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The redress of the past: historical pageants in twentieth-century England*

Historical pageants were a notable feature of many British communities, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. A historical pageant involved the dramatic re-creation of successive scenes from the history of a town, city, village or institution, and was a particularly popular form of engagement with history in the years before the First World War (1914-18), again during the interwar years, and finally in the early 1950s. Although historical pageantry declined after the mid-1950s, it never completely disappeared, and there were small revivals at the time of the queen's silver jubilee in 1977 and the millennium celebrations in 2000. Some towns still stage pageants, usually on a much smaller scale than in the past (Bartie *et al*, forthcoming(a)), and traces remain elsewhere: for example, Danny Boyle's spectacular opening ceremony for the London Olympics in 2012 adopted some aspects of the historical pageant form (Baker, 2015). In this article we consider the broad outlines of historical pageantry in England across the twentieth century, although it should be noted that pageants also featured in the life of other British nations (see Bartie et al, 2015), and elsewhere too. Recent work by Joan FitzPatrick Dean (2014) demonstrates the profile of historical pageants in Ireland, and the pageant craze also took hold in the United States (Glassberg, 1990). In Germany, they formed part of the larger twentieth-century *Heimat* movement, which marked the contribution of particular localities to the wider story of German nationhood (Applegate, 1990; Palmowski, 2009). These related developments, however, lie outside the immediate scope of this article.

1. Introducing historical pageants

Historical pageants were so widepsread during the early years of the twentieth century that observers wrote of an outbreak of 'pageant fever' or 'pageantitis' (Readman, 2005:170; Ryan, 2007). The pageants of these years involved large casts, were typically staged in outdoor venues, and were often performed several times in front of thousands of people in large temporary grandstands. There were, for example, 3,000 performers at the Colchester historical pageant in 1909, and 5,000 people could be packed into the grandstand at Hinchingbrooke in 1912. At Oxford in 1907, the 'book of words', containing the script of the pageant, sold 17,000 copies even before the first performance (Readman, 2005:173-5).

'Pageant fever' commenced with the Sherborne pageant of 1905, produced by 'pageant-master' Louis Napoleon Parker. This pageant took place in the ruins of Sherborne castle and consisted of eleven distinct episodes, beginning with the foundation of Sherborne by St Ealdhelm in 705 CE and ending with a humorous, even farcical, visit by the Elizabethan explorer and courtier Sir Walter Raleigh in 1593.[1] In between, the whole story of Sherborne was told: from intense battles with Danish marauders in 845, to the imposition of the Benedictine Order on greedy drunken monks in 998, to the establishment of the castle in the early twelfth century and the re-foundation of the school in 1550.

With around 800 performers and 30,000 spectators across several performances, Sherborne was a great success and launched Parker's career as a pageant-master: he went on to produce pageants in Warwick (1906), Bury St Edmunds (1907), and Colchester and York (both 1909), for example. Although Parker is now the best-known pageant-master of

this period, he was rivalled by Frank Lascelles, who opened his account in Oxford in 1907 and subsequently produced pageants in Bath in 1909 and London in 1911 (the pageant at the Festival of Empire, with 15,000 performers), and in Cape Town and Calcutta in 1910 and 1912 respectively. Lascelles's pageants were more extravagant than Parker's, but were recognisably similar in structure and form, and contributed in a similar way to the popularisation of dramatic representations of history in the pre-First World War years. Other notable pageants included St Albans in 1907, produced by Herbert Jarman, a pageant at the Scottish National Exhibition in 1908, and one at Winchester in 1908, where a riot resulted in the vandalism of the pageant ground, although it was not directly linked with the event (Yoshino, 2011:231-45; Freeman, 2013).

