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dans l'Europe prémoderne  
à la mémoire d'André Lascombes

***To entertain, instruct  
and celebrate***  
*Studies in early modern theatre and  
theatricality in memory of André  
Lascombes*

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## « 14 crests with hills and rabbits »

Edward III's Christmas party of 1347

**Meg Twycross**

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On 12 July 1346 an English army led by King Edward III invaded Northern France. Six weeks later (26 August), it inflicted a crushing defeat on the French army at Crécy. Edward then proceeded north to besiege Calais. The siege took nearly a year, and the city did not surrender until 1 August 1347. On 12 October following the King arrived back in England, and celebrated his successes with a round of jousts and festivities, the costuming of which is recorded in the accounts of the Great Wardrobe.

The accounts for September 1344-January 1349 were published in 1846 by Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas.<sup>1</sup> They were of particular interest to him and his fellow antiquarians because they provided potential evidence for the date of the foundation of the Order of the Garter. For modern historians of theatre they are some of our earliest detailed materials on court entertainments. Unfortunately, as evidence they suffer from a familiar problem: they tell us what the garments were made of, and what (within limits) the final versions were meant to represent, but not what the performers actually did when they were wearing them or, by extension, what

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1 NICOLAS, 1846: 1-163. The entry for 1348 was noted earlier by WARTON, 1774: 238. The original is on TNA E 101/391/15 mbs 7-11. Inevitably, COVID restrictions over the last three years have meant that I could not look at the documents in person. Many thanks to Mark Chambers for sending me his photographs of part of this roll. They confirm reassuringly that Nicolas was a relatively accurate transcriber. Fortunately, other useful supplementary material is to be found in the Pipe Roll, TNA E 372/207. Photographs of the relevant portion of this are available online at <[http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT4/E3/E372n0207/aE-372n0207fronts/IMG\\_0200.htm](http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT4/E3/E372n0207/aE-372n0207fronts/IMG_0200.htm)> to <[IMG\\_0203.htm](http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT4/E3/E372n0207/aE-372n0207fronts/IMG_0203.htm)>. They are a *post-mortem* global accounting for John of Cologne's work between 26 July 1333 and 18 October 1354, made by his brother and heir William of Cologne in response to a writ of 12 October 1361.

they were meant to convey to the audience. Materials for the study of performance at the time tend to be disjunct: either we have financial accounts like these, which give us the ingredients but leave us to fit them together; or we have (usually very brief) narrative accounts by chroniclers, who tell us what happened, in often exaggerated terms but without much practical visual detail. Illustrations, like the over-familiar ones from Froissart, are usually so far after the event that they merely tell us what a later generation thought it *should* have looked like.

This is the entry for the Christmas revels at Guildford in 1347/8:

*Et ad faciendum ludos domini Regis ad festum Natalis domini celebratum apud Guldefordum anno Regis .xxj°. in quo expendebantur .iiij<sup>xx</sup>. .iiij. tunice de bokeram diuersorum colorum .xlij. viseres diuersorum similitudinum .xxvij. crestes .xiiij. cloce depicte .xiiij. capita draconum .xiiij. tunice albe .xiiij. capita pauonum cum alis .xiiij. tunice depicte cum oculis pauonum .xiiij. capita cygnorum cum suis alis .xiiij. tunice de tela linea depicte .xiiij. tunice depicte cum stellis de auro et argento vapulate*

<i>xlvi. pecia de</i>	<i>Bokeram</i>
<i>lxvi. vlnę curte</i>	<i>Tele Angle</i>
<i>viiij. pelles de</i>	<i>Roan</i>
<i>vj. lb</i>	<i>fili de lymo</i>
<i>xiiij. similitudines facierum mulierum</i>	] <i>viseres</i>
<i>xiiij. similitudines facierum hominum cum barbīs</i>	
<i>xiiij. similitudines capitum angelorum de argento</i>	
<i>xiiij. crestes cum tibiis reuersatis et calciatis</i>	] <i>crestes</i>
<i>xiiij. crestes cum montibus et cuniculis</i>	
<i>xiiij. cloche depicte</i>	<i>cloce depicte</i>
<i>xiiij. capita draconum</i>	<i>capita draconum</i>
<i>xiiij. tunice albe depicte</i>	<i>tunice de Bokeram</i>
<i>xiiij. capita pauonum</i>	<i>capita pauonum</i>
<i>xiiij. paria alarum pro eisdem capitibus</i>	<i>ale pauonum</i>
<i>xiiij. tunice depicte cum oculis pauonum</i>	<i>tunice depicte cum oculis pauonum</i>
<i>xiiij. capita cygnorum</i>	<i>capita cygnorum</i>
<i>xiiij. paria alarum pro eisdem capitibus</i>	<i>ale cygnorum</i>
<i>xiiij. tunice de tela linea depicte</i>	<i>tunice linie depicte</i>
<i>xiiij. tunice depicte cum stellis<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>tunice depicte cum stellis</i>

2 NICOLAS, 1846: 37-38; E 101/391/15 mb 10. Based on Nicolas' transcription with abbreviations expanded.

(And for making the revels of the Lord King at the feast of the Birth of Our Lord, celebrated at Guildford in the King's 21<sup>st</sup> year [1347/8], in which there were consumed:<sup>3</sup> 84 tunics of *buckram* of various colours, 42 masks of various likenesses, 28 crests, 14 painted cloaks, 14 dragon's heads, 14 white tunics, 14 peacock's heads with wings, 14 tunics painted with peacock's eyes, 14 swan's heads with their wings, 14 tunics of painted linen cloth, beaten with gold and silver stars,

46 lengths of	"buckram" <sup>4</sup>
46 ells of short	English cloth
8 skins of	Roan (leather)
6 lb	linen thread
14 likenesses of the faces of women	
14 likenesses of the faces of men with beards	"visors"
14 likenesses of the heads of angels of silver	
14 crests with lower legs, upside-down and booted	
14 crests with hills and rabbits	crests
14 painted (short) cloaks	
14 heads of dragons	painted cloaks
14 white tunics, painted	heads of dragons
14 heads of peacocks	tunics of "buckram"
14 pairs of wings for those same heads	heads of peacocks
	wings of peacocks
14 tunics painted with peacocks' eyes	tunics painted with peacocks' eyes
14 heads of swans	heads of swans
14 pairs of wings for those same heads	wings of swans
14 tunics of linen cloth, painted	painted linen tunics
14 tunics painted with stars	tunics painted with stars)

Twenty items further on, after others mostly to do with provision for tourneys, it is followed by the costumes for Christmas at Otford and Twelfth Night at Merton the following year (1348/9). These are similar though not identical: *viseres* of heads of men and lions, men and elephants, men with bats' wings, woodwoses, and maidens at Christmas, followed by dragons and men with halos at Twelfth Night.

3 *Expendebantur*: "were used up", in the Wardrobe sense of stored materials being used and therefore no longer in store.

4 Not the coarse stiffened material we are used to, but at this period it appears to have been used for a heavier weight of linen used for household furnishings. See online *The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project*, online <<http://lexisproject.arts.manchester.ac.uk/>> sv *buckram*.

They have not unnaturally been worked over almost to exhaustion, usually in histories of tournaments and of courtly magnificence.<sup>5</sup> The revels costumes have however proved peculiarly recalcitrant to anything beyond direct reportage (e.g. “The usual elaborate masks and painted tunics were ordered, in sets of fourteen; six sets of buckram tunics, and set of masks of girls’ faces ...”).<sup>6</sup> There are no attempts that I know of to visualise them precisely;<sup>7</sup> while speculations on how and when they might have been deployed, or what messages they might have conveyed to the spectators or the participants, are frustrated by lack of direct material.<sup>8</sup> Tournament costumes are slightly easier to discuss, especially if they are also mentioned by the chroniclers, because they are less diverse and can be located in a rather more precise historical context.<sup>9</sup> The latest guess at the 1347/8 Christmas revels is: “These extravagant costumes clearly played a part in an elaborate pageantry, the subject of which was no doubt a symbolic or allegorical representation of the monarch’s newly asserted reputation” after Crécy.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps. But it is difficult to reconcile a cast dressed as peacocks, dragons, swans, women, bearded men, and angels, or wearing upside-down booted legs and “hills with rabbits” on their heads, directly to this theme. And what kind of “pageantry” might it have been? The word suggests something theatrical; indeed most earlier descriptions assume that this was a show put on—*exhibited* is the word used<sup>11</sup>— for a passive audience. The sheer scale of the provision, the fact that they come in sets of 14, the possible number of a jousting team,<sup>12</sup> and what we

5 The classic studies here are BARBER, 2013; VALE, 1982; and BARKER (VALE), 1986. BARBER and BARKER, 1989, has a European scope.

6 BARBER, 2013: 254-255.

7 Juliet Vale attempts to distinguish between *crestes*, *viseres*, and “heads”, but she does not suggest actual visual parallels; VALE, 1982: 69-70. Some of the speculations which have taken root are totally impracticable: Vale’s suggestion (1982: 71) that Edward appeared in the Bury tournament “in a bird outfit” wildly overestimates how far 30 pheasant’s feathers will go, even if they were twice the size of those on sale in current craft packs. A fan helmet-crest is possible. But by 2011, Mark Ormrod is visualising him dressed “in an elaborate outfit complete with flapping wings made up of copper piping covered with real feathers” (ORMROD, 2011: 300). Historians should be made to construct some of their fantasies before committing them to print.

8 Barber’s account of the Guildford Revels (BARBER, 2013: 77-89) is full of interesting speculations but marred by mistranslations and added details which are not in the originals.

9 See BARKER (VALE), 1986: 98-100; TWYXCROSS, 2021: 12-16. They seem to be something of a public statement, like carnival floats today, alluding to events about which the ordinary spectator would have opinions, or needed to be guided into them.

10 CHAMBERS, 2017.

11 COLLIER, 1831: 15: “In A.D. 1348, Edward III, kept his Christmas in the castle of Guildford, and there these *ludi* were exhibited: from the nature of the materials and properties furnished, it is sufficiently evident that they were of a dramatic character”. He identifies them, after WARTON, 1774, as “disguisings”, but struggles as to what disguisings might have been.

12 See e.g. NICOLAS, 1846: 36: “*Et ad faciendum .xiiij. tunicas et totidem capucia de panno curto blue-*

know of early-fourteenth-century festivities, suggests that this is unlikely. I would like to explore a little further, from the point of view of a historian of entertainments—*theatre* is too narrow a term in this context. Be warned from the beginning: I come to no conclusions. Indeed one of my conclusions is that this is impossible.

The dominant feature of the costuming seems to be the headgear. The only tunics which are precisely characterised, “*xiiij. tunice depicte cum oculis pauonum*”, are clearly meant to be part of the same costume as the “*.xiiij. capita pauonum cum alis*” which immediately precede them, though one can spend a lot of ingenuity trying inconclusively to match the other tunics to the heads—did the white tunics go with the swans’ heads and wings? did the silver-and-gold-star-embossed tunics go with the silver-faced angels? And why, incidentally, do the numbers not match up?<sup>13</sup>

One answer to that might be that they were not all meant to. At Otford and Merton, insofar as we can tell, the heads and bodies were not designed as a unit.<sup>14</sup> The “maskers” in the bas de page of MS Bodley 264 fol. 181<sup>v</sup>,<sup>15</sup> who are often invoked here, are like that: animal- and bird-heads are worn with normal, presumably party-style, garments.<sup>16</sup> The join is masked by a bell-shaped cape, a *cloc(h)a* (whence our word *cloak*).<sup>17</sup> But the heads instantly transform the dancers from mere humans dressed in their best to an upside-down version of the hybrid creatures which inhabit the margins of service books and other fourteenth-century manuscripts. Those tend to have human heads and animal bodies; these are all too clearly basically human—and yet not. They are probably people one knows, and yet they might do or mean anything. Like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, they are translated.

