

<p>Institution: University of Cambridge</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA29</p>
<p>Title of case study: The York Mystery Plays in performance</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Richard Beadle's ongoing research on the text and documentary records of the late medieval York cycle of Mystery Plays has made a crucial impact on performances at the York Festival in 2008, 2010 and 2012. Research since 1993 has issued in new scholarly editions in 2009 and 2013, and these (and his work on Medieval Drama more generally) have conserved and interpreted a vital example of cultural heritage for audiences and inspired new forms of artistic production outside the academy. This work has also contributed to economic prosperity via the creative sector, and to education outside the University of Cambridge.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Beadle has been a member of the Faculty of English in the University of Cambridge since 1975 and has been Professor of Medieval Literature and Palaeography since 2010. His research over many years has focussed on establishing a reliable printed text of the York cycle plays. The original text of the York cycle is preserved in the British Library. Compiled in York c. 1477, it contains around 13,500 lines of northern Middle English verse drama depicting episodes from the Old and New Testaments, especially focussed on the life of Jesus Christ. The cycle consists of some 50 separate short plays (known in their time as pageants), each of which was produced by one or two of the craft guilds of the medieval city, e.g. the Fishers and Mariners' pageant of <i>Noah's Flood</i>. The annual productions of the cycle were events of national importance in medieval England, and proved to be of remarkable longevity, taking place from around 1370 or earlier up to the last recorded performance in 1569.</p> <p>The establishment of the text has been co-ordinated with other research into the documentary records of early drama in York, still mostly preserved in York City Archives. These provide extensive background information about the social and economic functions of the sixty or so craft guilds involved in the annual production, and the civic authorities that organised it. They also furnish more limited data about the staging, props and costumes not evident from the text, especially about pageant wagons, the moveable stages upon which the plays were performed in the streets of York.</p> <p>These two bodies of information—text and documents—have been brought together in Beadle's definitive edition of the cycle in the original language, <i>The York Plays</i>, at last superseding the Victorian <i>editio princeps</i> of the cycle which came out as long ago as 1885, and published by the prestigious Early English Text Society across two volumes (together running to over a thousand pages) in 2009 and 2013[1]. Interim findings were published in 'The York Cycle', in the influential <i>Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre</i>, co-edited by Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (2nd. ed., 2008), widely regarded as the standard general survey of the subject: for new edition Beadle entirely revised his own chapter, commissioned and edited three new ones (by Johnston, Walker and McKinnell), and up-dated the bibliography.[3] Prior to these recent developments, an edition of about half of the pageants, converted into a form suitable for use by modern producers, was published as an Oxford World's Classic in 1995, and re-issued with corrections in 2009, as <i>York Mystery Plays: a selection in modern spelling</i>, co-edited by Beadle and P.M. King: half of the twenty-two selected pageants were edited by Beadle, who also co-wrote the introduction.[2]</p> <p>Beadle's recent work in bringing together the texts and documents includes crucial new archival work that supplements or supersedes standard extracts from the York archives (previously thought to have been definitive) in <i>Records of Early English Drama: York</i>, edited by Johnston and Rogerson in 1979; this new work is incorporated (together with his lexicographical and interpretative research) in vol. 2 of his 2009–13 edition, comprising the General Introduction, Commentary and Glossary. In a separate ground-breaking study he has also investigated in more minute detail the auspices under which the British Library manuscript containing the text of the cycle was produced, showing that Richard of Gloucester (the future Richard III) was influential, and</p>

narrowing the date of the compilation to c. 1476–7.[4]

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] Richard Beadle (ed.), *The York Plays. A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, Vol. 1, The Text; Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Vol. 2, General Introduction, Commentary, Glossary; Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

ISBN 978-0-19-957847-4 and 978-0-19-959037-7

[2] Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King (eds.), *York Mystery Plays: a selection in modern spelling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised and corrected editions, World's Classics, 1995, 2009). ISBN 978-0-19-955253-5.

[3] Richard Beadle, 'The York Corpus Christi Play', in Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 99–124. ISBN 10-0-521-36670-4.

[4] Richard Beadle, 'Nicholas Lancaster, Richard of Gloucester and the York Corpus Christi Play', in M. Rogerson (ed.), *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City* (York and Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2011), pp. 31–52. ISBN 978-1-903153-35-2.

All items were peer-reviewed, have received favourable reports, and reviews in leading professional journals. Beadle's contribution to the study of the plays was summed up as follows in the Early English Text Society's reader's report on item [1] above: ' . . . he is the acknowledged expert on the subject as a whole. He knows everything there is to know about them, and could have provided a monumental blockbuster of a book. What he has done is even better: to select what is most necessary and most important to the understanding of the plays, writing of them always with a vivid sense of personal engagement. He is to be congratulated on bringing a major work of scholarship to a successful conclusion'. (Early English Text Society reader's report 12.12.2012; copy certified by Helen Spencer dated 14.8.2013).

All outputs can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The York Mystery plays were revived during the Festival of Britain in 1951 and witnessed by over 26,000 people. In recent years they have been regularly performed with a mainly amateur cast drawn from the local community, playing an important role in the life of York, culturally, socially and economically. In 2012, coinciding with the 800th anniversary of York's City Charter and the London Cultural Olympiad, the thirty performances involved over 1,000 local volunteers working alongside theatre professionals.