Historical scholarship on pageants has concentrated on this early period: there is just one full-length study of modern English historical pageants, by Ayako Yoshino (2011), and this covers only the years before 1914. However, pageantry remained a significant aspect of British cultural life during the interwar years, when many pageants were no smaller or less impressive than those before the First World War. For example, Lascelles was pageant-master at Harrow in 1923, where 3,600 performers took part in the re-enactment of ten scenes from local history (Harrow Pageant, 1923:13). Other pageants included another Scottish Historical Pageant at Craigmillar Castle in 1927 followed by one in Glasgow in 1928 and a whole series of smaller pageants in Scottish towns and villages; a number of pageants in industrial towns ranging from Manchester in 1926 to Stoke in 1930 to Bradford in 1931 and many more; and small-town pageants such as the one in Taunton in 1928, with 1,500 performers (Woods, 1999). Pageantry became increasingly adaptable in this period: not only were there re-enactments in some cases of First World War scenes – most notably in the St Dunstan's Peace Pageants of 1919 but also for example in such spectacular imperialist extravaganzas as the Greenwich Night Pageant of 1933 (see Bartie *et al*, forthcoming(b)) – but the form was also adapted by political organisations, such as the League of Nations Union, to promote an internationalist message (Wallis, 1994; Wallis, 1996; McCarthy, 2010). The Women's Institute and Women's Co-operative Guild staged historical pageants, and there were two pageants of the history of nursing, in 1932 and 1937. Yet the literature on interwar British historical pageants remains small: there is no equivalent of David Glassberg's (1990) study of American pageantry, which explores the changes in the style and content of pageants after the First World War, when, as in Britain, they remained popular.

After the Second World War (1939-45) historical pageants continued as a notable feature of community life in many places. Yoshino (2011:247) notes a 'brief revival' at the time of the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Coronation in 1953, but the surviving records suggest that these years saw a more significant wave of historical pageantry than this. Many of these pageants had thousands of participants and spectators, and contained similar elements of spectacle, as those of earlier decades. At St Albans in 1953, for example, there were over 1,600 performers and a grandstand that could seat 4,000 (Freeman, 2013:440). Pageants adapted to new technologies, including more amplified sound and recorded music as time went on, and were influenced by developments in the cinema, radio and later television. Post-war pageants at Carlisle, Cirencester, Warwick Castle, Cambuslang, Clackmannan, King's Lynn, Wisbech, Brighton, Bradford, Grimsby, Filey, Diss, Ipswich, Streatham, Dartford, Coventry, Plymouth Bridport, Guildford, Maybole and Swanage demonstrated the resilience and popularity of this form of engagement with the past across Britain. As in the 1930s, pageantry could be used for specific political and professional purposes: diverse

examples include the Communist Manifesto Centenary Pageant of 1948 and a series of pageants depicting the history of policing.

Historical pageants continued in the 1960s: examples include another Scottish Historical Pageant at Craigmillar Castle in 1967, and, in the south of England, a substantial outdoor pageant at Berkhamsted in 1966. However, the number and scale of pageants undoubtedly declined, and the importance of visual spectacle was downgraded. This was largely due to the cultural changes of the late 1950s and the 1960s. The large-scale pageant was a victim of the 'mobile privatisation' that accompanied the spread of cars, television and other consumer goods (Freeman, 2013:454; Williams, 1974). In St Albans, the fact that the 1953 pageant made a loss of £1,203, due to lower-than-expected attendance, discouraged any further attempts to stage large outdoor events. The total income of the pageant was just £7,900, compared with £15,000 from a smaller pageant staged five years earlier.[2] It was a similar story elsewhere in Britain, as alternative sources of entertainment kept crowds away. In this context, pageant plays – smaller in scale than historical pageants and usually performed indoors, though with the same structure – were increasingly performed instead of full pageants. Yet, by the end of the twentieth century, the historical pageant was a largely forgotten phenomenon. The community play, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and often focused on a specific event in a community's history, was not usually presented as a successor in the pageant tradition, although it did share some features, notably the model of a professional working with local amateur actors.[3]

2. Debating historical pageants

Examination of the content, organisation and reception of historical pageants sheds light on a number of larger questions about the role of history and historical drama in modern Britain. There is a long-standing debate about the place of history and 'heritage' in British life and culture. For example, whereas Peter Mandler (1997:109-17) has expressed doubt about whether 'the relevance of the national past' gripped the popular mind in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Paul Readman (2005) has argued for a growth of interest in history in this period, pointing to historical pageants as one manifestation of this, along with other cultural indicators such as the publication of history books and the emergence of preservationist movements. Mark Freeman (2013) has linked the culture of preservation directly to historical pageants, in a study of the St Albans pageants of 1907, 1948, 1953 and 1968, although neither he nor Readman see pageantry as simply nostalgic and anti-modern in character. There is also a lively strain of scholarship on the nature of national and local ritual in the 1950s, with Mandler (2002:93) for example arguing that the post-war British public exhibited an 'indifference, or outright hostility, to history' before a revival of interest in the 1960s; certainly the key cultural event of the period, the Festival of Britain, is often seen as determinedly modernist in tone and inspiration. However, recent scholarship, notably by Becky Conekin (2003) and Harriet Atkinson (2012), has proposed a more complex relationship between past and present, and indeed the future, as embodied in the Festival and other post-war cultural moments. A focus on 'timeless traditions' emphasised the continuities between past, present and future, and – as Freeman (2013) has argued – encouraged the organisers of pageants to draw more explicit links between the historical subject-matter of their scenes and the present-day concerns of their communities. This was reflected in a growing tendency to depict more recent history during the interwar years and into the 1950s, and to adopt a less sombre tone in both scripts and souvenir programmes (Hulme,

