martial, functional music that had little connection ... with more artistic ensembles'.<sup>63</sup>

What we have in Rye in 1573, then, is the functional use of music for essentially political purposes. Elizabeth's government ordered general military musters in 1572, 1573 and 1574, and considerable evidence can be cited to show that civic pageantry in the 1570s took a distinctly militaristic turn.<sup>64</sup> In 1567 William Pelham had proposed that the musicians taking part in civic entertainments 'on festevall days [should] shew themselves with drome and fyfe'.<sup>65</sup> The civic authorities in Rye evidently took him at his word: indeed their employment of a duo whose music would provide symbolic, as well as sonic,

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<sup>58</sup> Butler, 206

<sup>59</sup> David Price, *Patrons*, 160

<sup>60</sup> Marsh, 505

<sup>61</sup> REED, *Newcastle*, 52,94

<sup>62</sup> Marsh, 55

<sup>63</sup> Polk, *German Instrumental*, 45

<sup>64</sup> C.E.McGee, 'Mysteries, Musters and Masque' in J.E.Archer, E.Golding and S.Knight (eds.) *The Progresses, Pageants and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, 104

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

encouragement to the troops was in keeping with the belief that military readiness was crucial for national security.<sup>66</sup> In the light of the military concerns of the time the previously unprecedented Royal visit by Queen Elizabeth I, to a port at which soldiers and sailors might embark, had strong political logic behind it. By comparison with such considerations, the musical literacy of Angel and Philip would have had no part to play in the town's deliberations as they planned the ceremonies to welcome the Queen. It was enough, at one level, that they banged the drum; the likelihood is that even the fife was of secondary importance here. Whilst the Elizabethans might not have countenanced this way of putting it, Angel and Philip can be understood as 'acoustical and visual symbols as well as performers' in this context.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, given that the nation was being put on a war-footing, they were on this occasion an entirely appropriate duo to be designated as Waits, representing their town.

## **2c Reflections on Waits in Liverpool and Rye**

Neither Halewood nor the Rye-duo played shawms, so often regarded as the primary instrument of the Waits. The association of the Waits with shawms was very well-established by the 1500s - not least by the fact that the shawms, as well as the musicians, could be referred to as waits or wait-pipes.<sup>68</sup> The examples of Rye and of Liverpool show that it was by no means absolutely necessary that the Wait/s played shawms, or, for that matter, the curtal, lysard, cornett, and recorders, which are also among the Waits' characteristic instruments.<sup>69</sup> Whilst it would be tendentious to give too much weight to these Liverpool and Rye Waits (such one/two-man bands are the exception rather than the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

<sup>67</sup> Kisby, 7

<sup>68</sup> Rastall, *Minstrelsy* (see footnote 2)

<sup>69</sup> *The list of Waits' instruments in the Exeter records for 1590*. REED, *Exeter*, 172

rule) these instances do show that that anyone exhibiting ability to play on at least one instrument could, in principle, be designated a Wait. Indeed, Merryweather has raised the question as to whether the Wait in Dover simply blew a horn and was in no way concerned with melody.<sup>70</sup> It seems not unfeasible. At times the civic purpose would be served if, at the very least, the instrument was of a kind that would compel attention; any melody or harmony would be a bonus. Horn, bagpipes, or a fife and drum, might serve the town's purpose well enough. As these Waits show, the civic/urban agenda was not necessarily one that required the Waits to be shawm-players or to be able to perform anything musically complex, sophisticated, or even necessarily tuneful - although that might customarily be preferred.

Exceptions such as these should not, however, obscure the fact that the ability to perform well on their particular instruments was surely necessary for most Waits, albeit - as the examples in Rye and Liverpool show - musical literacy would be of much less importance than practical performance capability, in such instances. It is, I think, significant that Halewood's ability to play the bagpipes was not what brought his Wait service into question, and it seems possible to infer that he would only have been given as many second-chances as he was because his playing was proficient, even if his moral character was questionable. There were occasional instances of Waits being dismissed because of their inability to play their instruments properly. In York, in 1584, two of the Waits were dismissed for drunkenness and 'for that [*they*] cannot so connynglie play on their instruments as they ought to',<sup>71</sup> although both men were to be found in the lists of Waits in subsequent years.<sup>72</sup> Yet instances of dismissal for a poor standard of performance are very

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<sup>70</sup> James Merryweather, 'Dover's Wait', note published on the website [townwaits.org.uk](http://townwaits.org.uk), accessed 20.5.20.

<sup>71</sup> REED, *York*, 40

<sup>72</sup> Merryweather, *York Music*, 78

rare indeed. If such dismissal is so seldom encountered in the record then either – as seems inherently unlikely - the towns were happy to tolerate ongoing musical incompetence, or else their civic musicians were generally competent.

Civic employment gave Henry, Angel, and Philip a foothold among the lower social orders, and also put them (though not perhaps very securely) above the level of itinerant *minstrels* of the 1572 Act. Yet someone like Whythorne would not have considered them *musicians*. No musical literacy was required of them in respect of reading notation, let alone in compassing counterpoint and/or composition. It is impossible to be absolutely certain that the Wait/s of Liverpool and of Rye were any better than the Waits of Edinburgh, who were criticised by the poet William Dunbar on the grounds that they could play only two tunes.<sup>73</sup> However, Dunbar was a satirist, and he was doubtless overstating the point. His remark can perhaps be taken to indicate that some Waits had a limited repertoire reflecting a limited musical skill-set. If Halewood and his contemporaries in Rye were in this *class* of Wait, then they can only be accounted as Whythorne's 'pettifoggers' of music.

Before acceding to such a negative appraisal, however, it is worth pausing to consider what musical skills one/two-man bands most obviously needed. The extent of their ability to memorize need involve only tunes, perhaps with some variations. Historical-dance re-enactors often prefer little or no variation, taking the view that variations obscure the rhythmic drive or risk confusing the memory of the steps and movements. If their historical forebears were similar then a straightforward rendition of the dance tune, with

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<sup>73</sup> Langwill, 6.

perhaps only minor variations, would suffice. If it did, then Halewood, Shaw and any others of this *class* of Wait were fit enough for occasion, but otherwise relatively low-skilled.

