

SHEFFIELD 1511-1637

Edited by C. E. McGee

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Introduction

Located in the foothills of the Pennines in the southwest corner of the Yorkshire West Riding, Sheffield began as a settlement at the confluence of the Don River and the Sheaf River, from which the city derives its name. The Normans built the first castle in the valley there because of the defensive advantage provided by the rivers on two sides. A moat was later added to protect the west and south sides of the castle site. The Normans also built the first church on the present-day site of Sheffield Cathedral, and the medieval market grew up between this church and the castle. In 1296, King Edward I gave Thomas de Furnival, lord of the manor of Hallamshire, the right to hold a weekly market there every Tuesday.

In 1297, de Furnival gave Sheffield its first town charter. He granted land to freeholders in exchange for the payment of an annual fee. With the charter he also transferred some of the powers of local governance to the 'Burgery' (later the 'Town Trust'), a committee of the whole of freeholders or 'free burgesses' of the town. At this time Sheffield also secured the right to hold an annual fair. The fair and the courts that met annually, the Court Leet and the Court of the Honour of Assembly of Inquest, became occasions for celebrations that included a show of light horse and performances of music (along with the provision of food, wine, beer, and tobacco). The music may have been provided by the town waits, who appear in earlier records as pipers in town liveries of red and white.

The hills surrounding Sheffield were not ideal for agriculture, but the good pasturage there contributed to the development of the wool trade. Ultimately more important were the woodlands that provided the raw material for charcoal, the fast-flowing streams that powered mills, and the supplies of ironstone, coal, and sandstone. These resources fed the growth of several trades, but that of cutlers became the most important. In 1624, an Act of Parliament established the Company of Cutlers of Hallam, an action that confirmed the importance of Sheffield as one of the major provincial centres of cutlery. Despite its prominence in this regard, Sheffield remained a comparatively small and surprisingly poor borough. According to Tim Lambert, "In 1617 a survey showed Sheffield had a population of 2,207.... Despite the booming cutlery trade there was a great deal of poverty in Sheffield in the 17th century. The survey showed 725 people, about a third of the population

were 'not able to live without the charity of their neighbors. They are all begging poor'. There were also many people living just above the poverty line. The survey found 160 householders who 'though they beg not are not able to abide one fortnight's sickness but they would be thereby driven to beggary'. In 1628 a workhouse where the destitute could live and be put to work was built. Meanwhile in 1624 the Company of Cutlers was formed with power to mark artifacts if they reached a certain quality. In 1638 the first Cutlers House was built."¹

In the headings of the records, 'AC' introduces a record taken from an Antiquarian Collection, a record for which we do not have the original pre-1642 manuscript. Also in the headings, the parenthetical references such as 'SHF01' refer to the items in the Document Descriptions.

In the transcription of the records, italics indicate the extension of abbreviations in the manuscripts. Square brackets ([.....]) set off material that has been crossed through (or cancelled in another way) and is now illegible or damaged.

¹*A Brief History of Sheffield, England*, <http://www.localhistories.org/sheffield.html>.

Records

AC

1511

Expenses for a Play

£ 75* (20 July)

LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/69 (SHF01, below)

The English Chronicle, or Universal Evening Post June 5th and 7th 1781¹

It may not be uninteresting to some of ye warmer devotees of ye stage to see at what expence dramatic representations were attended with between two & three hundred years ago. At a play acted in ye year 1511, on ye feast of St. Margaret, ye following disbursement were made at ye charges of ye exhibition.

To musicians, for which, however, they were bound to perform three nights. — 0: 5: 6

For players in bread & ale. — 0: 3: 1

For decorations, dresses, & play books. — 1: 0: 0

To John Hobbard, priest, & author of ye piece. — 0: 2: 8

For ye place in which the representation was held. — 0: 1: 0

For Furniture. — 0: 1: 4

For Fish and bread. — 0: 0: 4

For painting three phantoms and devils. — 0: 0: 6

and for four chickins for the hero.