forthcoming). Indeed, even in the early twentieth century, it has been argued that pageants were seen to have a contemporary role, and were not simply the anti-modern spectacles that some historians have described (Readman, 2005).

Another strand of debate concerns the social history of pageants. Although the bulk of research relates to the pre-1914 period, Michael Woods (1999), in his study of the 1928 Taunton pageant, has argued that the event's organisation – with its intricate hierarchy of committees, and the reproduction of social inequalities in the casting of members of local elites in the most prominent roles – helped to maintain the 'hegemonic power structures' that characterised small towns in the interwar period. Moreover, the version of history presented to the pageant audiences, with its focus on 'great men' and an implicit message promoting social order and harmony, was designed to underpin existing power relations and head off social discontent at a time of rapid social change and industrial unrest. The theatre studies literature echoes these themes: for example, Baz Kershaw (2007:214-15, 222-7) sees pageants as 'spectacles of domination', in which power was extravagantly re-presented to communities by cultural elites. Other scholars, however, have focused on the participatory nature of pageants, arguing that it would have been impossible to mobilise the thousands of people who took part – not just as actors, but also in making costumes, collecting tickets, selling programmes and souvenirs, staffing car parks, and so on *ad infinitum* – without a wider popular sense of engagement with the re-enactment of the past (Readman, 2005). It is hard to see the armies of people who took part as simply acquiescing in their own cultural domination by social elites. Moreover, as noted earlier, the pageant form itself was highly adaptable and could be turned to oppositional political purposes. Ryan (2007:66, 75-6) has shown that, even where it does appear that specific political messages were being sent to participants by pageant organisers, these messages were not necessarily received and understood in a passive way. It is, however, certainly the case that pageants – often organised and supported by local government institutions – were seen as important vehicles for the promotion of an officially sanctioned 'civic image'. Yoshino (2011:57-97) notes their economic importance in terms of attracting tourists to small towns; Matthew Vickers (2000:43-75) has seen the Liverpool pageant of 1907 as a key development in the self-representation of the city to the world; and Freeman (2013:443-4) has drawn attention to the role of pageants in attracting new businesses and residents to post-war 'expansion towns'. Pageants could, and did, mean different things to different people.

In the following sections we showcase three pageants: one from the pre-First World War period, an interwar example and one from the 1950s. These case studies enable us to illustrate some aspects of the evolution of historical pageantry in the twentieth century, as well as drawing out some continuities and common themes.

3. Pageants in focus (a): Warwick 1906[4]

The success of the 1905 Sherborne pageant attracted much notice, particularly in places with claims to long or illustrious histories. One such place was the town of Warwick, site of an important castle since the tenth century and famous for its association with the ancient British king Caradoc, the legendary hero Guy of Warwick, 'Warwick the Kingmaker' (Richard Neville, sixteenth Earl of Warwick), and other notable figures. In June 1905 Edward Hicks, an enterprising Warwick journalist (and author of a book about Caradoc), pounced on a passing suggestion in the *Daily Telegraph* that Warwick would be an ideal site for a historical pageant. Writing in the *Warwick Advertiser*, Hicks challenged the town to

demonstrate 'the importance of its place in the national life of the past'. Roused by this patriotic appeal, local opinion quickly mobilised behind the idea. The Lord Mayor declared his support, as did the heads of the town's secondary schools, and by the beginning of July a provisional pageant committee had been established. In view of the Sherborne example, the committee sought to acquire Louis Napoleon Parker's services as pageant-master, and by the end of September he had indicated his willingness to act. By mid-October, a town meeting had formally resolved to go ahead.