That said, the impression from the records of Waits in towns such as Exeter, Bristol, Colchester, Lincoln, Newcastle (to name but a few) is that civic musicians of whatever kind needed to have suitable music to play for civic ceremony. Whilst one could perhaps get away with one or two tune medleys without much variation, this would be limited fare to serve in all contexts. It seems probable, therefore, that a solo Wait in such circumstances would have at least some ability to extemporise. Such musical embellishment had long been the mark of the professional musician, and might enhance the impressiveness of the aural performance.<sup>74</sup>

What might well be needed of the lone melodist (whether bagpiper or fife player) was some ability to extemporise around a given tune, whether ballad or dance tune. A famous example of a solo civic performer is Jacob van Eyck, born c.1585, who performed in Utrecht. He became an expert carillonneur, but was especially famed for his variations for recorder. His blindness was no bar to his musical ability, and his variations so impressed that, in cooperation with an amanuensis, they were written down in *Der Fluyten Lust-hof* (1649).<sup>75</sup> The relevance is twofold. Firstly, his selection of material on which to base his variations: in all but a few instances, he used well-known ballads, and songs both sacred and secular. It is highly likely that such songs, along with dance tunes, would have been the mainstay of both a bagpiper in Liverpool, or a fifer in a Rye duo. Secondly, whilst we have no way of knowing the quality of performance in Liverpool or Rye, van Eyck's notated versions of his own performances show something of what might be possible for a solo

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<sup>74</sup> See, eg: Coelho/Polk (in Haar, *European*) 541, 555

<sup>75</sup> Thiemo Wind, *Jacob van Eyck*, in *Oxford Grove Music Online*, accessed 15.6.20

musician in such contexts. We cannot assume that this standard, or anything like it, was reached in Liverpool or Rye, but nor should we automatically assume that the standard of musical performance in those towns was poor. Most of us, whatever our level of musical literacy, can remember quite a lot of tunes if we have heard or sung them often enough. To create variations, extemporising on those tunes, requires a higher level of musicianship, but not to such an extent as to render it impossible that in Liverpool and in Rye they heard musically capable soloists. The danger is that, in reflecting on Halewood and his Rye contemporaries, a kind of automatic pessimism takes over that very easily turns us into latter-day Whythornes, assuming a level of musical incompetence on the part of these somewhat idiosyncratic Waits that is no more *automatically* justified than a naïvely romantic idealisation of these relatively humble performers.

### **3 Elizabethan Waits in Coventry**

Elizabethan Coventry was much more populous than either Liverpool or Rye; its population remained around six-and-a-half thousand during the sixteenth century.<sup>76</sup> It had declined a little from the wealthy city in which King Henry VI had resided for a number of years during the Wars of the Roses. The city suffered plague in the early 1520s, and what has been described as a 'subsistence crisis'.<sup>77</sup> Even so, Coventry had maintained a Waits band that is more representative of the Waits in such prosperous major cities as Bristol, York and Newcastle. Four Waits was a typical number for the period, which might see an increase to five, or more.<sup>78</sup> The Coventry Waits were a band of four men in the Elizabethan period, and their musical experience turns out to have been wide-ranging.

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<sup>76</sup> Clark and Slack, 83

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 84

<sup>78</sup> REED volumes, *passim*.



**3a Thomas Nicholas – Coventry Singing-man, Wait, Composer**

Thomas Nicholas was a Coventry Wait,<sup>79</sup> and also a singing-man in Holy Trinity Church.<sup>80</sup> A specific note in the Coventry Cappers' Guild Accounts of 1569: 'payd Thomas Nyclys for prikinge the songes'.<sup>81</sup> Whereas *pricking* a song might mean simply copying it out, what gives particular significance to the 1563 Drapers' accounts payment 'to Thomas nycles for **setting** a songe xjd' is its implications for his musical literacy.<sup>82</sup> Rastall argues that the Drapers' account reference to *setting* is a clear indication of the composition of the music rather than just copying it out.<sup>83</sup> (The Cappers' accounts distinguish between *pricking* and *making* a song - but frustrate the researcher by failing to name the 'maker'.) Thomas Nicholas, then, composed some music for the Drapers' pageant. He has to be considered musically literate, and - even by Whythorne's demanding standards - worthy of being considered a *musician*.

In order to have gained such musical literacy it is most likely that Nicholas had been educated in music as a choirboy. Had his training been primarily as an instrumentalist then it is doubtful that he would have become a singing-man, because the training necessary for that role took place in the singing-schools attached, usually, to cathedrals or major churches. As a singing-boy he is likely to have had a thorough grounding in music. An 'extensive instruction in chant-based descant (*counterpoint*) techniques' was central to

<sup>79</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 243 and elsewhere.

<sup>80</sup> Holy Trinity Church, Coventry, *Churchwardens' Accounts* for the Elizabethan period, held as part of the Coventry Diocesan Archives at Warwick Records Office.

<sup>81</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 249. The only other reference to anyone *pricking* songs in Coventry around this time was Thomas Wotton, who copied some 'songs' for Holy Trinity in 1559/60 – Rastall, *Heaven Singing*, 199

<sup>82</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 237

<sup>83</sup> Rastall, *Minstrels Playing*, 65

chorister education until 1565 even if it may have declined somewhat in many cathedrals and major churches thereafter.<sup>84</sup> What of Nicholas' fellow singing-men, and fellow Waits?

### **3b Coventry Waits as musically literate singingmen in Holy Trinity Church**

There is, of course, no necessary overlap between Waits and singing-men. Plenty of Waits were not, as far as we know, singing-men. The Elizabethan Waits of Coventry, however, seem to have treated the two roles as a kind of matched pair. Moreover, if you were a singing-man then you were likely to be musically literate. A Wait might be a practical musician without musical literacy, as (most probably) was the case in Rye and Liverpool. However, a singing-man who was also a Wait would be musically literate by default, as it were, whether or not his instrumental performance demanded such musical literacy.

Thomas Nicholas was not the only Coventry Wait to be a singing-man. Other named Waits in Coventry at this period who were also singing-men at Holy Trinity include Richard Sadler and Richard Stiff. Examining the Holy Trinity Churchwardens' Accounts in detail, the names of Thomas Nicholas, Richard Sadler, and 'Goodman' Styffe appear throughout the period from 1573-1577, after which Thomas Nicholas was no longer recorded as a singing-man. In 1580 Sadler no longer appears; he was replaced by Anthony Stiff, probably Richard's son. The Stiffs continued throughout the 1580s when there seem only to have been two singing-men, unless Thomas Pitts, elsewhere designated as Sexton, was also a singing-man. There was thus a period of at least fifteen years when the members of the Coventry Waits included one or more of the singing-men from Holy Trinity.<sup>85</sup> For some of

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<sup>84</sup> Tessa Murray, *Thomas Morley, Elizabethan Music Publisher*, 8

<sup>85</sup> Holy Trinity Church, *Churchwardens' Accounts* for the Elizabethan period, checked against a spreadsheet Dr Jonathan Willis kindly shared based on his own research on these accounts.

that time there was a complete overlap, when three of the four Waits in Coventry were also singing-men in Holy Trinity Church.