The sum total of the expences not amounting to quite forty shillings — The charges of the house for one night, at either theatre, are now upward of 100 li. — How justly may we exclaim *Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur millis*.

¹ After an exhaustive search, the editors have failed to locate an extant copy of *The English Chronicle, or Universal Evening Post* for 5-7 June 1781: the British Library's collection starts at 1800 and the Bodleian's collection, which starts in 1781, is missing this particular issue. Thus there is no provable locale for the play's performance. Although Wilson occasionally copied or preserved the eclectic oddity (this volume also contains a will purporting to be that of Jesus), his attentions focused almost exclusively on the West Riding and, particularly, on Sheffield. Whether the final paragraph's assessment of costs is from *The English Chronicle* article or is Wilson's own commentary cannot be discerned from the manuscript, and whether the reference to two theatres at c 1781 refers to Sheffield is equally opaque.

The 1 s payment for the "place in which the representation was held" would seem to suggest a secular or civic venue rather than a parish church, for which charge would not have been made were the activity a parish fundraiser. What little can be inferred about the performance itself from this account is muddled. The performance on St. Margaret's day and the priest's authorship might suggest a saint's play, as perhaps would the painting expenses for three phantoms and devils, which are appropriate to the St. Margaret legend. On the other hand, the apparent three-night performance suggests a parish or civic activity, and one is bound to note that no extant legend of St. Margaret requires "four chickens for the hero."

AC

1566

Burgess Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/110 (SHF02, below)
p 3

... Item paid for iij^e yerds of Whyte Clothe for the Pyper or wayte of the towne after xvij d the yerde 4 s 3 d Item paid for Lyttonge¹ the same 7 d Item paid for makynge the same Coats 12 d ... Item payde for iij^{re} yardes of clothe for the whytes coote 4 s 6 d Item payde for Lyttyng the same Clothe *videlicet* the half Redde 7 d ob ...

¹Lyttonge: *dyeing*

AC

1570

Burgess Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/110 (SHF02)
p 4 (12 December)

... 1570 Item paide the xijth daye of Decemr for vij yerdes & a halfe of whyte Carsaye¹ for the waytes 10 s Item for lyinge² to the same coates 18 d Item for makinge of the same coates & ij badgeis 2 s 8 d ...

¹Carsaye: *kersey*

²lyinge: *probably for lining*

AC

1574

Burgess Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/110 (SHF02)
p 5

... Item paid to Rawlenson for makeinge of the sayd ij pypers Coats 2:6 ...

AC

1581

Burgess Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/110 (SHF02)
p 7

... Red fflannel for waytes Coats 14 s 4 d ...

AC

1586

Burgess Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/110 (SHF02)
p 7

... pypers Coat lyning &c 22 s 9 d ...

1599

Leet and Great Court LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/58 (SHF03)
f 4* (1 October)

George Turner for erecting a Stage contrary to the statute — v s

...

1632

Sheffield Fair LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/130 (SHF04)

f 93v (17 November)

A bill of Chardges for Sheffeld ffaire ...

...

Giuen to the musicke — 0 02 - 6

...

1633

Assembly and Great Leet LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/130 (SHF04)
f 7 (23-25 April)

A bill of Chardges for the Assembly Tuesday and the greate Leete ...

...

Giuen to the musicke — xij d

f 42v (18 June)

A bill of chardges for Sheffeld ffaire ...

...

for [.....] Musicke — ij s vj d

...

1634

Manorial Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/131 (SHF05)
f 48 (June)

(A bill of Chardges for Sheffeld ffaire being the ___ of June 1634)

...

Giuen to the musicke — 0 - 03 - 0

1635

Francis Burdet Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/62 (SHF06)

f 10

...

Item for halfe a li of gunpowder for the Showe — 9 d

...

Item to Ellyson for bringeinge the headpeece & dragone from yorke — vj d

...

Item that itt cost me of vs & our horses att the Showe of lighthorse — 14 d

...

f 10v

...
Item for the great bridle mending against the Showe — ij d

...