Thereafter, things moved quickly. Indeed they had to do so after it had been announced in early November that the performances would be held in the week beginning 2 July 1906, leaving just eight months to get things ready. The pageanteers, led by the seemingly tireless Parker, spent the winter and spring in a flurry of publicity and organisational activities. Tens of thousands of pamphlets promoting the pageant were distributed; articles about the event were published in the local and national press; episodes were devised and music was commissioned; books of words and souvenir programmes were printed; and a 'Ladies' Committee' marshalled the sewing prowess of three hundred Warwick women, who produced 1400 costumes. Indeed, following Parker's usual practice, almost everything used in the pageant was of local manufacture, and it seems that many Warwick men and women spent a great deal of their spare time that winter making weapons, banners and other props.

Pageant week got underway on Sunday 1 July with a special service at St. Mary's Collegiate Church, at which the Bishop of Bristol preached. Special services were also held in other parish churches in the town. This was in line with Parker's ideas about pageants: he always insisted that pageant week celebrations should commence with special church services. And indeed, the religious content of the Warwick Pageant is striking. The antiquity of Christian belief was heavily emphasised in the early parts of the pageant. Episode I showed Caradoc saving a child from pagan sacrifice, and then later returning to Britain to preach the word of God; episode II had the legendary British king Gwar [Gwdyr] founding a church at Warwick. This was followed by the conversion of captured Danes, and two episodes featuring the return of Warwick heroes from the Crusades, one of whom demonstrated his faith by founding a hospital in honour of the Templars and establishing St. Mary's as a collegiate church.

Real-life local benefactors and notables were also celebrated, as well as the earls of Warwick and their families. Present-day notables were honoured too: the final episode, set in 1694, featured an appearance by a member of the Greville family, who would hold the title to the earldom of Warwick after its fourth creation in 1759. But throughout the pageant, the original intention that local history be fused to the larger narratives of the English national past was everywhere apparent; through its pageant, Warwick, a small provincial town by 1906, sought to assert its importance to the national life of the past (Parker called Warwick 'the Clapham Junction of English history': a busy crossing-point that featured in many larger national stories). This is shown not least by the prominence of British kings and queens, and also through the presence of Shakespeare and Warwick the Kingmaker. One highlight was the arrival of Queen Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603) in a magnificent state coach.

The pageant was accounted a great success, and did much to raise the temperature of the 'pageant fever' developing in the wake of Sherborne. All but one of the performances sold out, with visitors coming long distances (some from the USA) to see the show. Warwick itself was *en fête* throughout pageant week. Businesses closed early, pageant props were displayed in the streets, and the local press carried extensive

coverage of the performances and associated events. Warwick hosted other pageants after 1906, notably in 1930 and 1953; and, more recently still, one was staged in 1996. But the pageant of 1906 was the largest and most elaborate of all held in the town, and its traces are still very visible in the place today. Pageant House and the Pageant Garden remain as physical memorials to the event, the former now housing Warwick's registry office and the latter being very popular with local people (not least as a venue for wedding day photographs). Furthermore, the pageant continues to function as a focus for civic pride. In the newly refurbished tourist information centre the visitor can watch film footage from the pageant as part of a display devoted to the event, which is described as a great success, not only in meeting the challenge set by Sherborne and generating funds for the purchase of Pageant House and Gardens, but also as evidence that, even in 1906, Warwick 'knew how to entertain its guests'.

4. Pageants in focus (b): Salford 1930

Salford was one of many industrial towns and cities that staged historical pageants in the 1920s and 1930s, among them Bradford, Manchester and Stoke. The Salford pageant defied the economic turmoil of the time, and exceeded all expectations for success. Industry was very badly affected during the depression in this part of northern England and unemployment was growing, but 1930 happened to be the seven hundredth anniversary of the granting of Salford's charter, giving it official status as a town. The pageant was held in Buile Hall Park, a large public park in the city. In the context of the interwar years, a pageant was the obvious event to hold: it was clearly hoped that a large-scale theatrical performance might invigorate the city and its people during hard times. As Tom Hulme (forthcoming) has demonstrated, pageants performed this function in many industrial towns and cities in this period. Salford's civic leaders thought that such a flagship occasion would boost local businesses, and to this end an Industrial and Trades Exhibition accompanied the pageant, its aim being to show that Salford, as 'the fourteenth city in the kingdom', still had factories that could cater for 'the world's manifold needs'.[5] The pageant brought the story of the town up-to-date: the century of industrial transformation could hardly be ignored, and was what had put Salford on the map. Salford's pageant was held outdoors and had a large cast of 6,000; the final performance alone attracted over 11,000 spectators.[6]