The religious upheavals of the period made it an uncertain time for church musicians. That they continued to function at all depended on an Injunction (49) issued alongside the 1559 Book of Common Prayer. The injunction stated that 'no alterations be made of such assignments of living, as heretofore have been appointed to the use of singing or music in the Church, but that the same so remain'.<sup>86</sup> There were, however, major changes in the services, as English replaced Latin and the Prayer Book replaced the Catholic offices. The Latin polyphony that had been the regular diet of a previous generation of choristers was now probably reserved for the Chapel Royal, or the Oxford and Cambridge colleges which were still allowed latitude in such matters.<sup>87</sup> That there was some decline in church music outside of the Court and University settings, is generally acknowledged.<sup>88</sup> 'English canticles for matins and evensong, with an English anthem alongside musically bland psalmody and litany' posed fewer musical demands than heretofore, but church music did not completely falter.<sup>89</sup> Temperley avers that 'many churches retained for a while a small choir ... [that] sang simple polyphonic music of the kind found in the Edwardian partbooks' such as the Wanley partbooks.<sup>90</sup> However, John Day's publication of four-part Psalm settings (suited to choral presentation) was not reprinted, whereas the monophonic settings (suited to congregational singing) went into many reprints.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England*, 56

<sup>87</sup> Alan Atlas, *Renaissance Music*, 667

<sup>88</sup> Mould, *The English Chorister*, 96

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 97

<sup>90</sup> Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church Music*, 40

<sup>91</sup> Temperley, 53

The Churchwardens' Accounts for Holy Trinity, Coventry, show that in 1560 they had purchased a Procession book, four Psalters and four Psalm books 'in meter', but there is no clear evidence for the latter being polyphonic works, even though the number involved might suggest that the books were intended for the singing-men. The Holy Trinity choristers of the 1570s would also have been witnesses to the dismantling of their splendid organ.<sup>92</sup> Convocation, the Church's parliament, had tried to ban organs (in church) altogether in 1562, but had been defeated, albeit by only one vote.<sup>93</sup> It seems likely, then, that during the 1570s, when Holy Trinity's singing-men were also Waits, the extent and quality of church music would have been poorer than it might have been thirty years before.

Yet nothing in the previous paragraphs changes the likelihood that these singing-men would have had the same kind of chorister training as earlier generations, and even though the demands on them in the 1560s were not what they would have been in the 1530s, these Holy Trinity singing-men who were also Waits would certainly be musically literate in the sense of being able to read from musical notation if occasion demanded. The musical training that was given to boys from 1550 onwards seems to have continued on much the same lines as before, despite the liturgical changes consequent upon the Elizabethan church settlement. If the singing-men/Waits were Coventrians by birth (and it is probable that more of them were than were not) then it was most likely that their training would have been in a local singing school, and a city record notes, in 1581, that 'There is in St lohne's a Singing schoole'.<sup>94</sup> It was not new. The school at Bablake, associated with the church of St John the Baptist, had been closed in 1548, a victim of the

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ*, x

<sup>93</sup> Mould, 96

<sup>94</sup> Coventry Record Office 424, 71. *Current circumstances (COVID) have made it impossible to double-check this.*

Chantries' Act, but was revived in 1560 by Thomas Wheatley, who endowed it from riches that had unexpectedly come his way. Singing boys from the school at Bablake make fairly frequent appearances in the records of the Carpenters' Guild in the later 1580s onwards.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, a separate grammar school in Coventry had been founded by John Hales, Henry VIII's Clerk to the Hanaper. King Henry VIII's School (as it is now known) was inaugurated in, or shortly after, 1545, as a condition of Hales' being granted a large amount of former monastery land and property in and around Coventry.<sup>96</sup> What this means is that, despite the complete destruction of St Mary's Cathedral Priory at the Dissolution, education (including musical education) in Coventry was probably not too seriously disrupted by the effects of the Dissolution. The singing-men in Holy Trinity could have had a thorough musical education in the city.

Singing-boys were 'expected not simply to be able to read music but also to improvise descants and decorative versions of melodic lines'.<sup>97</sup> It may be that there was less call for such abilities in the churches during Elizabeth's reign, but the changes that took place did not mean that teaching singing was completely redundant. The Carpenters' Guild must have been happy enough to hear secular songs at their dinners, performed by the choristers from Bablake,<sup>98</sup> as these boys made repeat appearances on those occasions, and clearly continued to be musically trained. Even the grammar school paid specific attention to teaching Music, making it something of an exception among such schools.<sup>99</sup> There were cases such as Archbishop Rotherham's College where the teacher of 'song' (ie:

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<sup>95</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 315

<sup>96</sup> King Henry VIII School, Coventry, website, section on History of the School

<sup>97</sup> Alan Mould, *The English Chorister*, 102

<sup>98</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 315, 318

<sup>99</sup> Wikipedia entry on King Henry VIII School, Coventry. My attempts to contact the school Archivist have been unsuccessful.

music) was pensioned off whilst the teacher of grammar was retained,<sup>100</sup> and it has been averred that it is difficult to be definitive about exactly how music was taught in Elizabethan-era schools.<sup>101</sup> However, Marsh argues that there is evidence that rather more music was taught in the newer grammar schools than might previously have been thought.<sup>102</sup>

Whatever they might have done as singing-men, it is impossible to be sure that the Coventry Waits made use of notated music when performing as Waits. What the above account aims to establish, however, is not that the Coventry Waits in the Elizabethan period necessarily used notated music, but rather that they would have been capable of doing so if the occasion demanded: in other words, that they were musically literate. They might well have chosen to continue the longstanding practice of memorising much of their repertoire, and even of improvising some of it. Before venturing into that topic, however, there is another Coventry Wait of the time, very closely associated with those already mentioned, whose career offers further scope for reflection on the likelihood of musical literacy among these Waits.

### **3c James Hewett, Keyboard-player, Wait and Composer**

James Hewett was a Wait in Coventry from 1554 to 1584. The last unequivocal reference to James Hewett is in a Waits payment for 1584. Although we know little of his music-making as a Wait as such, we do have information about his other musical activities. Hewett is described in the records as 'James Huwet organpleier'.<sup>103</sup> That designation alone

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<sup>100</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Education*, 322

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Willis, 'By These Means the Sacred Discourses Sink More Deeply into the Minds of Men': Music and Education in Elizabethan England', 300

<sup>102</sup> Marsh, 8

<sup>103</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 211

would situate him among the mid-to-upper ranks of Whythorne's musicians and remove him from the Elizabethan infamy of being a *minstrel*.

By far the largest number of references to Hewett occur in the context of his providing Regals (a keyboard instrument) at the Guild drama performances known as the Mystery Plays. Coventry's plays were famed throughout England in the Middle Ages. Although these dramas were based on Biblical stories, they were organised by the City's Guilds, and stood outside the direct control of the Church authorities. Even so, changes in religious sensibility brought about by the upheavals of the Reformation meant that the famous Guild Plays of Coventry were discontinued in 1579-1580: the last of their kind to be performed. Even the texts of these dramas very largely disappeared, with the notable exceptions of the York cycle of plays, some Chester plays, and just a couple of the Coventry ones.