1635

Manorial Expenses LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/131 (SHF05)

f 63 (31 March, 2 April)

(A bill of chardges for the Assembly Tuesday and greate Leete at Sheffeld being the last of march and second of Aprill 1635)

...
for musicke — 0 1 - 00

1637

Sheffield Fair and Great Leet LEEDS, BROTHERTON: MS 295/130 (SHF04)

f 41v (6 June)

Sheffeld ffaire ...

...
Item paid for musicke — 0 - [02] - [..] 2¹ - 00

...

¹2] *interpolated in a different hand, presumably by another scribe*

f 6 (5 October)

Att the great leet held at Sheaffeild ...

...
Item for Musicke at the Leet — 0 - 1 - 0

...

Document Descriptions

SH01

A Play Performed in 1511

Leeds; Brotherton Library; MS 295/69; 1781; English and Latin; paper; 106 fols; sizes vary, f 75 being 230mm x 190mm; antiquarian collection from past centuries by John Wilson of Broomhead (1719-1783); fair condition; bound in cardboard.

SH02

Burgess Expenses

Leeds; Brotherton Library; MS 295/110; 1566-81; English and Latin; 38 fols numbered by pages on recto 1-75; numbering begins with the outside cover; 240mm x 190mm; artificial collection made by John Wilson c 1769.

Wilson had access to or temporary possession of innumerable Sheffield area documents; quite conscious of how carelessly such documents then were stored, he painstakingly copied excerpts for posterity. This volume, MS 295/110, contains

three booklets of extracts made by Wilson in inconsistent hands over a number of years; they are entitled "Extracts out of Sheffield Towns Book 1566," "True Copies of Original Letters relating to Sheffield Castle in the time of the Civil War," and "Extracts from Sheffield old Church Book from 1557, to 1573." None of these documents is known to have survived except in Wilson's copies and in Joseph Hunter's copy (now among the British Library Additional MSS) of Wilson's work.

SH03

Leeds; Brotherton Library; MS 295/58; 1599; English; paper; 12 fols; 310mm x 2mm; numbered by folio with the outside cover being f 1, and the recto of the back cover being f 12; titled on the cover "Two Verdicts for 1599 & 1600".

Wilson dates the cover as 1741, when he made his transcription, but this Leet and Great Court roll is an original document bound with Wilson's excerpts; the volume was formerly Phillips MS 14783.

SH04

Leeds; Brotherton Library; MS 295/130; 1632-1637; English; paper; 128 folios; 220mm x 170mm; loosely bound collection of folios and various scraps of varying sizes; numbered by folio in pencil; the numbers appear to be contemporary, not in Wilson's hand.

On f 93r, upside down, in the top left, is a title, "Fair Bills from 1632 to 1650." Beside that, separated by a fold line, we have "Mr. Mores bill for 3li 1s 6d for the winter faire".

SH05

Leeds; Brotherton Library; MS 295/131; 1634-5; English; paper; 107 folios; 200mm x 150mm; artificial collection compiled by John Wilson. This is a miscellaneous collection of 17th-century bills and receipts concerning the manor of Sheffield, the original now lost. Board and paper cover.

On f 48v, the document is identified as "Mr Moors bill for ye ssummer fayer 3li—15s—02". On f 63v, the document is identified as the "bill of charges for the great leet and semlie inquest 2—00—3".

SH06

Leeds; Brotherton Library; MS 295/62; 1635; English; 18 leaves + foolscap cover, numbered 1-20 in pencil; 200mm x 300mm; rental and expenses for Francis Burdet of Birthwait; marked '37 Birthwait Rental' on spine.

These expenses of Francis Burdet of Birthwaite probably were for a military show at Sheffield. Burdet lived at Birthwaite Hall near Darton, several miles northwest of Sheffield, and apparently was a county or local official. The Hall became the property of John Silvester, whom Joseph Hunter notes as smith to the Tower of London, in the early eighteenth century; this change may explain how the Burdet records came into Wilson's possession a few years later.