The pageant included people from all sections of Salford society. In terms of religious denominations, the local Roman Catholic church clearly supported the pageant and was closely involved with its organisation, as well as holding a special service of celebration on the Sunday before the first performance. This took place alongside pageant services held in Anglican and many of the non-conformist Christian churches. At one point, even the local synagogue was involved when moves were made to obtain permission from the Chief Rabbi to hold a special pageant service.[7] This reflected the fact that many members of the local Jewish community took part in the pageant.[8] An additional element of diversity was contributed by virtue of the fact that around 1,000 of the performers came from the ranks of unemployed men.[9] However, the pageant was organised and led by the middle- and upper-class population, who dominated the display of civic pride and patriotism, with the committees staffed by local politicians, professionals and church leaders.

The pageant was written by a variety of local authors who were said to have examined 'books, documents and pictures' in the town's library.[10] Yet most of the storyline followed local legend in equal

measure with historical evidence, despite Salford's claims to have a 'rich store of historical record to draw on'.[11] Key figures from this historical record included the thirteenth-century baronial rebel Simon de Montfort and the influential fourteenth-century magnate John of Gaunt, as well as many less well-known individuals. However, Robin Hood appeared in episode III, while episode V contained various embellishments of the life of the seventeenth-century insurrectionist Guy Fawkes that connected him to the locality through an established local family: this particular storyline was derived from a popular Victorian novel by the Manchester-born author William Harrison Ainsworth, and probably influenced by an earlier film adaptation made in 1923.[12] High drama, colourful costumes, battle scenes and a heavy dose of 'ye Olde England' as the backdrop to most of the episodes were what carried the spectacle. It seems that the pageant provided a good show and was generally welcomed, with a local magistrate even congratulating the town for the low rate of arrests for drunkenness during pageant week.[13]

The pageant galvanised municipal will to try to do something to help the town overcome its problems. Yet however successful the pageant was as large-scale entertainment, it could do little to stem the painful economic decline of Salford. Nonetheless, it certainly effected some bolstering of community spirit and civic pride. There were moves afterwards to install a replica of Salford Cross, which had been a backdrop to many of the pageant episodes, as a lasting memorial to the event, the original edifice having been demolished in 1824.[14] Furthermore, the Salford Society was formed a few months after the pageant, aiming to 'sustain and direct the spirit of civic patriotism evoked by the recent pageant' and to 'create a permanent feeling of unselfish friendship between all classes of citizens'.[15] Although the society seems to have been relatively short-lived, its foundation emphasises the role it was hoped that engagement with the past could play in encouraging active citizenship in the present.

5. Pageants in focus (c): Nottingham 1949

The Nottingham Quincentenary Pageant was a key attraction of the city-wide anniversary celebrations staged to commemorate the charter granted to Nottingham by King Henry VI in 1449. The pageant took place in the indoor setting of the Nottingham Ice Stadium, and was performed twelve times. In many ways it epitomised the changes that pageantry had undergone by the post-Second World War period, while also maintaining a link with some of the defining elements of the original epidemic of 'pageantitis'. In terms of press opinion and public engagement, it was seemingly very successful, though its financial records were never published. The script was written by Lawrence du Garde Peach, a nationally renowned playwright and author, known especially as a pioneer of radio drama (Mackerness, 2004). Peach saw the pageant as, in the words of one of his critics, 'a cross between a review, a musical comedy, a psychological play, and entertainment'.[16] Peach himself emphasised the need to 'compete with cinema … and the dance hall', and he admitted that he would 'sacrifice any historical fact in order to get entertainment value in my script' – certainly not something that Louis Napoleon Parker would have claimed.[17] Similar tendencies were at work in other post-war pageants: for example, a dragon featured in the St Albans coronation pageant of 1953, and was described by one observer as the 'comic highlight' (quoted in Freeman, 2013:447).