It is in the context of the plays that James Hewett is first encountered. The 1554 entry relating to Hewett reads: 'payd to lames hewet for hys Reygalles' viij.d. The Weavers' Guild payments that include this record are all concerned with the 'pagent' – thus making it clear that the regals are being used in the drama.<sup>104</sup> The regals have been described as a 'small portable reed organ with snarling tone, reminiscent of a crumhorn consort'.<sup>105</sup> Henry VIII's collection of musical instruments included twenty regals.<sup>106</sup> One other example of their use was in the Chester mystery plays.<sup>107</sup> Such an instrument may have been the tradition of the Coventry and Chester guild-plays: there is very little evidence of their use elsewhere in England at this time. Michael Praetorius makes reference to them in

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<sup>104</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 199

<sup>105</sup> Jerome and Elizabeth Roche, *A Dictionary of Early Music*, 161

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Ashbee, *Records of English Court Music VII*, 384-386

<sup>107</sup> REED, *Chester*, 78

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*Syntagma Musicum* (1619): 'an organist ... should be placed nearby with either a positive organ or a regal';<sup>108</sup> the rather casual way in which he makes this reference suggests that he was accustomed to the use of regals at the Court of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel. Whether fashionable, ubiquitous, or neither, regals possessed one distinct advantage outdoors, as in the performance of the plays, in that the sound would generally carry further than the flutier sound of a portative organ. Organs<sup>109</sup> certainly had been used, on occasion, in earlier times, as is indicated by an undated (but probably mid-1530's) entry in Coventry's Drapers' accounts: 'It for beryng forth of the organs'.<sup>110</sup> For the Guild plays, Hewett used his regals.

'Item payd to lames hewet for hys rygoles xx.d'.<sup>111</sup> Spelling apart, the 1562 entry is identical with that of 1554. Indeed, this is the most common form of reference to James Hewett, occurring - in almost identical wording - in twelve of the Weavers' Guild Account records between 1554 and 1572, and in seven of the Drapers' Guild Account records between 1563 and 1570. The Weavers' record for 1556 reads: 'payd to lames hewet for playing of hys Rygoles in the paygent'. There are three such references including the specific word 'playing', all from the Weavers' accounts: in 1556, 1557, and again in 1573. It seems beyond doubt, therefore, that in all cases Hewett was being paid for playing the instrument, as well as for the use of the instrument.

After 1573 both the Weavers' and Drapers' records are unhelpfully brief, and no names are mentioned. The record for 1576 simply reads: 'paid for playing on the Rygoles iiij.d'. Given that Hewett was still active then, and that he was also by then the apparent

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<sup>108</sup> Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum III*, ed. Jeffery Kite-Powell, 125.

<sup>109</sup> *There is no evidence to suggest that distinctions between organs and regals were not usually observed, probably because the sound of the regals is so distinctive.*

<sup>110</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 471

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 219



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leader of the City Waits,<sup>112</sup> it would not be unreasonable to suppose that he continued to be the supplier and player of the regals in the Weavers' and Drapers' pageants until they ceased. A vestige of uncertainty remains, though, as Hewett was not the only regals player to be mentioned in the records. One 'Raffe Aman'<sup>113</sup> was paid for 'playng on the ryggellys vj d' in an undated account.<sup>114</sup> Ralph can be shown to have been active in 1558 and in 1563, so he is at least partly contemporary with Hewett. 'Rauf a man the weit' is paid in 1564 alongside William Androwes, but this is the only known reference to Ralph as a Wait. The 1565 entry records payment to four unnamed Waits.<sup>115</sup>

Both Hewett and Ralph are designated as Waits, although their names are never concurrent in that respect; both men played the regals; both received a grant from White's charity. The Coventry Council Book for 1558 includes a record of payment from White's alms money to 'Rauff a man organpleyer'.<sup>116</sup> The next year's record (1559), in exactly the same context, has 'ffurst to Iames Huwet organpleier'.<sup>117</sup> The sum given to both men is 40 shillings. There were thus at least two musicians in Coventry who played the regals, and combined being a Wait with being designated as organ-players.

As organ-players/regalists - contemporaries would have expected anyone who played the one to play the other - Hewett and Ralph were highly likely to have been musically literate. On the one hand they might have attended singing-school, and learnt the organ whilst they were singing-boys (the route taken by such eminent composers as Thomas Tomkins and Orlando Gibbons), in which case their musical literacy - especially

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<sup>112</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 297, 'Hewit and the ministrilles'. Also, his name listed first in the list of Waits, 243,251

<sup>113</sup> There are four references to 'Raffe a man' in the Holy Trinity Churchwardens' Accounts.

<sup>114</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 475

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 225

<sup>116</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 209

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 211

given their employment as musicians in adulthood - can almost certainly be taken as given. On the other hand, it is possible that they might have gained their organists' training through an apprentice system. Clear evidence of such a possibility is provided by the records in Exeter, where (in the late 1540s – a precise date cannot be specified) Thomas Wyncott, the cathedral organist, was taken to court by his apprentice, John Yeo, who complained that he had not been taught, as agreed, to 'playe upon the vyalles, vyrgynalles & Organs'.<sup>118</sup> Although this type of apprentice-organist training was distinct from a singing-school education, and might have an emphasis on practical keyboard skills, it seems unlikely that it would have left the trainee without the ability to read notated music. More detailed reference will be made later to the Norwich apprentice-Wait who was specifically gaining such instruction. It therefore seems to be a reasonable presumption, (especially given his role as chief-Wait among a group who, apart from him as far as we know, were all singing-men) that Hewett was musically literate. Even Whythorne seems to assume that organ-players will have a respectable level of musical literacy.<sup>119</sup>

Other evidence also points to Hewett's musical literacy. Rastall affirms the high degree of probability that Hewett both wrote the words for, and composed music for *Beholde now hit ys come to pase*, 'the second song-text preserved with the Weaver's play', which song is 'ascribed to James Hewitt'.<sup>120</sup> In that case his musical status, in terms of Whythorne's thinking, becomes much more elevated than were he merely a performer.

### **3d Goldstone: chief Coventry Wait c.1590**

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<sup>118</sup> REED, *Devon*, 140. (Wyncott's response was that Yeo showed no aptitude or willingness to learn the instruments, but the final outcome is not given in REED *Devon*, and may not, therefore, be known.)