*to contra hastiludium de Bury*”. VALE, 1982: 86-88, suggests that the original Garter Knights were chosen partly to provide “two potential tournament teams”. Her Appendix 14 lists the founder members; they are two columns of 13 each.

13 VALE, 1982: 70, grapples with this.

14 The entry in TNA E 372/207, which goes on to mention the *capita* at Otford, starts with “*xiiij supertunicorum cum xiiij. tunicis de Bokeram rubeo & viride operato diuersimode*”. It sounds as if these were for the maskers, in which case they could have worn the same bodies but changed the heads. See <[http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT4/E3/E372no207/aE372no207fronts/IMG\\_0202.htm](http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT4/E3/E372no207/aE372no207fronts/IMG_0202.htm)>. The accounts suggest that the maskers performed on January 1<sup>st</sup> (the Circumcision) and 6<sup>th</sup> (Epiphany) at night.

15 This section contains various Alexander romances. Text completed 1338, illuminations 1344. Flanders, probably Tournai. Immediate patron unknown, though Queen Philippa has been suggested. See <[https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript\\_1315](https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_1315)>.

16 See fol. 21<sup>v</sup>, 181<sup>v</sup>.

17 See *DMLBS* sv 2 *cloca*; *OED* sv *cloak* n. though the quotations are not very helpful. Also *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing* online, sv *cloak*.



Oxford: Bodleian Library MS Bodley 264, *The Romance of Alexander*, fol. 181<sup>v</sup>, detail.

The masked male dancers are flanked by a row of six female dancers on the right of the page.

The line of verse above is the song to which they are dancing.

Image © Bodleian Library, Oxford, used under Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC 4.0.

Online at <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/ae9f6cca-ae5c-4149-8fe4-95e6ecarf73c/surfaces/9e56e413-ddb1-49e1-8b84-1f6e90b1ed7c/>>.

The difference from the Bodley 264 dancers is of course that the “heads” in the accounts come in matching sets of 14.<sup>18</sup> This suggests choreography and a planned entertainment rather than individual choice. Whatever comment the performers were making, they were making it as a group (here, as in most dance pictures, the maskers hands are linked), and it was presumably of interest to the whole court. And we have absolutely no idea what it was.

It does not necessarily, however, imply that these were stage costumes for professional entertainers.<sup>19</sup> Edward’s Chamber Knights were used to being costumed as a matching set for processions to tourneys.<sup>20</sup> It has been pointed out how Edward used this to reinforce group identity, even to the extent of himself jousting under the arms of one of his knights,<sup>21</sup> and that this paid dividends in battle. The victors of Crécy seem to have thought of themselves as a team, to the extent of presenting themselves as such on their tombs.<sup>22</sup> The court as a whole, male and female, were on occasion given their *livery*,

18 At Otford there are 12 and at Merton 13.

19 As Juliet VALE points out, 1982: 70-71.

20 BARKER (VALE), 1986: 98-99; TWYXCROSS, 2021: 12-14.

21 See below, page 14.

22 Especially Reginald Lord Cobham (d.1361) in Lingfield, Surrey. The brass of Sir Hugh Hastings (d. 1347, the year of the Guildford revels), replaced the expected saints in the arcading with heraldic images of his comrades in arms. The East Window of Gloucester Cathedral is a virtual armorial of the Crécy campaign. See SAUL, 2009: 216-231; BADHAM, 2016.



the issue of clothes that were virtually part of their wages, in colours and even designs “*de secta Regis*” (to match the King).<sup>23</sup> As I note later, this made economic as well as social sense. The Guildford costumes were equally likely, if not more so, to be for the party-goers as for professional entertainers.

This becomes even more likely when we look at the format for this kind of party. Adam Murimuth describes the “*nobilissima hastiludia sive tirocinium*” (extremely splendid jousts or tourney) held four years earlier on January 19<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> 1344 in Edward’s birthplace, “*videlicet in castro de Wyndesore*”. There were so many guests that the Great Hall was reserved for the ladies, and the men were put up in tents,

*ubi fuerunt cibaria et omnia alia necessaria præparata et omnibus liberaliter et sine murmure liberata; et in sero choreæ et tripudia diversa solempniter ordinata. Et tribus diebus sequentibus rex cum aliis decem et novem militibus tenuit hastiludia contra omnes ab extrinseco venientes.*<sup>24</sup>

(where foodstuffs and every other necessity were prepared and dispensed lavishly and without grudging; and in the evening caroles and various other dances were ceremoniously arranged. And for three successive days the king with another ten and nine (19?) knights held *hastiludia* against all comers from outside.)

The combination of tourneying during the day, with the ladies as admiring and occasionally terrified spectators, followed by an evening of strenuous dancing, seems from other narratives to be the standard pattern:

There tourneyed tulkes by times ful mony  
Jousted full jolilé these gentil knights,  
Sipþen kayred to the court caroles to make ...<sup>25</sup>

The *Tournoi de Chauvency* by Jacques Bretel,<sup>26</sup> which purports to be an eye-witness account of an event in 1289, details an exhausting sequence of three days of one-on-one

23 See NICOLAS, 1846: 26-29 for an example when the whole court, including the ladies, were dressed in this way for the tournament at Lichfield. Smaller groups were also favoured in this way. In 1347 for Christmas at Guildford, the King was made a green robe and hood embroidered with pheasant’s feathers: so were his 8 chamber knights; NICOLAS, 1846: 38. On the household knights and livery, see HEFFERAN, 2019a.

24 MURIMUTH, 1889: 155. For a lengthier translation and discussion, see BARBER, 2013: 62-63.

25 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (anon.), ll. 41-43.

26 BRETTEL, 1932, and trans. BRYANT, 2020. This is of course in the time of Edward I, but the overall pattern does not seem to have changed.

jousts. Each day's jousting is followed by an evening of feasting, dancing, singing, and amorous conversation which goes on till midnight. The three days over, after a day's recuperation and preparation, the knights then take part in a *melée* in which several are seriously injured. The whole thing is arranged to showcase their stamina, and one task of the heralds is to describe them to the ladies in terms which suggest that they would be desirable sexual partners.<sup>27</sup> This is then played out in the dancing that follows. According to the "more florid"<sup>28</sup> version of Murimuth in MS Cotton Nero D X, at Edward's 1344 tournament feast, "*inter dominos et dominas non defuerunt tripudia, amplexus ad invicem commiscentes et oscula*" (between the lords and ladies there was no lack of dances, with frequent mingling of embraces and kisses).<sup>29</sup> It is not made clear whether these amorous exchanges were all purely make-believe.<sup>30</sup> Dancing is clearly felt to be highly erotic; there is a sense that the dancers are skating on very thin ice.

Singing, composing songs, and dancing are presented as social skills expected of a gentleman in the same breath as skill in arms: Chaucer's Squire, for example, "koude songes make and wel endite, / Juste and eek daunce".<sup>31</sup> The carole at least seems to have been danced to singing alone, without instrumental accompaniment.<sup>32</sup> It is noticeable from *Chauvency* that there the songs-and-dances involve a great deal of role-playing in which the singers, male and female, throw themselves into the scenarios created by the words (most of them are cast in the first person, or are dialogue songs) and, it is suggested, are thus led into serious love-affairs. To cite just one encounter: the poet tells of a dance in which a handsome knight, Renaud de Trie—all those involved are named—sings to his partner (inverted commas below indicate snatches of song),

"He tres douce Jehanette vous Mauez mon cuer emble"	2450	("Ah, most sweet Jehannette You have stolen my heart from me!")
Jehenne dauuiller lesgarde Qui nestoit nice ne couarde ...		Jehanne d'Avillers turned her eyes on him She wasn't bashful or timid...
Le bras estent et puis se torne	2455	She stretched out an arm and then turned,

27 See e.g. BRETEL, ll. 825-835, 1142-1144. A lot of the descriptions and comments have erotic overtones. After each encounter the heralds harangue the ladies about their amatory obligations to the combatants: e.g. ll. 534-567, 946-996.

28 MURIMUTH, 1889: xxxix.

29 *Ibid.*: 231. Is this disapproving?

30 Bretel says that they behaved "*Sanz vilonnie et sans desroi ... Ains ne ui feste mains estoute Plus cor-toise ne plus adroit*" (ll. 1309, 1312-1313).

31 CHAUCER, *Canterbury Tales*, *General Prologue*, ll. 95-96.

32 See MULLALLY, 2016: 84-90. In the *Restor du Paon* in MS Bodley 264, fol. 181<sup>v</sup>, the minstrels fall silent, when the lady Elios enters with an eagle of gold on her wrist. She sings for the dance, and the other dancers respond. The music for her song, "*Ensi ua qui amours / demaine a son commant*", is written in the manuscript on the same page as the famous masked dancers at the *bas de page*. The second main illustration of the page shows her proceeding with the eagle.

<i>A chanter liement satorne</i>		And made ready to sing joyfully
<i>Et a commencie sans delai</i>		And began without delay:
<i>“Onques mais namai</i>		“I have never been in love before,
<i>He diex bone estrainne</i>		Ah God, what good luck!
<i>En commencie iai”.</i>	2460	I have now begun”.)

And Bretel concludes, “*En mon cuer pansai se me samble / Dont auenez uous bien ensamble*” (In my heart I thought, it seems to me that good fortune has happened to you both).

Others are singing-games, in which the participants take on traditional roles, though only for the occasion. The Countess of Luxembourg takes the leading role in the game of The Garland, as a maiden choosing a lover, in this case a bashful young member of the audience;<sup>33</sup> even more teasingly, in a *pastourelle*, a young lady playing a shepherdess is courted by a “shepherd lad” dressed for the part, who takes considerable liberties with her—Bretel, slightly shocked, asks a servant who he is, and is told that it isn’t a lad, but a girl, Jehanette de Boinville, playing the part.<sup>34</sup> Nothing, it is implied, in this party world, is quite what it seems.

An entire jousting festival can be theatricalised: in Sarrasin’s *Romance of Le Hem*, one held in 1278<sup>35</sup> seems to have been given a scripted Arthurian scenario in which the sister of the lord of Longueval, one of the hosts, played Queen Guenevere, Longueval himself played the Knight of the Lion (complete with attendant lion) rescuing four damsels in distress, and comic relief was provided by “Sir Kay” (real identity unknown). This script is written into the poem, so that it is presented as an almost genuine Arthurian tourney.<sup>36</sup> Again, the “actors” were all members of the party.

Role-playing seems to have been part of the ethos of such an event. Though we have no direct information about this in Edward’s revels, we do know of a scenario created around the challenges for an unspecified tournament, possibly (though not certainly) held at one Christmas between 1357-60.<sup>37</sup> Each challenge is couched as a message from an Oriental female potentate (Penthesilia Queen of Persia, the Amazons, and Greater

33 BRETEL, ll. (4180-4300) 4341-4464.

34 BRETEL, ll. (2532-2613) 2550-2602.

35 SARRASIN, trans. Bryant, 2020.

36 There were many theatrical marvels including a flying chapel, all of which are part of the jousts rather than the evening’s entertainment, which we are told consisted of feasting and dancing till dawn. On Van Velthem’s account of an Arthurian tournament at Edward I’s court, and other witnesses to his Arthurian and jousting enthusiasms, see VALE, 1981: 46-61.