Despite Peach's free-and-easy attitude to the historical record, however, some of the traditional themes of historical pageantry were still in evidence at Nottingham, notably civic pride and the connection of local events to the wider national story: the latter could be seen in

particular in episodes featuring the English Civil War, royal visits such as that of Princess Anne in 1688, and – in the final scene – the sacrifices made by local servicemen in modern wars, including the most recent. The pageant also told a tale of growing municipal power. This emphasis was particularly evident in scene VII – which featured a masque of the kings who had given Nottingham its early charters – and scene XIII, which recounted the history of the municipal police from 1820 to 1949. Yet, while this civic agenda was certainly in line with established traditions of pageantry, the depiction of the very recent past was a deviation from Parker's blueprint (and, as noted above, this deviation was common to many mid-twentieth-century pageants). Moreover, in a further departure from the early days of 'pageant fever', the costumes at Nottingham were mostly hired rather than made, and the actors, rather than being drawn from across the local community, were mostly recruited from amateur dramatic societies.[18]

In attendance terms, the Nottingham Quincentenary Pageant, and the celebrations of which it was a part, were a great success, marred only by a disastrous fire on the final night.[19] The trade exhibition and medieval fair that were held alongside the pageant drew visitor numbers of 117,000 and 12,297 respectively, while over 40,000 people paid for admission to the pageant itself.[20] The local critical reception was mixed, however. Although, on the whole, the press reported positively on the achievements of the pageant, there is little indication of it lasting in popular memory as long as some other twentieth-century pageants, which themselves became significant events in the social history of the communities that staged them.[21] The most notable lasting memorial was a statue of Robin Hood, the erection of which incited feverish debate in the press.[22]

While many of its elements differed from Parker's original vision, the Nottingham pageant still quite obviously bore the imprint of the historical pageantry movement. It epitomised the evolution of the form, influenced by broadcasting and cinema as well as by new approaches to the past in the early post-war years. Moving the action indoors probably kept costs down, while keeping the storyline light and humorous helped to ensure good audiences at a time when increasing leisure provision created competition for the pageant. As a well-attended and (generally) well-reviewed spectacle, its success also attests to the popularity that a historical pageant could still muster in post-war Britain, and the continued belief that engagement with the past was a key means of bolstering a sense of community identity in the here-and-now. Indeed, the pageant linked past and present in explicit terms. Introducing the pageant in the souvenir programme, Nottingham's Lord Mayor, William Sharp (1949), was straight to the point in describing its purpose:

> This Pageant ... is designed to bring to the citizens of this City and their guests a vivid visual impression of the history and traditions which lie in the background of our civic life. Every age has its problem and the manner in which we solve our own will determine what the future will be. The Nottingham our children will know to-morrow will reflect our achievements, and our failures of to-day. Our hope is that this Pageant may, through the medium of theatrical entertainment, enhance your knowledge of Nottingham's past, increase your pride of [*sic*] Nottingham's present, and strengthen your sense of responsibility for Nottingham's future.

In the years that followed, and especially in 1951 and 1953, more pageants up and down the country presented local history to

communities in similar ways, with a powerful emphasis on the contemporary uses of the past, and the role of events like this in sharpening a sense of local identity and civic purpose.

6. Conclusion: pageantry, localism and civic identity

We can draw a number of conclusions from this small selection of pageants in twentieth-century England (archival records exist for more than 400). First, it is important to note the vitality of historical pageants well into the mid-twentieth century: the Nottingham pageant of 1949 was followed by a wave of pageants across the whole of Britain in the 1950s. Although their scale and ambition, and the element of visual spectacle, declined, in many places pageant plays survived and evolved in the 1960s and 1970s, and indeed beyond, and the practice of re-enacting a series of scenes from the history of a community or an organisation remained widespread. Many schools and churches performed historical pageants, and the tradition of the 'Left pageant' also persisted: there was, for example, a 'Highlights of the Struggle' pageant at a Communist Party rally in 1972.[23] Unsurprisingly, perhaps, there were both continuities and divergences from the pageants of the early twentieth century, but in many respects Louis Napoleon Parker would have recognised the post-war pageants, with their extravagance, amateur ethos and close connections with civic life, not to mention the continued popularity of Queen Elizabeth I and scenes from her reign. Indeed, Parker's own grandson Anthony Parker was one of the best-known pageant-masters after the Second World War. Although the pageant plays and other events of the 1960s and 1970s lacked the scale of the earlier costume dramas, the form never died out completely.