Beadle's research has proved vital in **conserving and interpreting cultural heritage**. His work has been influential on the York Festival Trust and the York Guilds and Companions since 1998, when they began their modern day association with the Mystery Plays, and it had specific impact on the production of 2010, which drew directly on Beadle's findings about original performance conditions and sought to reproduce them. Their Chairman attests that 'from the start the work of Richard Beadle has been the strongest influence on our reinventions of the medieval texts'. He writes that 'These translations offer us as organisers, and the various directors and groups who perform the Plays, accessibility to the language, mind-set and world of the medieval citizens of York. They help us to recreate these Plays for modern localities and audiences.' [1] The 2010 production reached wider audiences through YouTube and a professionally produced DVD [2], and the 2012 production was streamed live across the internet. It is not only the York performances to which Beadle's work has added an extra dimension: for the 2011 production at Shakespeare's Globe he wrote the programme explaining 'the mystery play tradition'. [3]

Beadle's research has **inspired specific new forms of artistic expression and informed performance practice**, most markedly in the 2010 York production, when — drawing directly on

Beadle's research findings — twelve plays were performed outdoors on wagons in the traditional manner, by casts from schools, colleges, amateur dramatic groups, churches, and from the modern descendants of the craft and mercantile guilds who had brought forth the pageants in medieval times [4]. These included *The Creation* (York Guild of Building), *The Massacre of the Innocents* (St Peter's School), *The Crucifixion and Death of Christ* (Company of Butchers and St Chad's Church), *The Last Judgement* (Company of Merchant Adventurers and Pocklington School). Several hundred performers, musicians, singers, stage-hands, stewards, wagon-, costume- and prop-makers were involved, many becoming very enthusiastic about this experience and the new perspective they had gained on the city's history and medieval life in general. Parts of the city centre were closed off to enable the wagons on which the plays were being staged to be drawn through the streets in something like the authentic medieval manner, as described in the edition from which the texts were drawn. Each play was performed four times to different audiences gathered at a series of previously advertised locations across the city. The Head of Drama at Pocklington School, affirms that Beadle's editions in original and modern spellings have 'provided access on pronunciation, meaning, intention, practical possibilities, original staging elements, character, location and social conditions which has enabled me to use [them] with non-specialists in a practically meaningful way. ... I use both editions regularly for inspiration, practical examinations and general educational purposes.' [5]

In so far as Beadle's research inspired and specifically informed the York production of 2010, it helped to **contribute to economic prosperity and the quality of the tourist experience**. On 11 May 2010 the City of York Council received a report that the 2010 production had 'levered in over £1 million to the city's economy ... An increased level of benefit would be expected from the 2012 production'. And further, that 'The staging of the 2012 York Mystery Plays would contribute to a number of corporate objectives including strengthening local communities, developing opportunities for residents to experience York as a vibrant and eventful city, supporting a thriving economy and improving opportunities for a healthy, active lifestyle.' [6]

Beadle's research has also had an impact on **education**, as witness the testimony of the Head of Drama, Pocklington School, and a conference sponsored by the Guilds in July 2011 to reflect on their experience of producing the pageants [7]. Beadle was a key figure amongst the academic researchers in the field of early drama, responding to representatives from local groups involved in the 2010 production, such as The Builders, Butchers, and Scriveners, Heslington Church, and Pocklington School, and taking part in question and answer sessions and informal networking with the local mystery play community. Further afield, Beadle's research has had wide impact on teaching in institutions of higher education other than his own. Not only the editions of the York plays, but also the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (2008) is frequently prescribed on reading lists round the world, as for example, at the Universities of Exeter and London (King's College London) in the UK, and the Universities of Rochester and Virginia in the US [8-11] The importance of his recent article on Richard Duke of Gloucester and the York Plays (3[4] above) has recently been singled out for emphasis in a review in *Speculum*, where the arguments are said to be 'seductive . . . and will no doubt provoke lively debate' [12] .

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Statement from person 1 (Chairman, York Guilds and Companies and yorkmysteryplays.co.uk)

[2] DVD: a professionally produced DVD of the 2010 York Guilds and Companies production, showing all 12 plays in full. See Web link: http://www.yorkmysteryplays.co.uk/2010_plays.htm

[3] <http://www.london-se1.co.uk/news/view/5464>

[4] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/jul/25/york-medieval-mystery-plays>

[5] Statement from person 2 (Head of Drama Department, Pocklington School).

[6] Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture) to the City of York Council, 11 May 2010

[http://democracy.york.gov.uk/\(S\(er5fig3cbkjmjx55ekdxrgfc\)\)/documents/s39312/York%20Mystery%20Plays.pdf](http://democracy.york.gov.uk/(S(er5fig3cbkjmjx55ekdxrgfc))/documents/s39312/York%20Mystery%20Plays.pdf)

[7] http://www.yorkmysteryplays.co.uk/2012_symposium.htm

[8] <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/english/modules/eas2071/description/>

[9] <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/english/modules/2012-13/level5/5AAEB038.pdf>

[10] <http://www.unm.edu/~english/resources/documents/pdf/MiddleEnglishPhD.pdf>

[11] http://www.engl.virginia.edu/graduate/ma_phd_medieval

[12] *Speculum*, October 2012, p. 1243.