It was not only noble households who indulged in Arthurian role-playing: in Tournai in 1331, for example, the bourgeois held a joust *de trente ung roys*. These kings were “King Galehaut and the 30 kings he conquered”, who then submitted to King Arthur because of his admiration for Lancelot. Each joust was known by the name of the king he represented and whose fictitious arms he bore; VALE, 1981: 92-108.

37 CARPENTER, 2018.

Africa; “Judith, daughter of the noble king Joshua, Empress of Egypt and Arabia, Queen of Jerusalem and Judaea, Lady of Nubia and of the lands of Nimrod”) and presents a knight, either with a fantasy name or unnamed, who wishes to joust against a defendant from the court. Queen Philippa, or another royal lady presiding, is asked to choose a defendant. Apart from the necessary fantasy of identifying the English court with New Troy and thus the Matter of Britain, the theme is not specifically Arthurian: if anything, it looks toward the Matter of the East. One is reminded that the earlier part of MS Bodley 264 is an anthology of Alexander romances which take place on the fringes of India. The text of the challenges is sophisticated and also on occasion disconcertingly bawdy.<sup>38</sup> They are also clearly personalised; there are in-joke references to individuals, which would have been recognised by the audience but which mostly escape us. There even seems to be a (possibly disparaging) one which refers to the king and his sexual prowess. This seems to have been allowable, among friends, which we should bear in mind when we get on to what I suggest might be personal references to members of the court.

None of this seems to be laid on by paid entertainers; the party-goers themselves are the actors. There were minstrels at Edward’s 1344 festivities, where they provided “*melodia, letaque diversa*” (music, and various delights) and were well rewarded,<sup>39</sup> but there is no reason to believe that they were the actors, and the court and its guests merely provided a passive audience. But we do not and never shall know, unlike *Chauvency*, what the songs were which were danced by the teams wearing the “heads”. That they were dancers seems certain, especially since in 1331, for the Christmas *ludi Regis*, Thomas of Cobham provided “*vj. tunicas largas factas pro tripudiantibus*” (six wide tunics for the dancers).<sup>40</sup>

It is possible that the one with the fourteen swans might have provided the motto (*dictamen*), “Hay hay the Wythe swan; by godes soule I am thy man”, which the King

38 They make a good foil to the *chansonnettes* of MS Douce 306 which follow the text of *Chauvency*, or the late 13<sup>th</sup>-century Berne *Chansonnier* which, presumably because they are lyrics, can become anodyne *en masse*. Some of the badinage in *Le Hem* is also very risqué.

CARPENTER, 2021, has recently published the challenges for Henry IV’s tournament of 1401 for the visit of the Emperor Manuel Palaeologus, which tantalisingly suggest the existence of an entire lost genre. They are equally fictional but more formal and romantic, as befits a major state occasion, than Edward’s more playful and intimate versions.

39 MURIMUTH, 1889: 231.

40 TNA E 361/3 mb 16 (IMG 0086). There was also a team wearing 12 tunics, 12 cloaks, and 12 hoods of gilded canvas, and a set of hairy costumes for woodwoses, “*garniamenta pilosa ... pro hominibus feris*” (IMG 089). They also overbought 4 dozen masks (*falsa visagia*) and a horn, and had to sell them off. Wide tunics are mentioned again in 1347: “*xxiiij tunicarum cum tot camisarum largarum*” TNA E 372-207 (fronts IMG 200).

wore the following year at Christmas at Otford. Here the motto, or “word”, which later becomes another formal/informal feature of a heraldic achievement, anticipates the verbal part of the Elizabethan *impresa*, in that it is an enigmatic phrase, usually a quotation, adapted to suit a particular occasion. As such it expects a knowledgeable audience to interpret it. Usually it applies to a particular person at a particular time, though it can then be attached to a family or a society, like the Garter.<sup>41</sup> We know of Edward’s mottos (“*Honi soit qui mal y pense*” is only one of them, except that it then acquired a special status) largely because they appear in the accounts as embroidery.<sup>42</sup>

They add to the general aura of playful riddles—the Garter motto has never been satisfactorily “solved”. Even “I am thy man” is ambiguous. If we are to take it as warlike, since it was embossed on a suit of buckram armour,<sup>43</sup> was he identifying with the White Swan as its retainer? Or was it a love-message proclaiming (temporary?) allegiance to a lady whose badge was the white swan (a Bohun perhaps)? His other mottos, “*Siker as ye wodebynde*”, “*It is as it is*”, “*Who can hold that will away?*”, even “*Honi soit qui mal y pense*”,<sup>44</sup> might also be song-connected.<sup>45</sup>

It seems likely, though not provable, that the costumes were also meant to be teasers, even if the puzzle could be easily solved by those in the know. The one thing we cannot deduce from the accounts, which might give us a clue, is their style; whereas if we had photographs of them as we do of modern carnivals, for example, we would automatically read the mood and intention at once, though we might need further information to get the full flavour. If we could find a visual parallel it would at least be a step in the right direction.

41 See SIDDONS, 2014: xxi-xxviii, for an introduction. Later heraldists preferred to derive the motto from the war-cry. This is probably truer of Scotland.

42 E.g. NICOLAS, 1846: 34, 40, 43, 44, 49. “*Who may hold hat will away*” was however engraved on the cover of a silver-gilt *godet* (drinking cup); PALGRAVE, 1836: 273, 275. It was used again as a motto by Charles Brandon at a tilt in 1515; TWYLCROSS AND CARPENTER, 2002: 126.

43 This was not necessarily a lightweight costume for a fake joust: padded cloth armour, which could be studded, was normal in real jousts, though sometimes ineffective; BARKER, 1986: 166-168.

44 At the end of the first day at Chauvency the countesses of Chiny and Luxembourg come down from the stands singing, “*Honis soit qui ia se repentira damer*” (line 1274) (Shame on anyone who now repents of loving), and MS Douce 308 also contains an extensive chansonnier, in which two of the *ballettes* (fol. 226r and 235v) begin “*Honis soit ... Honis soit li iones bons qui premiers fut sans amors*” (Shamed be the young man who was the first to be without (a) love), and “*Honis soie ie lou iour. Que ie serai sans amours*” (Shamed may I be on the day that I am without love). I have not yet been able to get hold of *Chansonnier*, 2005, so these are transcribed from the manuscript online at <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/dd9d1160-196b-48a3-9427-78c209689c1f/>>.

45 VALE, 1982: 65.

Perhaps we can. The accounts cover two types of entertainment, *hastiludia* (“spear-games”, jousts and tournaments);<sup>46</sup> and *ludi* (“games, entertainments, revels”). To us these may seem like two completely different kinds of activity, but as we have seen, they were part and parcel of the same events and, even more important, on the practical front, not only were costumes for them provided by the same department, the Great Wardrobe, but the set of craftsmen who made them are unexpected but relevant.<sup>47</sup>

The Great Wardrobe was the department responsible for storing and accounting for all non-perishable goods bought in for the king’s household: furniture and tapestries; wearing apparel; groceries including dried fruit, spices, and sugar; plate and jewellery; and “all sorts of arms and armour, tents, flags, saddles, harness and other such articles”.<sup>48</sup> Its chief Purveyor, responsible for buying in goods, was the King’s Tailor. The other early executives were the King’s Pavilionier, the King’s Confectioner, and the King’s Armourer.<sup>49</sup> They accounted for their purchases and the subsequent requisitions from this stock to the Clerk of the Wardrobe. These are the documents, like TNA E 101/391/15, which give us our detailed information.

As a department, it had another, extended, role. It was responsible for the “*liberationes robarum*”, the handing out of garments, which were a traditional bonus, virtually part of the wages, of being in the king’s service. It was more economical, as well as visually cohesive, if these came in matching sets (hence the development of the meaning of *livery* and its sense as “uniform”;<sup>50</sup> and also if they were made in-house. The Great Wardrobe was thus also a (London-based) factory which supplied, often at very short notice,<sup>51</sup> not only breathtakingly elaborate garments *pro corpore Regis* and the royal family, but also matching sets of clothes for court officials and employees, together with bed-hangings, banners, pavilions, horse-furniture, and armour.<sup>52</sup> (It also repaired them at need.) There was a team of craftsmen, many on semi-permanent contracts, to cope with such demands.

Moreover, their areas of expertise overlapped, from our point of view at least. The Armourer’s team made all the padded garments to be worn under or in place of metal.<sup>53</sup> It also made (usually velvet) surcoats and coverings for metal arm- and leg-pieces, as well

46 I translate this as “jousts”, but it may equally have included a *melée*.

47 Not to be confused with the Wardrobe, which was essentially the national finance office.

48 TOUT, 1928: 350-355. See also account in *Lexis Wardrobe*.

49 TOUT, 1928: 387-383. On the complex history of the organisation of the Great Wardrobe, its officials, housing, and craftsmen, see TOUT, 1928: 349-416. The best way of getting a sense of the various “departments” who accounted to the Clerk is to look at the accounts, as in the TNA E 361 series.

50 TOUT, 1928: 413-414. See *OED* sv *livery*, DMLBS sv *liberatio* 7.

51 Page 6: “*cum summa festinacione*”.

52 See TOUT, 1928: 387. The armoury eventually ended up as a separate institution in the Tower of London.

53 See MERCER, 2014: 1-20.

as banners, horse-trappings, and pavilions. All these were heavily decorated. Embroidery was an important skill, and it was the province not of the tailor, but of the armourer.<sup>54</sup> When the King asked for an outfit embroidered with pheasants' feathers for the Christmas revels at Guildford in 1347/8, John Marreys the King's Tailor accounts for the green material and the fur, with the making and furring.<sup>55</sup> Johannes de Colonia, the King's Armourer (John of Cologne—the best armour and armourers were from Germany and Italy),<sup>56</sup> also accounts "*ad faciendum*" (for the making), but the materials he cites are 10lb of silk (thread), 8 lengths of wide gilt ribbon, and 3lb of linen thread. This is clearly for the embroidery.<sup>57</sup>

It should not therefore be surprising, on several counts, that the provision for Christmas revels, which we think of as peaceful and would expect to be the province of the King's Tailor, seems to be bundled in with provision for jousts, which we think of as war-games and would expect to belong to the Armourer. The work seems to be shared between the two, presumably according to their specialist expertise. At first glance, if it were not that the entries distinguish between garments made "*pro hastiludiis*" (with the names of the venues) and "*ludos domini Regis ad festum Natalis domini celebratos*", we might assume that if the armourer made them they were all for jousts and tournaments, but it is clearly not so. The claim for making "44 masks for the jousts at Canterbury for the king, nobles, barons, knights, and ladies, and for a covering for the King's seat/saddle for the joust, and for making other necessaries for the jousts from the same source"<sup>58</sup> comes from the King's Tailor,<sup>59</sup> while the one for the costumes for the *ludi* at Guildford, and at Otford and Merton the following year, is from the King's Armourer.

The word *crestes*<sup>60</sup> suggests the personalised heraldic crest on a jousting helmet. The tendency has been to treat the two events as separate, but if we see them as a continuum,

54 TOUT, 1928: 390-391.

55 NICOLAS, 1846: 11 and 38.

56 Johannes de Colonia makes his first appearance in the Great Wardrobe accounts in 1327, the year of the King's accession, making returns in the accounts of the Great Wardrobe; see TNA E 361/3. He was definitely from Germany: his brother appears as "Terri [Thierry] de Almaign" in 6 Edward III; TNA E 213/325.