A key theme of pageants across the country, and indeed internationally, in the twentieth century was localism and civic identity. The American pageant-master William Chauncy Langdon described the historical pageant as a play in which 'the place is the hero and the development of the community is the plot' (quoted in Glassberg, 1990:69, 78). Early pageant scriptwriters were eager to demonstrate the contribution that their town or city – and script-writers, unlike pageant-masters, were usually local people – had made to the national story, although this was easier in some places than others. This ambition never went away, although by the post-Second World War period the distinctiveness of local history was often emphasised. At St Albans in 1948, for example, the pageanteers re-enacted the achievement of city status, which had occurred in 1877: this event had no particular national significance and involved no nationally recognisable characters (Freeman, 2013:442-3, 445). Such re-enactments had been become more common in the interwar years and retained their purchase in the 1940s and 1950s. Such localism makes sense in the context of the rapid changes of the twentieth century which, it has sometimes been suggested, promoted a national identity at the expense of local identities, saw the ascendancy of central over local government, and entailed the erosion of long-standing loyalties, customs and autonomy. Early twentieth-century pageants were popular cultural responses to the experience of change, and the same can be said for pageants that took place in towns and cities after the Second World War, in the wake of bomb damage and the impact of urban planning. Pageants – in their presentation of history and in the mobilisation of collective effort in their planning and organisation – were used to promote a 'community spirit' that was often remembered long after the event itself: the St Albans pageants, for example, lived long in popular memory into the twenty-first century.[24] Conflict and local rivalries were often not far below the surface when pageants were staged, but their repeated success

in mobilising large sections of local communities and attracting even more people as spectators, over large parts of the twentieth century, is worthy of note. From Warwick in 1906 to Salford in 1930 to Nottingham in 1949 and in many other places too, pageants promoted local identities and pride, and brought the past into the service of the present.

Notes

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[1] This account of the Sherborne pageant is taken from 'The Sherborne Pageant: "Mother of All Pageants"', *The Redress of the Past: Historical Pageants in Britain*: http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageant-month/sherborne-pageant-1905/ (accessed 8 May 2015).

[2] *Herts Advertiser*, 23 October 1953, p. 10.

[3] Community plays share with historical pageants the aim of raising community consciousness: the past may be depicted, and brought to bear on contemporary concerns, in different ways from before, but in both traditions there is a theatrical and a social purpose behind the endeavour (Beddow, 2001:10).

[4] This section on the Warwick pageant is based on the account on the website *The Redress of the Past: Historical Pageants in Britain*: http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageant-month/warwick-pageant-1906/ (accessed 8 May 2015).

[5] 'Charter celebrations', *Burnley Express*, 7 June 1930, p. 13.

[6] *Manchester Guardian*, 7 July 1930, p. 13.

[7] 'Special Church Services', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 June 1930, p. 13; no evidence has been recovered as to whether this service did take place.

[8] See for example 'The Spirit of Salford', *Yorkshire Post*, 27 June 1930, p. 3.

[9] 'Salford Pageant: Parts for Unemployed', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 9 June 1930, p. 5; see also *Yorkshire Post*, 9 June 1930, p. 5; *Dundee Courier*, 13 June 1930, p. 14 .

[10] 'Salford Pageant: 700th Anniversary of the Charter', *Manchester Guardian*, 30 April 1930, p. 15.

[11] *Manchester Guardian*, 30 April 1930, p. 15.

[12] *Guy Fawkes* (1923): http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0297157/ (accessed 8 May 2015). This was a British made film first released in September of that year.

[13] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 10 July 1930, p. 3.

[14] 'Salford Pageant and Surplus', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1930, p. 13; no record has been recovered of this being built, however, and it is assumed the idea had to be abandoned.

[15] 'Salford Society: Founders' Meeting', *Manchester Guardian*, 11 October 1930, p. 15.

[16] 'Nottm. Pageant Critics', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7 May 1949, p. 1.

[17] 'Pageant Worthy of City', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28 March 1949, p. 1.

[18] 'Pageant Singers Wanted', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 9 March 1949, p. 5; 'Pageant Plans', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 January 1949, p. 1.

[19] 'Priceless Treasures Destroyed in Nottingham Fire', *Nottingham Evening News*, 11 July 1949, p. 5.

[20] 'Charter Week Tributes', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 July 1949, p. 1.

[21] Letter from Barry Elliot to Editor of *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14 June 1989: Nottingham Archives (NA), DD/2464/1/4 (ii).

[22] 'Churchill Preferred' – letter from Robbing Hoodwink to Editor's Letter Bag, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1949, p. 4; 'Money "Wasted"' – letter from Bill Cole to Editor's Letter Bag, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1949, p. 4; 'Poor and Needy' – letter from Hemlock to Editor's Letter Bag, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1949, p. 4.

[23] See documents in the Labour History Archive, Manchester: CP/LON, EVNT/02/16.

[24] *Herts Advertiser*, 9 June 2011, p. 20.

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