<sup>119</sup> Whythorne, 233

<sup>120</sup> Rastall, *Minstrels*, 209

The Waits in Coventry towards the end of Elizabeth's reign were led by Goldstone (first name unknown). He first appears in the records in 1584, as an apparently independent musician, playing at a dinner at Cheylesmore Manor.<sup>121</sup> After that his appearances are quite frequent, including for 'Sounding the trumpet' in 1587.<sup>122</sup> His versatility is further indicated by a Weavers' Book record of 1586 in which he was paid for 'mendinge our Instrumentes'.<sup>123</sup> Goldstone's involvement with the Waits is shown in records of 1590 and 1594 when he was paid 'for ye waites of this Cittie', his leadership emphasised by the fact that, in 1589 he had received the Waits' silver scutcheons.<sup>124</sup> Whythorne, one imagines, would tell us that none of this confirms his musical literacy – but the relative frequency of his freelance appearances may give some hint as to his talents, and the fact that in 1600 we find Goldstone listed among the Schoolmasters of the city is yet more evidence that he was an educated musician.<sup>125</sup> Teachers of music might not have been in the first rank as far as Whythorne was concerned, but they were not *minstrels*.

### **3e**     **Reflections on the Waits in Coventry**

Over the course of the Elizabethan period the Waits in Coventry included at least six musicians who were either singing-men or organists, and who must therefore have been *musically literate* insofar as they would have been able to read music. In one certain, and one probable, case they composed music. Coventry's Waits were in an altogether different *class* from Halewood of Liverpool, or Angel and Philip in Rye, making it difficult to sustain Langwill's assumption of the common character of Waits as belonging to one *class*. Today,

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<sup>121</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 302

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 317

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 315

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 327, 340, 588

<sup>125</sup> REED, *Coventry*, 356

unlike Whythorne, we would acknowledge all of these performers as *musicians*, but some of them – Coventry's included - were capable of a wider range of musical skills than others.

#### **4 Elizabethan Waits in Norwich**

##### **4a Musical reputation**

The Elizabethan Waits of Norwich achieved resounding fame by comparison with the Coventry band, possibly because of success breeding yet greater success rather than a necessary guarantee that their musical abilities were vastly superior. However, Norwich, in Elizabethan times, was considerably more populous and economically significant than Liverpool, Rye, or for that matter, Coventry. It was far larger than those towns, being second only to London in population (some fourteen thousand inhabitants) in the Elizabethan period.<sup>126</sup> By the end of Elizabeth's reign the renown of its Waits band depended on two chief reasons. Firstly, Waits from Norwich accompanied Sir Francis Drake, at his specific request, on his voyage to Portugal in 1589; sadly the excursion proved fatal for three of them.<sup>127</sup> Secondly, in 1600, when Will Kempe completed his *Nine Daies Wonder* he wrote an encomium on the Norwich Waits that would confirm their reputation: 'fewe Citties in our Realme haue the like, none better'.<sup>128</sup>

Such a direct statement valorising the Waits is rare; either the nature of such records as we have (chiefly administrative) usually omits such appraisals, or Waits were so much a part of the civic ceremonial as often to be taken for granted. Nevertheless, a hundred years before Drake and Kempe the reputation of the Norwich Waits was evidently already high, as in 1475 King Edward IV had requested the Norwich Waits to accompany

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<sup>126</sup> Clark and Slack, 83

<sup>127</sup> George Stephen, *The Waits of the City of Norwich through Four Centuries to 1790*, 14

<sup>128</sup> REED, *Norwich*, xliii

him to France.<sup>129</sup> Perhaps that is also why King's College Cambridge chose to employ the Norwich Waits at a feast in 1562/3 despite there being at least one, and possibly two, Waits bands in Cambridge at the time.<sup>130</sup> These examples suggest that the Waits of Norwich were most certainly in a different *class* from their fellows in Liverpool or Rye.

#### **4b Musical literacy among the Norwich Waits**

That Norwich took an interest in the musical literacy of its Waits is evident from a record in the 1534/5 Chamberlains' Accounts: 'to the Waytes at comandement fforsed for studying to playe vpon the prykson'.<sup>131</sup> It is worth considering the implications of this note. Boys brought up as choristers would have already known *pricksong*, so it would seem that the City was ensuring that boys who might have been brought up to play an instrument, but who might not have otherwise been trained in *literate* music, were being required, as Waits, to gain that level of musical education.

Norwich records provide some details of Waits' apprenticeships. In 1558/9 Thomas Knott, son of Hammond Knott, was apprenticed to Michael Knott (possibly his uncle?). Michael Knott was listed among the Norwich Waits in 1557, 1558 and 1559. He may have held the role for longer, but no names of Waits are given for some years before or after those dates. To the modern understanding there are two strikingly contrasting elements to this apprenticeship: Knott was required to teach Thomas to become a rowemason (construction work), but at the same time he would teach Thomas to play 'vpon the vyoll ... and harpe as also to synge playnesonge & pryksonge'. At the end of the apprenticeship

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<sup>129</sup> Stephen, 7

<sup>130</sup> REED, *Cambridge*, 730

<sup>131</sup> Carole Janssen, 'The Waytes of Norwich and Renaissance Civic Pageantry', (*unpublished PhD thesis*) 234

Thomas was to be given what may now seem the odd mixture of two musical instruments (viol and harp) and a variety of masonry tools.<sup>132</sup>

This record prompts various reflections. Firstly, it serves to remind us that a Wait would have been very fortunate indeed to rely solely on his musical services to bring in a sufficient income. Other jobs were often held in tandem with being a Wait. For example, Robert Thacker, one of those Waits who died on Drake's expedition, was listed in the record of 1580/81 as a Water Bailiff for the city – just a year after a rather different record of him being paid for the purchase of a sackbutt for the Waits.<sup>133</sup> A second reflection is that the indenture specifically refers to the apprentice Wait being taught plainsong and pricksong. Such musical literacy was clearly seen as an essential part of training a Wait in Norwich. Had Thomas been a chorister he would not need such instruction: lacking it, the indenture seeks to ensure that he would gain the necessary musical literacy. Thirdly, the instruments that are specifically mentioned are not those most usually associated with the Waits, at least in the late Medieval and early Tudor period. There is no mention here of shawms, which, of course, he may already have possessed or have been able to access through his fellow-Waits. Instead the instruments are those which would more readily fit into the context of more intimate chamber-music rather than outdoor ceremonial.

Indoor performance, for example at Guild dinners and feasts, had always been part of the Waits' ancillary work, and did not require the louder instruments. Waits may indeed have played on the softer instruments for longer than is now apparent, but there are no references to the softer instruments in records relating specifically to the Waits until the

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<sup>132</sup> REED, *Norwich*, 47

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

later 1500s. Around 1570 such references begin to appear in the records and multiply by around 1600 (see section 5, below).

#### **4c Extending the range of instruments and genres**

The indenture record cited above is just one piece of evidence among a number that show that the Waits in Norwich were responding to changes in musical fashions and genres, and which meant that they needed to be able to play a wider range of instruments. The music for some of the instrumental ensemble-pieces was likely to rely on the ability to read musical notation rather than to improvise or memorize (see below). Shawms had not been forgotten, though. Before they went off on their voyage with Drake the Waits were provided not only with some new livery, but also with some new instruments, including three new shawms, a treble recorder, and a sackbut case.<sup>134</sup> Drake presumably wanted both loud and softer instruments on board his ship in 1589.

