

English Guild and Confraternity Research: The Records of Early English Drama Project

Readers of *Confraternitas* may be interested to know of the resources offered by the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project for advanced study of guilds and confraternities in England.

The REED project was formally launched in 1976 through the collaborative efforts of scholars in Canada, the United States, and Britain, and with the essential funding support of a major editorial grant by the Canada Council. REED's goal is to find, transcribe, and edit for publication all surviving evidence of drama, secular music, and public ceremonial in Great Britain before the theatres were closed by Puritans in 1642. Although the subject is British theatre history and the research team is at work on both sides of the Atlantic, there is a head office at the University of Toronto in Canada where REED's principal investigators and editorial staff are based.

Research is organized along geographical lines. After fourteen years, REED has issued ten city and county collections in ten volumes, with a further county volume of Herefordshire-Worcestershire records to be published in the summer of 1990. Research and editing of thirty-eight further collections are in progress; only eight English counties remain to be spoken for.

The published REED volumes, as well as those submitted in draft form to the Toronto office, should be useful reference works for scholars interested in dramatic or other festival activities organized by guilds and confraternities in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. These activities range from the ambitious Whitsun play cycle at Chester performed by local craft guilds, to the Creed play mounted by the Corpus Christi guild in the city of York, to the colourful St George's Day procession with patron saint and dragon organized by the guild of the same name in Norwich, to humbler annual 'drinkings' with entertainment by local musicians common to guilds and confraternities across the country.

Entertainment records themselves can shed some light on the development, economic prosperity, and urban relationships of a trade or craft guild. Their cessation or continuation after religious confraternities as such were officially dissolved by Edward VI's act of parliament in 1547 can bear witness to post-reformation religious attitudes at the local level.

Although REED's primary function remains the research and editorial work for publication of its records series, the facilities of the head office are being developed as a resource centre for scholars in related disciplines. In particular, those interested in more extensive study of English guilds and confraternities may wish to consult our bibliographic card files for notices of surviving guild manuscripts, or books and articles relevant to their subject. In compiling this information over the past decade, REED bibliographers have conducted a comprehensive survey of catalogues,

guides, reports, and calendars for major British repositories such as the Bodleian, the British Library, and the Public Record Office, as well as for smaller local record offices. General, period, and local bibliographies continue to be searched regularly to update existing files of printed sources.

In addition, the REED library has approximately four hundred books, including bibliographies of general and local British history; guides to archives and record office catalogues; local histories and records editions; paleographical handbooks; and standard dictionaries and reference works such as the Complete Peerage. There are also photocopies and offprints of hundreds of articles, many from relatively esoteric local history journals.

Of equal if not greater importance are the microfilm and photocopies of original guild documents that have been used by REED editors. It is our policy to check all transcripts submitted for publication against manuscript reproductions to ensure accuracy and consistency of editorial policy. As a result the office now possesses a growing repository of local history materials, in some respects unique in North America. The craft and trade guild historian will find here extracts or complete runs of guild accounts, minute books, and ordinances, as well borough council minute books and town treasurers' accounts that provide evidence of town regulation of guild affairs (REED's holdings for York and London are particularly rich).

Records of religious confraternities can be found not only with those of related craft guilds but also in local parish records, such as those of St Margaret's, Southwark where information and a few accounts of the parish-based Fraternity of Our Lady can be traced amongst fifteenth and early sixteenth-century churchwardens' accounts. Fifteenth-century parish accounts are relatively rare in England, so REED has attempted to purchase full runs of such accounts whenever possible.

Records of Early English Drama was founded on co-operative principles and encourages interdisciplinary collaboration. REED editors and Toronto office staff welcome new opportunities to exchange ideas and information with other scholars. Anyone interested in making use of our resources is invited to phone (416) 585-4504 or write to me, c/o Records of Early English Drama, 150 Charles Street West. Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 1K9.

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