57 NICOLAS, 1846: 38. He says that Marreys had handed over the cloth to him from the Private Wardrobe. Presumably it had been cut out but would be made up after it was embroidered.

58 "*Et ad faciendum .xliiij. visers facte pro hastiludiis Cantuarie pro Rege Comitibus Baronibus militibus et dominabus et pro coopertura selle Regis ad hastiludium et ad alia necessaria pro hastiludiis inde faciendum*"; NICOLAS, 1846: 30.

59 He also made the 288 *visers* handed out to nobles, ladies and damsels as a gift from the King during the time of the *hastiludium* at Lichfield; NICOLAS, 1846: 29.

60 *Cresta* is the word mostly used in the accounts. Occasionally we get *timbre*. See *OED* sv *timbre*|*tymber* n<sup>2</sup>. It is the same word as *timbre* n<sup>1</sup>, which means "drum, tambourine". *OED* suggests this is because in French it is transferred to a metal bell, and then to a helmet, but one wonders if the practice of making them out of parchment may not have contributed.

it would not be surprising if crests as made by the armourer for the *hastiludia* were perceived in the same way as crests supplied by him for the revels. Artistically, they had the same creative and visual imagination behind them, especially if they were both sometimes bought, as the accounts seem to suggest, from specialist workshops.<sup>61</sup> They may even have been made on the same (wooden?) moulds. Then there is the way in which they were likely to have been read. If they were styled like helmet crests, it could well be that in a visual ambience where decoration was frequently heraldic (beds embroidered with armorial devices, household plate decorated with escutcheons), it would be second nature to read them heraldically.

We cannot actually prove this. We do not know what the accompanying action was; a song, if there were one, might have changed the emphasis completely; and it is of course not necessary to posit that all the costumes were “read” in the same way; but in our current meagre state of information it seems as good a guess as any, and there is no harm in pursuing it to see where it takes us. Well over a century later, the incorporation of crests in the costumes for one of the disguisings in the morality play *Wisdom*<sup>62</sup> suggests the existence of a tradition: “*Here entur six dysgyssed [dressed up] in the sute [livery] of Mynde, wyth rede berdys,<sup>63</sup> and lyouns rampaunt on here crestys, and yche a warder [staff] in hys honde; her [their] mynstrallys, trumpes [trumpets]*”.<sup>64</sup> One interesting thing about this performance, however, is that it is a dumbshow: the dancing teams each have an appropriate minstrelsy, but they themselves convey their message “by countenance”.<sup>65</sup>

The concept of reading our performances “heraldically”, however, raises some interesting questions. Firstly, it implies that the costumes were meant to be identified with a particular person or family. Secondly, it assumes that the *crests*, the most conspicuous features, were “heraldic” in that sense. But were they at that particular period? Are they, by extension, puzzles, and therefore to be solved? Or were crests just the most effective way of displaying the results of your visual inventiveness, and incidentally bringing them to life through motion, creating a flotilla of swans, or a pride of peacocks?

To take the first point: heraldry in this context<sup>66</sup> is essentially a method of identification, evolved for warfare when helmets began to cover the face completely. In battle, a

61 E.g. “*Et in .xij. viseres cum capitibus draconum emptis pro ludis Regis apud Mertonum in festo Epiphanie dicto anno .xxij*”; TNA E 372/207.

62 Persuasively argued as based on the de la Pole heraldry by MARSHALL, 1992: 37–66.

63 In a clean-shaven era (like the mid-fifteenth century), false beards were treated as masks: see TWYCROSS AND CARPENTER, 2002: 334–335.

64 *Wisdom* (anon.), 2008: s.d. at l. 691.

65 See *OED* sv *countenance* n<sup>1</sup> †3: “A sign, gesture. to make a countenance: to make a sign, intimate by sign or gesture”; *MED* sv. *cōtenaunce* n. 4, especially quotation dated 1509 (?1468), pageants described as difficult to understand as “all was cuntenance and no wordes”.

66 See WOODCOCK AND ROBINSON, 1988: 1–13, for theories of its origin.



leading warrior had to be recognisable by some other means. To begin with, this was the device on his shield and surcoat, and probably more important, on his banner, so that his men would know where to rally.<sup>67</sup> (The arms on the surcoat were useful for the heralds in one of their less pleasant tasks, identifying the corpses.) In a tournament, judging from accounts like *Chauvency*, the heralds' function was to recognise the combatants from their arms and shout out their names for the spectators.

The effect of this was to associate the device, first with a particular person, and then with his family, or to be more precise, his blood-line and himself as its current representative. The relationship between person and symbol becomes fixed, then hereditary, and then official. Organisations are set up to record and then regulate its use, so that no two people can cause confusion by using the same device.

The complication is that this is permitted in certain circumstances. The quasi-theatrical world of the tourney can on occasion exploit the inbuilt paradox in the game of concealment and revelation. It is possible to use the coat of arms to mislead the spectators deliberately and present yourself as someone else. Often this was as a fictional character. In *Le Hem*, Longueval appeared as the Arthurian Yvain, Knight of the Lion. Edward III jousted as Sir Lionel.<sup>68</sup> It is difficult to judge whether the disguise theme was pushed to extremes and the combatants in some tourneys actually jousted dressed as monks and nuns or Tartars.<sup>69</sup> The chroniclers say so: according to Murimuth, for example, in 1343 at the Smithfield hastiludia “*papa et duodecim cardinales per tres dies contra quoscumque tirocinium habuerunt*”.<sup>70</sup> Usually, however, for Edward III's tourneys, the fantasy costuming and masking was a feature of the initial procession to the tournament ground not, as far as one can tell, of the *hastiludia* themselves.<sup>71</sup>

Also, from the beginning of his tourneying career (he was only 14 when he came to the throne) he is famous for jousting in the arms of members of his entourage:<sup>72</sup> in the two years we are interested in, of Sir Stephen Cossington (1347), and Sir Thomas

67 Many thanks to Keith Downen of the Royal Armouries for confirming this (private communication 5 August 2020). The coats of arms described in *The Siege of Caerlaverock* are all displayed on banners.

68 In 1334 and 1342 at Dunstable; BARBER, 2013: 101-103; VALE, 1982: 64. The records of the Tower Armoury, however, show that in 1352 and 1353 they were storing 29 coats of arms of tirtaine (a linen/woollen weave) “*cum scuto domini Leonelli*”, and 21 crests of sindon “*de armis dicti domini Leonelli*”; RICHARDSON, 2012: 214, 216. This sounds more like a team dressed in Lionel's arms than an individual gesture. See also SHENTON, 2002: 79-80.

69 E.g. see TWYXCROSS AND CARPENTER, 2002: 115-117.

70 MURIMUTH, 1889: 146 and 230; “*papa cum xij. cardinalibus suis, qui omnes consimili modo erant vestiti, fovebant partem interiorem*”. This may again be a colourful exaggeration.

71 BARKER 1986: 98-100; TWYXCROSS, 2021: 12-14.

72 This again needs further balancing of the chroniclers' accounts against the Wardrobe accounts. Likewise to say that he jousted under the banner of a team captain is not the same as jousting in his arms, though it might imply it.



Bradestone (1348). Judging from the accounts, sometimes this was an individual impersonation,<sup>73</sup> but often the whole team wore the same coat-armour,<sup>74</sup> which would make them the chosen knight's "men", as in "Hey, hey the white swan". At first Edward was acknowledging his status as a tyro, but then it became a compliment, and a team-building device; he presents himself as simply one of them: "*in quo turniamento fuit rex, ad modum tamen simplicis militis.*"<sup>75</sup> Thus there is nothing intrinsically aberrant about a group of 14 matching crests. Heraldically, they would just be read as if they were livery badges.<sup>76</sup>

Crests were not "heraldic" in the sense of being exclusive, as the coat of arms had become. In Edward's reign, they were not even part of the official system.<sup>77</sup> In England this only really happened in the later fifteenth century, when the College of Arms assumed the function of creating new arms for those who aspired to become armigerous, and the grant or ratification of a crest drew an extra fee.<sup>78</sup> Earlier armorials cite, and occasionally illustrate, the blazons for shields and banners,

Arms of Sir Stephen Cossington  
(*her steuen van cussenten*) from  
Claes Heynen (herald), *Gelre*  
*Armorial* (1370-1395):  
Bruxelles, BRB ms. 15652-56,  
fol. 57<sup>r</sup>, detail.  
Reproduced by permission of the  
Bibliothèque royale de Belgique.  
Online at  
<<https://uurl.kbr.be/1733715>>.

- 73 The available accounts (of John of Cologne) speak only of making a harness for the King "*de armis domini Thome de Bradeston*", powdered with roses and other silk works; NICOLAS, 1846: 40. The more detailed breakdown in TNA E 372/207 (IMG 0201) says it was made of white taffeta with gold and silver leaf and "*aymell diuersorum colorum*". Bradeston's arms were *Argent on a canton Gules a rose Or*; *Medieval Ordinary* 2, 1996: 239. They are in the East Window of Gloucester Cathedral, panel 9n, with the other Crécy knights; <<https://images.cvma.ac.uk/iipsrv/iipsrv.fcgi?FIF=023493.jp2&WID=1024&CVT=JPG>>.
- 74 "*Rex dedit .viij. hernesia de syndon ynde facta et vapulata de armis domini Stephani de Cosyngtoni Militis*" (the King gave 8 harness made of dark blue sindon and beaten with the arms of Lord Stephen de Cossington, Knight) to eight named knights starting with the Prince of Wales; NICOLAS, 1846: 42. Cossington's coat of arms was *Azure, three roses Or seeded Gules*; *Medieval Ordinary* 4, 2014: 58, as shown on fol. 57<sup>r</sup> of the *Gelre Armorial* (cutout above). The gold roses were "beaten" out of gold leaf. There is no mention of *Gelre's* extraordinary helm, however. According to the breakdown in TNA E 372/207 (IMG 0201) John of Cologne used 8lb of Cyprus gold, 5¼ lb of silk thread, and 3000 gold leaf to decorate these, with matching hoods, and 12 garments for ladies.
- 75 MURIMUTH, 1889: 123 (1342, the tournament at Dunstable for Lionel's betrothal).
- 76 On badges, see WOODCOCK AND ROBINSON, 1988: 106-111, 197; AILES, 2002: 94-98. Here I refer to "badge" in the abstract, as the design that was associated with a magnate and which could be realized in various ways, including as the metal or cloth badges handed out to his retainers, but also as decoration in hangings or on plate. In the early sixteenth century it was recorded by the heralds with his banner and sometimes his crest: see e.g. BL MS Harley 2076 and Additional MS 45132.
- 77 On the history of crests, see SOUTHWICK, 2006: 64-68; WOODCOCK AND ROBINSON, 1988: 78-88.
- 78 See FOSTER, 1915. Unlike the situation on the Continent, in England a grant of arms was deemed to confer gentry status. Strictly speaking it is not made by the heralds, but by the Sovereign. The heralds merely suggest a design.

but they do not feature crests.<sup>79</sup> But they were personal. Their unofficial nature clearly provided an opportunity for experiment, both for individuals to try out different crests for themselves, and for designers to produce more and more extravagant conceits. The Wardrobe accounts show Edward himself wearing crests of various kinds of feathers and, from 1331, not the famous leopard crest, but a splendid golden eagle seated on a dark-blue velvet mountain, apparently imported from Valence.<sup>80</sup>

It looks as if during the thirteenth century the range of designs had been fairly limited. The accounts for the Windsor Tournament of 9 July 1278, which survive, show that though the 38 knights each wore his personal coat of arms, and had a crest (made of calfskin and parchment) both for himself and for his horse, the crests do not seem to have been individualised, save that twelve of the helmets of the more noble<sup>81</sup> were gilded, and the other 26 were silvered.<sup>82</sup> Of those seals appended to the Barons' Letter of 1301 which show crests,<sup>83</sup> a large proportion are fan-shaped, probably of feathers or possibly of parchment.<sup>84</sup> The rest are almost all creatures. They come in a fairly limited range: birds (eagles, the Bohun swan), animals (lions,<sup>85</sup> the de Vere boar), or mythical beasts (wyverns, the Montagu griffin). There are no human heads, and as far as one can see, no *jeux d'esprit*.