Twelve years before Drake requested the Norwich Waits for his voyage, Queen Elizabeth had visited Norwich. Perhaps word had filtered back through her Courtiers that the Waits of Norwich were excellent players? On the occasion of her visit, the 'Waites of the Citie were placed with loude Musicke, who cheerefully and melodiously welcomed hyr Maiestie'.<sup>135</sup> One notes again the approbation which these Norwich Waits received. In another account we hear of 'a noble noyse of Musicke of al kind of instruments, seuerally to be sounded and played vpon'.<sup>136</sup> Then on another day during the visit 'the Musitions within the gate played vpon their softe instruments vsed broken Musicke and one of them did sing'.<sup>137</sup> The indoor, or enclosed, space ('within' the gate) is more suited to the soft

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<sup>134</sup> REED, *Norwich*, 92

<sup>135</sup> Stephen, 11

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

<sup>137</sup> REED, *Norwich*, 261

instruments. Whilst this record fails to specify these musicians as the Waits, given that the Waits had played for the entry, and unless the Queen's own musicians were involved (of which there is no evidence at all) it is probable that this refers to the Waits. On the Friday of the Queen's visit there was 'very sweet Musicke' at St Benet's Gate.<sup>138</sup> Again, it is impossible to say *for certain* that the Waits were playing that music, but on balance that seems the most likely conclusion. We know that the Waits had the softer instruments, and the strong probability that the references above are to the Waits suggests that it is reasonable to claim that by 1578 the Waits in Norwich were entirely capable not only of presenting the ceremonial loud music that had long been the stock-in-trade of Waits groups, but could also perform music in a gentler mode.

The 'broken music' reference is also interesting because (whichever of two ways it is interpreted) it points to something more than just playing softer music on, say, a consort of recorders. 'Broken' music has two possible meanings here, either of which is of potential interest. It could refer to music with 'divisions' - much improvised variation and embellishment, similar to the kind of music by van-Eyck to which reference was made earlier. That would take special skill on the part of one or more of the players. However, on balance I think it is more likely in this context that the music is being played not on a consort of the same type of instruments, but an ensemble of instruments of different kinds. In the form which the standard 'broken consort' assumed towards the end of the 1500s it comprised flute and/or recorder, treble and bass viols, and a range of gut and wire-strung plucked instruments, such as lutes, citterns and pandora - and these would match the epithet 'softe'. If Thomas Morley's *Consort Lessons* are typical of the genre, then whilst

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 276



some of the parts are fairly straightforward, the group would probably prefer to work from notated music rather than from memory.

#### **4d Musical concerts and performing from notated music**

Norwich clearly had reason to be proud of its Waits, and in 1553 they had been given licence to perform thirty-minute concerts on the roof of the Guildhall each Sunday and Holy-day evening in the summer period, between seven and eight pm.<sup>139</sup> It is, of course, possible that they performed without any notated music, which must surely have been the norm when they were involved in processions, or on those ceremonial occasions when their contribution would not have been prolonged. However, it is likely that they were, at least in part, playing from notated music. This is not mere speculation: the 1585/6 Norwich records include a payment for 'A Lectorne and iij Seates for the Waytes' at the Market Cross'.<sup>140</sup> The lectern, in this context, can only be a kind of music-stand - entirely surplus to requirements unless notated music is placed on that stand. In Seville Cathedral there is a large bronze medallion (1564) of instrumentalists playing shawms and sackbutts at a lectern.<sup>141</sup> Clearly those performers were reading from the music on the lectern; there is no reason to suppose that the Waits in Norwich could not have done the same.

#### **4e Norwich Cathedral Singing-men who are Waits**

Lecterns were perhaps more commonly depicted in conjunction with singing-men. As we have seen, some – and often the majority - of Coventry's Waits were singing-men; the same goes for Norwich, together with what that might imply about their musical literacy. William Brewster, Wait, was a singing-man at Norwich Cathedral in the 1570s;

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<sup>139</sup> REED, *Norwich*, 33

<sup>140</sup> REED, *Norwich*, 82

<sup>141</sup> Kenneth Kreitner, 'Minstrels in Spanish Churches' in *Early Music*, Nov 1992

Richard Graves likewise in the 1580s.<sup>142</sup> Arthur Jackson and Peter Spratt (the two Waits who survived Drake's expedition) also held dual roles as Waits and as Cathedral singing-men in the 1590s.<sup>143</sup> There were others in the Jacobean era. Enough has been said already, with respect to the Coventry choristers, to suggest that such a dual role might be some indicator of musical literacy. However, those Norwich Waits who were also singing-men do not seem to have engaged in musical composition, as at least two Coventry Waits seem to have done. Maybe they felt no need to do so, because Norwich Cathedral had a number of competent composers on whom it could call, like Osbert Parsley, a singing-man for over fifty years, who also sometimes served as organist there. Other Norwich composers in the Elizabethan period were Edmund and William Inglott, and Richard Carleton.<sup>144</sup> Music by the latter was published by Norwich-born Thomas Morley.

#### **4f Thomas Morley and his association with Norwich Waits**

Morley, was *Magister Puerorum* at Norwich from 1583-1587, and one particular incident associates him with the Waits, albeit not in a specifically musical capacity. Morley, together with the five Waits, brought a complaint against a Cathedral singing-man called Robert Ambrye, who had insulted them as 'ffydlyng & pyping knaves' and then threatened physical violence.<sup>145</sup> The minor interest here lies in noting that Ambrye provides a dissenting voice, loudly raised in opposition to those who praised the Waits of Norwich almost extravagantly. However, he was hardly a dispassionate critic: he seems to have had some personal grievance and/or to have been drunk.

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<sup>142</sup> Jannsen, 281, 283

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 285, 300

<sup>144</sup> REED, *Norwich*, xl

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., xli

The more significant point of interest lies in the fact that Morley, who has every claim to be considered a significant composer, even by Whythorne's standards, was on such good terms with the Norwich Waits as to be ready to join them in their complaint - even though it is clear that the insults Ambrye had uttered had much more application to the Waits than to Morley himself, unless he had also joined with them in playing string and woodwind instruments.

Morley was the epitome of Whythorne's first-class musician. He was granted a Cambridge music degree, composed music of high quality, had almost certainly studied with Byrd, and wrote a best-selling music treatise. Yet, on the basis of these events in Norwich, it is difficult to imagine that he would have shared Whythorne's disparagement of supposedly inferior musicians. Like others in Norwich and beyond, Morley knew that the Waits of Norwich demonstrated musical talent, versatility, and had probably been confidently musically literate since early in the 1500s, if not before.