79 There are several online lists: e.g. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll\\_of\\_arms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll_of_arms)>. A list of facsimiles online is at <<https://heraldica.hypotheses.org/1770>>, though it is grouped by century, not according to date. CLEMMENSEN, 2017, is a comprehensive study. See also CLEMMENSEN, 2016: 61-88.

80 TNA E 361/3 mb 19 (IMG 0091A): "*J aquila aurea pro galea Regis sedente super unum montem factam de velvetto Ind / j. corona aurea / j. lapkin viride operatum de diuersis operibus*". William Montacute, earl of Salisbury, was made "bearer of the eagle crest" in 1333, in what sounds like a joke; *ODNB* sv *Montagu*, William; the ambiguity of the word *bear* has led to some serious mistakes about the current status of crests.

81 LYSONS, 1814. The transcription says "*dingmor-*" but it seems more likely that this was *di(n)gnior-*.

82 This may contextualise the much-quoted reference in Barbour's *Bruce*, Book 19, ll. 394-398, to the "*novelrie*" of the English "Tymbrys for helmys" in the 1327 Weardale campaign; BARBOUR, 1894: vol. 3, 153. It does not actually say that the *timbres* were distinctive; and the story in the *Scalachronica* of the rescue by Thomas Grey, Constable of Norham Castle, of Sir William Marmion who had been sent "a war helmet, with a gilt crest on the same" by his lady, telling him to go to the most dangerous place in Britain and make this helmet famous, does not say anything about the crest except that Marmion was "glittering with gold and silver": GREY, 1907: 61.

83 Where a helm appears, either on an equestrian seal or separately, the majority (14: 3) show crests; but these are outweighed by the purely heraldic shields which do not (60). Possible crests (about 5) turn up balanced on top of shields, though the ubiquitous wyvern is difficult to interpret. In the fully equestrian seals where the knights wear crests (9), the horse also wears a matching crest.

84 See e.g. the crests on the helmet of Sir Geoffrey Luttrell and of his horse in the Luttrell Psalter, fol. 202<sup>v</sup>. The polygon with engrailed edges would be difficult to make in any other material. They are painted with the Luttrell arms. See above, note 60, for the word *timbre*.

85 Edward III's leopard crest does not appear on the Great Seal till 1340: BIRCH, 1887: 23-24 and plate 2; and MERNICK, *Great Seals* online resource. On gold quarter-florin (1344), see ALEXANDER AND BINSKI, 1987: 491-492, and <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_1864-0713-17](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1864-0713-17)>.

This was about to change. The reign of Edward III seems to coincide with an upsurge of creativity and inventiveness in crest design. The evidence is various: designs on seals, images in manuscripts, the very occasional survival of a real one,<sup>86</sup> a scattering of references (too short to be descriptions) in financial accounts, and at the end of the century and the beginning of the next, their appearance in armorials (the first to show English and Scottish crests is the *Gelre Armorial*, content 1370-1386, but execution 1400-1403/05),<sup>87</sup> and on the Garter stall-plates in St George's Chapel, Windsor (retrospective, 1421).<sup>88</sup> Above all, from the late 1360s, we have the crested helmets on which the effigies of knights pillow their heads. They give us a life-size three-dimensional impression of what the real thing might have looked like, especially if traces of the original colour remain (or have been renewed, though possibly inexpertly). Alabaster lends itself to the carving of fine detail, but this cannot have been the only reason why the fashion in tomb effigies shifted from resting one's head on a pair of cushions to the rather less comfortable-looking crested helmet, just about the time that the heroes of Crécy were beginning to die off.<sup>89</sup>

It is difficult not to deduce that this is to do with the major rise in popularity of the tournament. Crests may not have been viable in battle<sup>90</sup>—they were too fragile, and not visible or distinctive enough—but in the one-on-one of the joust they could come into their own.<sup>91</sup>

Helmet crests are innately theatrical. As later antiquaries were keen to point out, they had been around since classical times:

Creasts, being the ornaments set on the eminent top of the helm, and called Tymbres by the French, I know not why, were used anciently to terrifie the enemy, and therefore

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86 Though these are more likely to be mocked-up funeral achievements. The Black Prince's helm at Canterbury Cathedral is probably genuine, and shows signs of having been worn in combat. See video "Up close with The Black Prince's Cap of Maintenance", <<https://youtu.be/xrTdd-nPCwx8>>; for scientific examination of the helmet, <<https://www.wired-gov.net/>>; general description MILLS AND MANN, 1972.

87 Brussels: KBR MS ms. 15652-5. For date(s) see CLEMMENSEN, 2017: vol. 1, 173-190. Armorials like this are compilations, and the collected material may predate the actual writing and painting of the manuscript by some decades; also different batches of material can be of different dates.

The Bellenville Armorial is clearly related to *Gelre*, but unfinished. For the Zürich Armorial Roll of c. 1330-1345, and the Beyerens Armorial, see Bibliography. The *Manesse Codex* (see Bibliography), which is often cited as if it were an armorial, is actually an anthology of *Minnesinger* poems, and many of the earlier arms in this are fantasies. Where crests are shown in action, they are in a joust.

88 HOPE, 1901.

89 BADHAM, 2016.

90 Thanks again to Keith Downen of the Royal Armouries for confirming this.

91 Despite the images in the later *Livre des Tournois* of René d'Anjou, which shows them in the *melée*: BnF MS français. 2695, fols 97<sup>v</sup>-98<sup>r</sup>, 100<sup>v</sup>-101<sup>r</sup>.

were strange devises, or figures of terrible shapes, as that monstrous horrible Chimera, out-breathing Flames upon Turnus Helm in Virgil.<sup>92</sup>

One imagines that, as Camden assumes, they were meant to make the warrior look taller and more menacing. But it might also make him feel more self-assured. There seems to be an instinct when dressing for a role, warlike or celebratory (everything from medieval battle to modern Carnival, and the hats worn by royal ladies), to put something on top of your head, whether horns or feathers, the figure of an animal or a basket of flowers; at its most basic it makes you walk taller and more confidently.

The fact that a crest was not yet an official part of an armorial achievement seems to have given their wearers *carte blanche* to give their imaginations full rein, and to express their personalities—something that was no longer possible through the hereditary coat of arms, which expressed your great grandfather's—and sense of humour. Moving from the Baron's Letter of 1301 to the Gelre Armorial of 70 or 80 years later is like walking into a different world. The crests are lively, they are inventive, they are mad—above all, they are funny. This may be partly due to the cartoon-like style of the drawing, but even when we turn to the much more ceremonial style of the Garter plates in St George's Chapel, Windsor, it is clear that something has happened. The way their design plays with proportions and perception must be based on the experience of viewing them in action, so that the spectators simultaneously see a man wearing a swan-crest and a giant bird.<sup>93</sup> The helmets on effigies probably give the best idea of proportions. The De la Poles in Wingfield church, Suffolk, provide three, in different materials: the wooden effigy of Michael (d. 1415), 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Suffolk; the alabaster one of John (d. 1492), 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Suffolk; and the helm above the latter's tomb, which is however a mock-up for the funeral.<sup>94</sup> The scale seems to be human-sized, or slightly larger. It is easy to see how a particularly lifelike crest could become an avatar, so that William Bohun *was* the White Swan; or Sir Thomas Lovell, whose charming floppy-eared crest appears in Gelre (fol. 58<sup>v</sup>), might end up as "Lovell our dog". Others suggest stage effects: the ermine-spotted dragon breathing fire (which



Arms of Sir William FitzWarin  
(*her willem fiworim*) from  
Claes Heynen (herald), Gelre  
Armorial (1370-1395):  
Bruxelles, BRB ms. 15652-56,  
fol. 57<sup>r</sup>, detail.

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Online at

<<https://uurl.kbr.be/1733715>>.

92 CAMDEN, 1870: 246.

93 On this illusion, see TWYXCROSS AND CARPENTER, 2002: 111-112.

94 For images, see <<https://www.britainexpress.com/counties/suffolk/churches/wingfield.htm>>  
© David Ross and Britain Express (Michael); <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/norfolkodyssey/16420450403/in/album-72157651307928537/>> (John) and <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/norfolkodyssey/50998660783>> (funeral helm), both © Simon Knott.

it appears they did in the jousts held by Henry IV in 1401)<sup>95</sup> belongs, appropriately, to the *condottiere* Sir John Hawkwood. Were the dragon heads for Merton in 1348 bought (*emptis*) as opposed to made (*factis*) because they were also to throw flames?<sup>96</sup> Despite the later tendency to describe them all as “Saracens”, the giant human heads which the English seem especially keen on are as various as their wearers, so much so that they will have to wait for another article.

Some crests do seem quite early to have been claimed by particular families. “The Bohun swan” I mentioned is a case in point. It was probably adopted as a badge by Humphrey VII, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Hereford, uncle-in-law of Edward III (1276–1322). It appears on his seal attached to the Barons’ Letter of 1301, though not as a crest.<sup>97</sup> He used the swan motif in his household furnishings and jewellery.<sup>98</sup> It was part of his family “history”. They bore it in order to claim ancestry from Elias/Eneas, the mythical *Chevalier au Cigne* (“Knight of the Swan”), who was also ancestor of Godfrey of Bouillon (1060–1100), Crusader King of Jerusalem for one year, and one of the Nine Worthies.<sup>99</sup> Humphrey’s fourth son was christened Eneas. If the “White Swan” of the King’s motto was a Bohun, it was probably his son William, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Northampton, KG, veteran of Crécy, and his close companion.<sup>100</sup> William’s granddaughter Mary married Edward’s grandson Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV, and was the mother of Henry V, who adopted the device: the Dunstable Swan is believed to have been one of his badges.<sup>101</sup> However, there

95 Gelre, fol. 58<sup>v</sup>; CARPENTER, 2021: 63–68.

96 TNA E 372/207 (AALT: fronts IMG202): “*Et in .xij. viseres cum capitibus draconum emptis pro ludis Regis apud Mertonum in festo Epiphanie dicto anno .xxij*”.

97 VERTUE, 1747: plates XXIX–XXXIII. See also WALDEN, 1903, with images, and sketches from the B version. For Humphrey de Bohun, see pp. 10–11. Original two copies of the letter now in The National Archives: TNA E 26. Seals are detached and kept separately. The Wikipedia entry “Barons’ Letter of 1301” gives a good conspectus of them: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barons%27\\_Letter\\_of\\_1301](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barons%27_Letter_of_1301)>. For the seal, see ELLIS, 1981: 13–14, #P1063, and plate 6; dated 1306; BIRCH, 1892: 252–3 #5722 (impression A.D. 1301). See also PASCUAL, 2020, which concentrates on variations in their seals.