## **5 Waits' instruments and musical skills**

### **5a Instrumental versatility**

Thomas Morley dedicated his *Consort Lessons* to the Mayor and Aldermen in London, but added particular praise for the London Waits, whose 'excellent and expert musicians' clearly played a variety of string instruments as well as wind, since that is what his *Consort Lessons* require.<sup>146</sup> We see from this that Morley's association with Waits bands continued even when he moved to the capital city. Probably the London Waits were in the vanguard in such changes to Waits' instrumentation. Nevertheless, there is evidence that even provincial Waits had been introducing string instruments into their performances as

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<sup>146</sup> Marsh, 118. See also Timothy McGee, 'The Fall of the Noble Minstrel', 107

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the 1500s progressed. In Exeter, in 1602, two payments illustrate the changes taking place. The City Council Chamber Act book records a payment in August for a 'doble Curtall' for the Waits – a wind instrument that had been known in England for a least thirty years by that time. However, winds were no longer the only desirable instruments for Waits: in October 'the said Waites at ther Charges shall by a set of vyalles'.<sup>147</sup> William Madock, a Wait in Chester, was not unique in possessing a viol alongside the more traditional Waits' instruments of sackbut, two cornetts and a double-curtal, recorded in the inventory of his goods in 1591.<sup>148</sup>

It is more likely that the string instruments featured when the Waits played indoors; the much louder, more carrying, wind instruments (shawms, higher-pitched recorders) still served ideally for outdoor processions and ceremonies. The viols, especially, were likely to appeal to the gentleman-class, for whom some musical accomplishment was becoming *de rigueur*.<sup>149</sup> Lutes and virginals might also attract amateur music aficionados. It would doubtless have been considered demeaning for them to play wind instruments, certainly in public, and at this time the violin was still more associated with the tavern than the court. However, both ladies and gentlemen could sit elegantly with a viol or lute and play ensemble music. 'Music-making became an established form of convivial entertainment'.<sup>150</sup> Most of the music publications of the time were aimed directly at the increasing number of amateur musicians, as were such music treatises as Morley's *Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*. The *professional* musicians needed to be able to play such instruments as well, if not better, than these amateurs.<sup>151</sup> The music for these ensembles was likely to

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<sup>147</sup> REED, *Devon*, 178

<sup>148</sup> REED, *Cheshire*, lxi

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxv

<sup>150</sup> Flora Dennis, 'Interior Spaces for Music', in *Cambridge History of Sixteenth Century Music*, 276

<sup>151</sup> McGee, *Fall*, 104-107

require musical literacy, as the compositions were often in five or six parts and would have been difficult and time-consuming to memorise.

It was not only the string instruments that marked out the Waits in 1600 as in some ways quite different from their predecessors in 1500. Records in several towns show that there was a particular interest, in the later 1500s, in purchasing bass wind instruments. These were a relative novelty. The Exeter 'doble curtall' of 1602 has already been noted. Coventry's Waits took possession of not just one, but two, curtals in 1593, at least one of which is likely to have been a bass (the English never really developed the Spanish taste for the smaller sizes of curtal). However, this was not the first bass instrument to be purchased in Coventry: a frustratingly imprecise record of 1575 notes the purchase of a 'base pype for the Waytes'.<sup>152</sup>

### **5b Waits' skills: memorisation, improvisation, and needing to read music**

The interest in bass instruments is indicative of changes in musical practice that had affected the Waits. In 1500 the standard Waits band probably still consisted of two or three shawms with a sackbut (perhaps a slide trumpet in the 1400s?). Such an ensemble probably never needed to play from notated music; their music-making relied on a *cantus firmus* or a *basse-dance tenor*, on which they improvised. However, in order to improvise they would have needed at least a basic understanding of what would be very thoroughly taught to singers, namely, learning to *sing* (which includes *play*) in counterpoint to a given musical line (*cantare super librum*).

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<sup>152</sup> REED, Coventry, 338, 270

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The 'central place of memorization and musical literacy in the training of young singers' has been firmly asserted.<sup>153</sup> The claim that we 'need to assume a different sort of musical memory from ours', might have sounded odd until Busse-Berger showed, in considerable depth, just how important memorisation was to medieval musicians – and how they went about it.<sup>154</sup> The stock-in-trade of any such musician would be the memorization of consonance tables and interval progressions, so that knowing which notes would go with which other notes would become second-nature.<sup>155</sup> Note-against-note progressions were fundamental for training in polyphony.<sup>156</sup> One, two, or three parts might then be improvised around a cantus firmus. Particularly gifted exponents of such memory-based-improvisation were reputed to be able to improvise in more than four parts, which, as Zarlino commented, 'if one did not hear and see it, one would scarcely be able to believe'.<sup>157</sup>

A medieval singer's memory would, at the very least, hold an extensive library of interval progressions.<sup>158</sup> Instrumentalists without the full chorister-training (perhaps apprentices such as Thomas Knott in Norwich) might not have the same depth of musical experience, but it is likely that something of the same kind of memorisation was fundamental to their training. Without it, the ability to improvise around a cantus firmus or tenor would not be possible. Only because of what was memorized could the singer or instrumentalist then improvise, because 'they had all of this musical material easily available at the tip of their fingers'.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Susan Boynton, *Young Choristers, 650-1700*, 16

<sup>154</sup> Jessie Ann Owens, *Composers at Work*, 54

<sup>155</sup> Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory*, 7

<sup>156</sup> Rob C. Wegman, 'What is counterpoint?' in *Improvising Early Music*, 32

<sup>157</sup> Peter Schubert, 'From Improvisation to Composition', in *Improvising Early Music*, 107

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, passim, but see especially 136, 138, 141, 148

<sup>159</sup> Busse Berger, 149

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However, in the 1500s, new 'thicker' musical textures become fashionable, and the top (discant) and bottom (bass) parts begin to assume greater importance, as a more homophonic style - as in many French chansons of the early 1500s - marked the beginning of a transition to a new type of music in which upper and lower voices dominated the texture, and the need for bass instruments – the point of departure for this section of my account - was ever more imperative.<sup>160</sup> There was also an increased tendency to use *imitative* structures within the overall construction of the music, and unless those were entirely regular and predictable, the performers needed to read from notation.<sup>161</sup>

Nevertheless, we should not assume that memorisation and improvisation immediately ceased. It is true that, writing in 1597, Morley was already sceptical about the idea that polyphonic music could have been improvised in the way that Zarlino suggests: 'Such confusion ... must bee amongst so many singing extempore'.<sup>162</sup> This is a clear indication that the medieval memorization-to-improvisation tradition of polyphony was becoming a thing of the past. The form that improvisation was likely to take in the newer music had more to do with extempore embellishment of (generally) a top line, rather than more polyphonic structures.