98 In his will (1319) he leaves “*a mon enizne fuiz toutz mes armures et un lit entier de vert poudre de Cynes blaunches ove toutes les apurtenaunces*” (to my eldest son all my armour, and an entire bed of green powdered with white swans, with all its appurtenances); TURNER, 1845: 346. He died in 1322 at Boroughbridge fighting with Thomas Earl of Lancaster against the royalist forces of the Despencers, and was thus for a while officially a traitor; the inventory of his confiscated property contains further swan items; PASCUAL, 2020: 153.

99 WAGNER, 1959: 127–138 and plates 34–40; also PASCUAL, 2017: 59–65. The story was familiar in romance from the late twelfth century.

100 He and his twin brother Edward are frequently mentioned together in the earlier accounts as part of Edward’s close circle. Edward however died in 1334, attempting to rescue a drowning man on the Scottish campaign.

101 <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_1966-0703-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1966-0703-1)>. The Wikipedia entry gives a

was a sizeable network of other would-be descendants of the Swan Knight,<sup>102</sup> both in their own right and that of their wives or mothers, and other claimants could include Sir Hugh Courtenay KG, son of the Earl of Devon and Margaret Bohun, who was a player in the festivities of 1347;<sup>103</sup> and Sir William FitzWarren KG (d.1361), in the prince's division at Crécy,<sup>104</sup> not to mention the Beauchamps, Roger,<sup>105</sup> John,<sup>106</sup> and "Giles and his son John",<sup>107</sup> though it has been argued that their swan was black rather than white.<sup>108</sup>

I am not suggesting that each crest in the revels was meant to be reference to a Crécy knight—that would be straining it, and as far as I know there is no known crest at the time which involves an angel. But several of them might have been read as compliments or tributes. Again, it depends on the performance. The link might have been purely theatrical: an effective design might have been suggested by a particular badge. But though the swans might have been intended as a flotilla of swans, and nothing more, in this milieu, they could hardly not have evoked both the romance and the families who associated themselves with it.

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comprehensive account: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunstable\\_Swan\\_Jewel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunstable_Swan_Jewel)>.

102 WAGNER, 1959: plate 40 shows a few of the complex pattern of noble families claiming descent from the Knight of the Swan.

103 NICOLAS, 1846: 25: he is one of the recipients of four garments of cloth of gold powdered with gold stars and crescents matching those of the King; at the *bastiludia* at Lichfield he was one of a contingent of 11 Chamber Knights with a great many others who were given a matching set of garments in blue (p. 26); at some time, possibly for the *bastiludia* at Eltham, he was one of five who received white hoods embroidered with blue dancing men, and buttoned with great pearls (p. 41).

104 WROTTESLEY, 1898: 31, 197. See Gelre, fol. 57<sup>r</sup>.

105 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Beauchamp of Bletsoe (c. 1315-1380); COCKAYNE, 1912: 44-45.

106 Probably John, the third son of Guy Beauchamp Earl of Warwick (d. 1315) and Alice de Tony; she also claimed descent from the Knight of the Swan. He was a Founder KG and the King's standard bearer at Crécy: WRITTELEY, 1898: 38. He is described as "John Beauchamp *Warewike*" in NICOLAS, 1846: 26. See BOTHWELL, 2003; COCKAYNE, 1912: 50-51. CLEMMENSEN, 2018, makes a valiant attempt to sort out the Beauchamp genealogy. The other possibility is John Beauchamp of Holt (Kidderminster), d. 1388; COCKAYNE, 1912: 45-46; CLEMMENSEN, 2018: 5 and 11.

107 NICOLAS, 1846: 26. Beauchamps of Powicke/Alcester. See CLEMMENSEN, 2018: 38; fig. 2.

108 CLEMMENSEN, 2018, 12, presumably referring to the alleged tomb of Sir John Beauchamp of Holt, (d. 1388) and his wife Joan (d. 1374) in Worcester Cathedral; it is under her head. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Beauchamp,\\_1st\\_Baron\\_Beauchamp\\_of\\_Kidderminster#/media/File:Beauchamp\\_Tomb,\\_Worcester\\_Cathedral\\_\(14641849053\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Beauchamp,_1st_Baron_Beauchamp_of_Kidderminster#/media/File:Beauchamp_Tomb,_Worcester_Cathedral_(14641849053).jpg)>. It is not clear however whether the current painting is based on the original colours. In the Gelre Armorial (fol. 56<sup>v</sup>), it is shown as white.

For the Beauchamp swan on a seal, BIRCH, 1892: 224 #5662: Thomas de Bellocampo, 12<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick (A.D. 1343-44), and <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal\\_of\\_Sir\\_Thomas\\_de\\_Beauchamp\\_\(1344\),\\_Earl\\_of\\_Warwick,\\_died\\_1369.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal_of_Sir_Thomas_de_Beauchamp_(1344),_Earl_of_Warwick,_died_1369.png)>. There is no swan on the Beauchamp seal on the Barons' Letter.

The two sets which have caused the most mystification are the 28 Guildford *crestes*, presumably so called because they were not face-coverings but, like helmet crests, sat on top of the head. They are not heads or faces, but what can only be described as “something else”: “*xiiiij. crestes cum tibiis reuersatis et calciatis*” (14 crests with upside-down shins wearing boots/shoes) and “*xiiiij. crestes cum montibus et cuniculis*” (14 crests with hills and rabbits). Reaction to them has ranged from a refusal to believe that they say what they appear to be saying<sup>109</sup> to suggesting that the second item must have been some form of scenery.<sup>110</sup> They did have occasional “scenery”,<sup>111</sup> but it is difficult to imagine a scenario, apart possibly from an over-literal rendering of the end of *Macbeth*, which would call for 14 mobile hills; and one would still have to explain the rabbits.

But as an heraldic joke, they make perfect sense. Heraldry has always revelled in in-jokes and puns (especially in Latin). A very early speciality (self-assumed and long before the heralds) is the “canting” device, either on a shield or a crest, which hints, none too subtly, at the bearer’s name. In French they were called “*armes parlantes*” (speaking arms).<sup>112</sup> So the Lucy family bear three pikes on their shield because the word for that fish was *luce*;<sup>113</sup> the Corbets and Corbyns bear crows;<sup>114</sup> the Cokaynes three cockerels;<sup>115</sup> Trumpington two trumpets addorsed;<sup>116</sup> Trivet an initially baffling geometrical device which turns out to be—a trivet:<sup>117</sup> and those are on the relatively serious display of the shield. Crests gave an opportunity for further whimsical inven-

109 WARTON, 1774: 238, note h, says “I do not perfectly understand the Latin original”, and this mystification seems to have persisted. CHAMBERS, 2014: 123 translates *tibiis* as “pipes” and *cuniculis* as “troughs” (the word *cuniculus* does imply “burrower”, and was used of military sappers).

110 BARKER (VALE), 1982: 70.

111 BARBER, 2013: 79.

112 OED sv *canting* adj.<sup>2</sup> sense 5: *Heraldry. canting arms*: = *allusive arms n.* at ALLUSIVE adj. ... *allusive arms n.* “*Heraldry. arms in which the charges make indirect reference to or suggest a pun on the bearer’s name, title, occupation, etc.*”. One of the most famous canting coats of arms belongs to Shakespeare.

Modern heralds continue the tradition; try for example the arms granted to Sir George Martin, the producer of the Beatles: <<https://www.college-of-arms.gov.uk/news-grants/grants/item/66-george-martin>>. (Though why are there only three beetles on the shield?) His badge is *A Zebra statant proper supporting with the dexter foreleg over the shoulder an Abbot’s Crozier Or*.

113 “He did beare *Gules, three Lucies Hauriant, Argent*”; FERNE, 1586: 232; Powell Roll: 19; *Medieval Ordinary 4*, 2014: 7-10, 12-13.

114 *Medieval Ordinary 2*, 1996: 149, 161, 163, 172, Powell Roll: 33, 45, and 48. Names and families associated with *Cornwall* (interpreted as “crow country”) often bear choughs.

115 *Medieval Ordinary 2*, 1996: 171; Powell Roll: 12.

116 *Medieval Ordinary 4*, 2014: 263. See <<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1064905/sir-roger-de-trumpington-in-brass-rubbing-unknown/?carousel-image=2018KP6014>>, also Gorleston Psalter, fol. 86<sup>r</sup>.

117 *Medieval Ordinary 4*, 2014: 446; Powell Roll: 27.



tion — the Talbots have a beagle (a Talbot dog) for a crest,<sup>118</sup> Redmayne a horse's head with mane, painted red,<sup>119</sup> Sir Richard de la Vache KG and his son Philip KG, *a cow's foot ermine the hoof gold* (upside-down).<sup>120</sup>

Despite the Vache pun, upside-down legs, indeed legs the right way up, are not very common as crests—arms, human and animal, and claws are more so, because they can clutch things. Apart from the mailed leg of the King of Man in the Gelre Armorial,<sup>121</sup> the best-known belong to the Foljambes (“crazy legs”, possibly because an ancestor had a damaged one)<sup>122</sup> of Derbyshire. The crest-with-leg can be seen, the right way up, on their tombs, e.g. at Chesterfield.<sup>123</sup> However, they could also hint at someone called Gambon (“little leg”).<sup>124</sup> Sir John Gambon fought at Crécy in the Black Prince's division,<sup>125</sup> and his arms (though not his crest) are among those in the great Cloister of Canterbury Cathedral.<sup>126</sup> Among the *domicelle* (ladies in waiting) given matching garments for the *bastiludia* at Lichfield was Joanna Gamboun.<sup>127</sup> In March 1343, “Joan Gambon, damsel of Queen Philippa”, was retired to St Augustine's Canterbury “for her good service to the king and queen and to Isabel, the king's daughter”, but she seems to have been still

118 The crest under the effigy of John Talbot, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury, in Whitchurch, Salop, is damaged, but there is also a talbot under his feet. British Library, Royal 15 E VI fol. 2<sup>v</sup> shows him presenting the MS to Margaret of Anjou in 1445, with a white talbot hound standing behind him. See also BL MS Harley MS 2076, fol. 46<sup>r</sup>.

119 Sir Richard Redman (Redmayne) (d. 1426), tomb at All Saints, Harewood, Yorks. Photo by Roel Renmans on <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/roelipilami/10154413453/>>.

120 HOPE, 1901: plates XIX and XXXVI (c. 1421). Sir Richard de la Vache (KG c. 1355-1366), Sir Philip de la Vache (KG 1399-1408). Sir Richard was a Gascon, Constable of the Tower of London. The overseas contingent seem to have added a touch of extravagance to the humour.

121 Gelre Armorial, fol. 64<sup>r</sup>, under Scotland. It is deduced from the Isle of Man triskelion.

122 ODFN, 2016 sv *Foljambe*.

123 For an image of the later Sir Godfrey Foljambe (d. 1585) and his crest, see photo by Julian P. Guffogg: <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jpguffogg/49530925186/>>. Most Foljambe tomb crests were vulnerable and have been broken off. See also BL MS Harley 2076, fol. 71<sup>v</sup>, Foljambe crest.

124 The suffix *-on* is a diminutive. ODFN, 2016, sv *Gammon*. The heraldic term for “leg of an animal” is *gambe*, as in “a lion's gambe”, but it is not clear when this term was adopted in England: OED's earliest reference is 1660. FOX, 2020: 339, who gives a detailed account of the family, suggests that “perhaps ... the first Gambon was some sort of giant”. We cannot tell whether the “leg of pork/ham” meaning was lurking here as well.

They could also refer to a Hussey, but it would be more likely to be a stockinged leg. See arms of Nicole de la Heuse in the Dering Roll.

125 GREEN, 1998: 170.

126 FOX, 2020: 339: “The arms later attributed to the elder John by his descendants were *argent a fess between three human legs couped sable* but his arms in the Cloister (Bay 28) are *argent on a chevron sable three mullets or*. See <<https://www.drpaulfoxfsa.com/bay-28>>.

127 NICOLAS, 1846: 28.

at court in 1347.<sup>128</sup> What her relationship with Sir John might be is unknown. Another Gambon, William, was a yeoman of the King's chamber.<sup>129</sup> So Gambons were familiar at court, but what they were famous or notorious for we do not know.

The other crest is however quite the opposite. To an audience with this mindset, a hill with rabbits could only mean one thing: a rabbit warren, and so the de Warenne Earls of Surrey.<sup>130</sup>

There is an apparent drawback. Their recorded crest was not a rabbit warren but an (*es*)*carbuncle*, a device of eight equally spaced ornamental rods with finials radiating from a central boss, which is supposed to represent the rays of light emanating from the mythical gem.<sup>131</sup> It appears on both the helmet (between bull's horns) and horse crests of the equestrian figure of the damaged seal-impression, dated 1346, of John de Warenne.<sup>132</sup> However, on the other side of this same seal, a highly elaborate affair created to mark his status as Count Palatine of Strathearn in Scotland, the Earl is shown enthroned in a landscape. To the left is a stag, which was probably balanced by another on the missing right. Under his feet are three rabbits emerging from circular holes. There could hardly be a better illustration of a warren—or, if one wants to extend it further, the rights of free warren (the right of hunting game enclosed and protected in a game-park) as also illustrated by the deer on this and the waterfowl on the other face.

There was another earlier seal, dated 1329, of which only an antiquarian engraving and the impression of one side survives.<sup>133</sup> The obverse was an equestrian image of a

128 *CCR 1343-1346*: 104. In September the previous year she had been allocated to St Leonard's Hospital, York; *CCR, 1341-1343*: 656. By 1339 she had been granted a yearly fee of £10 by the King.

129 See FOX 2020: 239.

130 Like most canting arms, the pun has nothing to do with the actual etymology of the name. The name originally comes from the river Varenne in Normandy: *ver-* is probably Celtic for "water", whereas a *warren* is a place where creatures are "guarded" (Germanic *war-*, as in the adjective *wary*). The English *warren* is a French loanword, modern French *garenne*: see *OED*. William de Warenne, the first Earl of Surrey, was one of the Conqueror's knights. His great-granddaughter Isabella (d. 1203) was the countess of Surrey in her own right. She married Hamelin, illegitimate son of Geoffrey of Anjou, who took her surname and became Earl of Surrey *jure uxoris*. John, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl, was his great grandson. Throughout their history the Earls were closely connected by marriage to the royal family.

131 Technically "a charbocle between bull's horns": TNA E 42/244; see ELLIS, 1978: 70, #P846 and Plate 23. *Charbocle* is an alternative version of *escarbuncle*. The jewel really exists, but without the magical properties given to it in romances and medieval encyclopaedias.

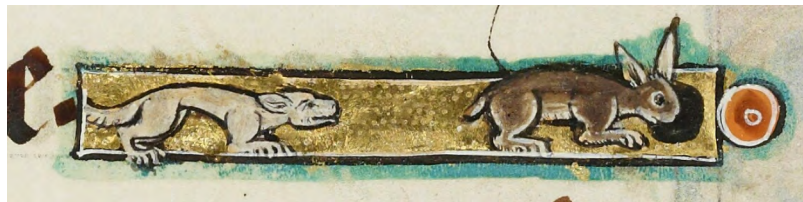
132 On this seal, see PELTZER, 2015: 67-68 and Fig. 4.1; HOPE, 1914: 123-127.

133 See ALEXANDER AND BINSKI, 1987: 117 and fig. 81, from a cast at Magdalen College Oxford; WATSON, 1782: vol. 1, plate after p. 304, engraved after a drawing(?) in the *Aspilogia* of John Anstis (1669-1744), Garter from 1718, and then in the collection of Thomas Astle. This seal, which is dated 1329, is undamaged. (It is said in the engraving to be the seal of Hamelin de Warenne (d. 1202) which is impossible from the date, apart from the fact that the inscription clearly reads IOHANNIS.)

knight in the Warenne arms with carbuncle crest (but no horns) on helm and on horse; the reverse is an amalgamation of all the wildlife on both sides of the seal, deer, swans and other birds, and rabbits in burrows.

For backup for this identification, and incidentally for images of what an early fourteenth-century rabbit-warren was thought to look like, there is no better place than the bas de pages of the East Anglian and London psalters of the early fourteenth century: the Ormesby Psalter, the Gorleston Psalter, the Macclesfield Psalter, the Queen Mary Psalter, the Luttrell Psalter,<sup>134</sup> the Peterborough Psalter, and (not a Psalter) the Taymouth Hours.<sup>135</sup> They are absolutely seething with rabbits and their warrens.<sup>136</sup>

The plethora of rabbit warrens in manuscripts from this part of the country may merely mirror the actual agricultural situation,<sup>137</sup> but least two of these psalters are said to be directly connected with John, the 7<sup>th</sup> and last Warenne Earl of Surrey, and a member of Edward III's circle. Phase 2 (1310-1325) of the illumination of the Ormesby Psalter<sup>138</sup> was probably initiated when the Earl decided to take it over as a commemorative gift on the proposed marriage of his ward Richard Foliot with a daughter of Thomas Lord Bardolf.<sup>139</sup> The line fillers are packed with small shields which feature the de Warenne *checky azure and or*— and rabbits.



Dog chasing rabbit.

Oxford: Bodleian Library, MS Douce 366 (Ormesby Psalter, here c. 1310), fol. 70<sup>r</sup>, line filler.

Image © Bodleian Library, Oxford, reproduced under Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC 4.0.  
Online at: <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/34a6037b-12e8-4b12-8920-26c33914fe0e/surface/7354b2a2-d8aa-4220-81b5-f64b666d5860/>>.

134 Especially the splendid one on fol. 176<sup>v</sup>.

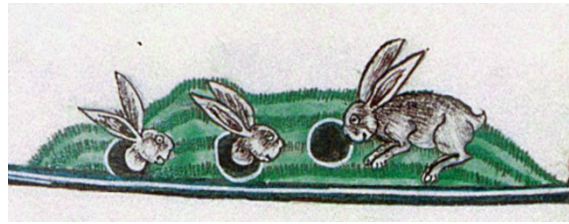
135 See Bibliography for manuscript details. Taymouth Hours was possibly made in Norwich. The Peterborough Psalter is slightly earlier (before 1317-1318), and the warrens in main images as on fols 25<sup>r</sup> and 47<sup>r</sup>.

136 This is not to say that rabbits and even rabbit holes are not frequent in other service books, especially from the Low Countries and northern France. But warrens seem a particularly distinctive feature of these ones.

137 GOULD, 2017, who argues from documentary evidence that there were more in eastern England than elsewhere, and that the surplus they produced supplied the royal court. See VEALE, 2003: 209-214, for the history of rabbits and their husbandry in Britain; also *OED* sv *coney*.

138 See LAW-TURNER, 2017.

139 Suggested by LAW-TURNER, 2017: 25-29, 38-43, 46-47, 66-82. He lost the wardship (pp. 81-82), the marriage seems to have fallen through, and this stage of the manuscript campaign seems to have lapsed. The proposed bridegroom, by then married to someone else, died in 1325.



Rabbits in a warren.

London: British Library, Additional MS 49622  
(Gorleston Psalter, England, Suffolk, c.1320), fol. 178<sup>v</sup>, detail.

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Image online at <[https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_49622](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add_ms_49622)>.

Even more convincing is the Gorleston Psalter, which, it has been persuasively argued on heraldic and other grounds, was also produced under the patronage of John de Warenne.<sup>140</sup> As Margot and David Nishimura point out, here the de Warenne shields, *checky or and azure*, are “not only ubiquitous, they also regularly appear next to depictions of rabbits and rabbit warrens ... punning allusions to the patron’s name. What has not previously been noted, however, and what clinches the case, is the appearance of the identical allusive devices in the earl’s seals”,<sup>141</sup> which we have already mentioned. At the foot of the Jesse Tree illumination on the opening *Beatus* page is a riotous hunting scene which seems to echo very closely the devices on the Earl’s 1329 and 1346 seals. Hounds are pulling down two deer (and a wild boar) across a terrain of rabbit burrows in which their terrified occupants are taking refuge. The only difference is that the hunt is being conducted by a monkey.



(Heraldic?) Hunt, with rabbits.

London: British Library, Additional MS 49622 (Gorleston Psalter), fol. 8<sup>r</sup>, detail.

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Image online at <[https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_49622](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add_ms_49622)>.

Convincing as this allusion may seem, exactly why the rabbit warrens should be featured in these particular Christmas revels remains a mystery. To begin with, the Earl of Surrey had just died, after a turbulent private life.<sup>142</sup> John de Warenne was a relative of Edward III, and apparently part of his close circle, though he belonged to his father

<sup>140</sup> See NISHIMURA, 2007.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>142</sup> See ODNB *sv* Warenne, John de, seventh earl of Surrey (earl of Surrey and Sussex, Earl Warenne).

Edward II's generation, and was knighted with him by Edward I at the Feast of the Swans in 1306. Despite an earlier record of changing loyalties in the increasingly bitter battle between Edward II and Queen Isabella, he seems to have become a trusted elder statesman to their son, and was made joint Protector of the Realm with the Black Prince when the King was abroad in 1338 and 1340. He was also a keen jousting, even though when he was only six months old his father had actually been killed in a tournament.<sup>143</sup> He was Edward III's cousin-in-law; his wife was Joan de Bar, Edward I's granddaughter, whom he had married in 1306 when he was 18 and she was 10.

Like many child marriages, however, it was a disaster, and his unsuccessful attempts to get out of it occupied the rest of his life.<sup>144</sup> He lived with two women whom he considered to be his wives, and with whom he had children, but his legal wife was close to Queen Isabella (Edward's mother),<sup>145</sup> and she and Queen Philippa seem to have thrown their weight against any attempt to have the marriage annulled.<sup>146</sup> He made a desperate last-stand case in 1344 by accusing himself to the Pope of a premarital affair with his wife's aunt, Mary of Woodstock, daughter of Edward I, who was a nun, and by now conveniently dead and unable to give her part of the story. Apart from being sensational, this would have debarred him from marrying Joan on grounds of consanguinity. The Pope was nearly convinced, but in the event even this strategy did not work.<sup>147</sup> As a result the Earl died on 30 June 1347 at the age of 61 with a large family but no legitimate heirs. The earldom lapsed; and Edward very speedily (6 August 1347) solved one part of his own problem of having a large number of sons and not enough land to go round them by granting Warenne's lands to Edmund of Langley, with reversion to John of Gaunt, with reversion to Lionel of Antwerp.<sup>148</sup> The Christmas at Guildford was five months after that. They may have been topical, but if the rabbit warrens were an allusion to him, what on earth were they saying?