Tielman Susato's *Danserye*, together with his other chanson publications (both his own and those of other composers) probably provide the best guide we can have to the kind of music a civic musician might be playing mid-1500s onwards. Susato was himself a civic musician as well as a composer and music publisher. Some of the dances in his *Danserye* are developed, but others are very short. The amateur could perhaps rest

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<sup>160</sup> Polk, *Susato*, 191/2. See also McGee, T, 106.

<sup>161</sup> Coelho/Polk, *Instrumentalists*, 77; Polk, *Susato*, 99

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Morley, quoted in Wegman, 'Improvising', 52

satisfied with the latter as they stood, but there was great scope to use such music as the 'framework for extensively varied repetitions'.<sup>163</sup> The burgeoning practice of divisions would be much more useful in this respect than the older traditions.<sup>164</sup>

Performance involving memorization and/or improvisation, and without notated music, would have been fundamental to the historical tradition of the Waits before 1550. Even after that date it is hard to imagine that such abilities did not continue to be an essential part of their performance in civic processions and other outdoor contexts, in many of which playing from notated music would present logistical difficulties. Yet in the later 1500s, it would have become requisite for the more typical Waits bands to be musically literate. As music for five or more parts became quite usual, improvisation in the medieval tradition - however skilled the musicians - became out of the question.<sup>165</sup>

## **6 CONCLUSION**

### **6a The musicianship of the Waits [2]**

I have emphasised the overlap between Waits and singing-men in two cities, as evidence that these Waits would certainly be musically literate. However, as this specific evidence cannot be duplicated to the same extent elsewhere, it is possible that oral/aural musical skills, rather than musical literacy as such, dominated the skills-set of many Waits in the Elizabethan era. In opposition to Whythorne, however, I have sought to show that we should not undervalue those non-literate accomplishments. In my opinion the examples covered by this present study make it more likely than not that musically literate Waits were the norm by the later years of Elizabeth's reign, but that claim is not

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<sup>163</sup> Polk, *Susato*, 197

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 192

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 99



incontestable. However, by 1600 the kinds of music that were becoming fashionable would encourage, if not require, the Waits to possess a level of musical literacy at least commensurate with the accomplishments of the increasing number of gentlemanly amateurs.

There were some Waits who had little to offer by way of sophisticated musicianship; this was certainly the case in Rye, and probably in Liverpool. Insofar as 'placing musicians in their social environment is now an important feature of musicological work'<sup>166</sup> then we should note that these Waits had a symbolic civic function that was more significant than their musical contribution as such. However, a chief concern here has been with how our understanding of the Waits' range of musical experience may provide some clues as to the general level of musical literacy among the Waits. The nature of the surviving records, which are primarily administrative or legal, means that there is no particularly direct evidence of the Waits' musical competence. Yet as this study has demonstrated, there is sufficient evidence that some Waits were musically literate, both in the modern sense of being able to read notated music, and even occasionally also in terms of Whythorne's requirement that musicians be able to compose as well as to perform.

Where, as was usual, they were three or more to a band, the Waits provided the chief means by which citizens might hear any *concerted* instrumental music. Whilst we have no direct evidence of repertoire for the English Waits, Wulstan's remark that 'The Waits bridged the gap between popular and more learned music'<sup>167</sup> summarises the quite reasonable assumption that the Waits would have performed a repertoire based in chansons, dance-tunes, and even sacred motets. This seems to have been the stock-in-

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<sup>166</sup> Beat Kümin, 'Music in the Parish Church c1400-1600', in *Kisby*, 75

<sup>167</sup> David Wulstan, *Tudor Music*, 61

trade of their peers in the Netherlands, although as Polk acknowledges, we know more about 'the music Susato published' than we do about exactly what he performed.<sup>168</sup> Yet it is hard, after all, to imagine that in those instances when the Waits were called upon to give concerts, they did nothing but churn out repetitions of ballad tunes without variation.

### **6b Minstrels or Musicians? [2]**

Whilst Whythorne's distinctions may have mattered to him, they need not matter much to us. Doubtless there were some poor people who were also poor musicians, desperately busking for a living. The above account of the Waits shows that it is not mere speculation to claim that many Waits would have been better musical performers than such. There is good evidence for the Waits' versatility on a range of instruments. By contrast the modern musical performer is often expected to be a virtuoso on one single instrument. If allowance be made for that, though, then the Waits' musical capabilities – including memorisation, improvisation, performing divisions, and in some cases proficient reading of musical notation - would stand up well enough. The Waits were rarely so well-paid for their music as to be able to live by music alone, but they were not beggars, and their livery and civic function gave them some social status, albeit not an exalted one. Few of them (to our knowledge) composed music, but by 1600 it was probably essential - for all but a few idiosyncratic exceptions - to be able to read music. The fact that this was seen as necessary for the Norwich Waits from the early 1500s onwards is at least suggestive that it might have been a recognised necessity among other Elizabethan Waits bands too, even though confirmatory evidence remains elusive.

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<sup>168</sup> Polk, *Susato*, 69, see also 73, 76

Janssen's dissertation on Norwich's Waits aimed, among other things, to show that 'The Waytes of Norwich were at all times skilled professionals, adept at handling the refinements of vocal and instrumental music'.<sup>169</sup> In revisiting the topic of the Norwich Waits I hope that I have confirmed and supplemented that judgement. I also hope to have shown that the Waits of Coventry could stand comparison with those of Norwich. Perhaps it was not only the Waits of Southwark who might be 'as rare fellows as any are in England'.<sup>170</sup>

It is time to look at the Waits not 'as mere moments in English history nor as curious adjuncts in the development of a culture, but rather ... [to] take them seriously, recognizing their imperfections but also acknowledging their accomplishments'.<sup>171</sup> I have appropriated these words from a somewhat different topic, but they apply very aptly to what I have set out to do in this study. Whereas some scholars of Elizabethan music in the past paid little attention to musicians whom they probably assumed (in line with Whythorne) to be musically illiterate and therefore unworthy of serious study, more recent scholars like Marsh (an historian) and Wistreich (a musicologist) represent a change of tone in that respect.

It has also been claimed that Waits were 'key contributors to the symbolic assertion and maintenance of the broader political identity of towns and cities'.<sup>172</sup> The Waits played a significant part in civic ritual, and did so by performing music that was not the exclusive preserve of the elite. For someone like Whythorne, Waits were probably little better than

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<sup>169</sup> Janssen, 249

<sup>170</sup> The words are spoken by Citizen, in the introduction to Francis Beaumont's play *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), quoted by Prof. Alan Somerset, [playerswithoutpatrons.ca](http://playerswithoutpatrons.ca)

<sup>171</sup> David Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642*, 4

<sup>172</sup> Wistreich, 'Music Makers', 316

the *minstrels* he vilified - and even now the term *minstrel* has not altogether lost its derogatory connotations. The chief aim of my account has been to present evidence that the English Elizabethan provincial Waits, whether they had higher-level musical literacy, or proficient practical skills, should be fully acknowledged for their capabilities as *musicians*.

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