Perhaps it was a sort of memorial tribute, but if so a rather strange one. We might assume a decorum of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, but there is a very strong sense of a riotous and probably risqué joke to which we are not party. One worries about those rab-

143 At Croydon on 15 January 1286. It was reported as an assassination; BARKER, 1986: 47. The infant John was thus his grandfather's heir as earl. In his will, he leaves his eldest (illegitimate) son "*tout mon hernoys pour le joustier*"; *Testamenta Eboracensia* 1, 1836: 41-45; FAIRBANK, 1906-1907. He also leaves Edward III his two best flying hawks.

144 FAIRBANK, 1906-1907, despite the title, incidentally gives a blow-by-blow account of the record of the Earl's relationship with his official wife, and of his unofficial wives.

145 See BOND, 1854: 456, 458, 460-478. She seems to have acted as a political envoy, not only for Queen Isabella, but for the King; e.g. FAIRBANK, 1906-1907: 243.

146 She blocked his last attempt at a divorce, in 1344, by writing to the Pope in Joan's support (FAIRBANK, 1906-7: 242).

147 *Ibid.*, 244-245.

148 *Ibid.*, 255-256.

bits, not least because it is very difficult to prove innuendo. Were they a reference to the Earl's prolific sex life? Dictionaries are reticent about how far back the *coney* / *cunny* pun goes. Literary scholars assume it was active at the time, and in 1963 Claude K. Abraham industriously collected French examples from the *Roman de la Rose* onwards, though he deprecates its “what we may call coarseness”.<sup>149</sup> Since the court did its light reading and conducted at least part of its entertainments in Insular French, or at least, if we are to take Edward III's mottos as evidence, switched between it and English with equal ease,<sup>150</sup> they probably made rude jokes in it as well.

Would they have lampooned a respected elder statesman in this way? As Sarah Carpenter says,<sup>151</sup> “Why not? You get a sense of a court in which rude jokes were almost as sign of affectionate respect”. As possible supplementary evidence, the Gorleston Psalter appears equally to be having a joke at its patron's expense. Margot and David Nishimura point to a bas de page illustration in the Litany immediately under the name *Johannes* (John—the Earl's Christian name), which shows a young man standing on a dragon apparently breaking-in a rabbit on a leash with a whip: “on one hand a visual metaphor for conquering the devil (the dragon) through reining in lustful passions (the rabbit), but in this context, possibly also a humorous reference to yet another Warenne-warren connection: the earls' [*plural*] leading role in the cultivation of rabbits”.



London: British Library, Additional MS 49622 (Gorleston Psalter),  
fol. 209<sup>r</sup>, bas de page, detail.

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Image online at <[https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_49622](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add_ms_49622)>.

149 ABRAHAM, 1963: 593.

150 Hence the argument of STANDLEY, 2018: 373, that a warren was called a “coney garth” is irrelevant. French was in any case the language of heraldry

151 Private communication, June 2022.



Line filler from the above, enlarged.

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Image online at <[https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_49622](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add_ms_49622)>

Both these explanations suggest that modern scholars are possibly still rather over-reverent about iconography. Something is definitely going on. As the writers also point out, the line-filler after *Sancte Johannes* features yet another set of terrified rabbits. (Rabbits are and were a byname for cowardice, but the Gorleston rabbits are peculiarly desperate-looking.) Is this a case of “Lock up your daughters”? And is the rabbit on the leash being chastised (for being a rabbit), or is it being trained to do something, and if so, what? To dance? Psalter margins are full of performing animals.<sup>152</sup> To jump on command?<sup>153</sup> The traditional encyclopaedia description of the creature is “*Lepus quasi levipes: qua velociter currit. Velox enim est animal: satis timidum*” (The hare is so called because it is light-footed. For it is a speedy animal, and rather timid).<sup>154</sup>

The writers also point out, in a footnote, that the Earl lived in Conisbrough. Etymologically of course this means “king’s stronghold”, but who knows what puns may have been being made about the Earl and his large but irregular family? If this word-play sounds far fetched, consider that the arms of the Coningsby family were *Argent a chevron between 3 conies sejant Sable*,<sup>155</sup> that a stretch of the king’s highway in York has metamor-

152 In the Rutland Psalter BL (Additional MS 62925) fol. 71<sup>r</sup>, a performing monkey on a leash is being whipped, apparently to make it dance to a bagpipe; in the *Maastricht Hours* (BL MS Stowe 17), fol. 204<sup>r</sup>, a trained monkey on a chain is leaping over a stick; on fol. 112<sup>r</sup> a woman musician plays for a man and a dancing dog in a cloak with hood. Dancing animals are ubiquitous in MS Bodley 264: a dog dancing on its hind legs to a drummer on fol. 91<sup>r</sup>, dancing goat ditto 91<sup>v</sup> and without music 108<sup>r</sup>, a chained bear 76<sup>r</sup>, performing monkeys, one on chain and trainer with stick 119<sup>v</sup>, performing horses 73<sup>v</sup> and 96<sup>v</sup>; a goat on its hind legs as part of a spinning-dish act 130<sup>r</sup>, and the *tour de resistance*, a dog on its hind legs and a pantomime goat with the man’s face peering out of its neck, dancing to handbells, 117<sup>v</sup>. These seem to echo real-life entertainments, though the mass of pictorial evidence for dancing-dog troupes turns up in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

153 In Bodley 264, fol. 108<sup>r</sup>, a dog seems to be being trained to jump over a stick.

154 Isidore, 1957: XII, 1, 23; Vincent, 1494: fol. 227<sup>r</sup> (liber 18, cap. 44, *De Cuniculo*), 228<sup>v</sup> (liber 18, cap. 61, *De Lepore*). Medieval authorities do not make the same distinction between hare and rabbit that we do: for them a rabbit (*cuniculus*: a *rabbit* was a baby *cuniculus*) was a smaller type of hare, mostly from the Balearic islands. Was this anything to do with the motto, “Who can hold that will away?”? The “gift that is no gift” in the famous riddle is shown in the Ormesby Psalter, fol. 72<sup>r</sup> as a rabbit, which will bolt as soon as it is handed over.

155 *Medieval Ordinary* 2, 1996: 295. See also *Medieval Ordinary* 1, 1992: 294, 309; *Medieval Ordinary* 3,

phosed to Coney Street; and that we have evidence that the pun *coninc* (king) / *coney* was being made in the 1350s, though purely in the “frightened rabbit” context.<sup>156</sup>

On the other, hand, it might just be that the Gorleston artist enjoyed drawing rabbits. He was very good at it.

There are many other things that could be asked. We can probably dismiss the idea that they were anything but frivolous. There is a whole branch of rabbit-interpretation which sees them as a symbol of the frightened soul taking refuge in the Church,<sup>157</sup> even, mistakenly, as a symbol of the resurrection of the body,<sup>158</sup> but this seems highly unlikely in context. Pursuing the visual a little further, what did the “hills” look like? Edward’s golden eagle on an indigo-velvet mountain suggests a model, and the burning hill of the Lords of Greystoke (Cumberland) suggests a suitable sugarloaf shape.<sup>159</sup> The practical questions, like the kind of dance, if it were a dance; the music to which they were dancing, if they were dancing; the words if any of the song, if there was one; the scenario it might have suggested; and so on, are unanswerable. We simply do not know enough. A lot, for example, would depend on whether they were multi-rabbit warrens, or one-rabbit

2009: 362 (seal).

156 See *OED* sv *coney* n', I 2: “a punning allusion to Peter Conyng, the name in English of Pieter de Coninck (c. 1225-1333; with the surname compare Middle Dutch *coninc* king n.), Flemish weaver and leader of a popular rebellion against French rule of Flanders [...] We shule flo þe Conyng & make roste is loyne; Þe word shal springen of him in to coloyne”.

157 STOCKER, 1996: 267-268. The Patristic literature on this is too lengthy to cite here. It is possibly to be read into the carved rabbit warren in the reputed tomb of Bartholomew, Lord Burghersh (d. 1355) in Lincoln Cathedral: BUTLER, 2002. There are however serious problems with the whole structure, which was assembled from pieces of several monuments. Nonetheless, it has been subject to popular misreading: the damaged crest, a broken Burghersh lion with a *queue fourché*, has been read as a rabbit. It has even been suggested on the Web that Burghersh was “The King’s Warrener”. There was no such office: the king, like other nobles, had individual warreners for each of his estates

158 STOCKER, 1996: 270. This is based on a misreading of *The Prick of Conscience*: see Powell, 2004; also Rosewell, 2010. The people in the window at All Saints, North Street, York, are not the dead emerging “from burrows, rather than graves, during the Last Days”, but the traumatised survivors who have been hiding there from the apocalyptic disasters. On the Fourteenth Day everyone on earth dies to await the General Resurrection. This sequence is graphically shown on fol. 41<sup>v</sup> of the Holkham Bible Picture Book; image online at <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=56922>>.

159 See Gelre, fol. 57<sup>v</sup>, and the tomb effigy of John FitzWilliam Baron Greystoke (d. 1436) in St Andrew’s, Greystoke. Photos of the effigy can be seen at <<http://www.northernvicar.co.uk/2018/02/18/greystoke-cumbria-st-andrew/>>. It is not unlike the later pageant versions of Parnassus, e.g. in the Antwerp *ommegang*, as shown in the 1685 engraving by Gaspar Bouttats, online at <<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/RP-P-OB-67.567>>. This is inhabited, not by rabbits, but the Nine Muses. Most sixteenth-century pageant hills are this shape.

A single-rabbit hill might have been more like the canting crest on the effigy of Sir John Harewell (d. 1428) in Wootton Wawen, Warwickshire. See <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/ana\\_sudani/8432796394](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ana_sudani/8432796394)>. It has lost the ears shown in Wenceslas Hollar’s engraving in DUGDALE, 1656: 603.



warrens. Though one is tempted to speculate whether the crests might have been mechanical (if fire-breathing dragons, why not spring-loaded rabbits?), and the rabbits have come out of / been ejected from their burrows. Art-historical speculations are based on still images, even if they are, like the Gorleston image above, attempting to show action. Performance *is* action, and almost anything can happen.

So what were the rabbits doing at Guildford? The best guess is, “being disruptive”. Rabbits are not only versatile, they are subversive. Traditionally terrified and famous for running away at speed, they are the ideal material for world-upside-down cartoons: there is an entire subculture on the Web dedicated to hunting down medieval images of “killer rabbits”.<sup>160</sup> They are shown turning the tables on their traditional enemies: in the Smithfield Decretals they execute the law mercilessly on dogs and humans alike.<sup>161</sup> (It could be said that this is an image of the Law empowering the weak, but they seem too enthusiastic about it for that.) In the Pontifical of Renaud de Bar one plays the role of David and approaches Goliath with a slingshot.<sup>162</sup> They are capable of anything humans can do. They play the organ, they hold funerals (of dogs). They joust. They can do better: one defies gravity by dancing on its ears.<sup>163</sup> In other words, they might have been up to anything: but it would have been very agile.

And of course, in Guildford the revellers next to a park with a thriving rabbit warren—the earliest recorded on the English mainland.<sup>164</sup> They might just have been mounting a mock hunt.

That is about as far as we can go. It is tempting to try and summarise, but ultimately defeating. We probably have enough material to attempt a reconstruction of the costumes, though one doubts we would ever be given the budget to achieve it: this is high-end, high-production-values entertainment, with a dedicated team behind it working



Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 298, Pontifical of Renaud de Bar (France c. 1303-1316), fol. 115<sup>r</sup>, bas de page.  
© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Image from “Illuminated: Manuscripts in the Making” at <<https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/illuminated/manuscript/discover/the-pontifical-of-renaud-de-bar/folio/folio-115r>>

160 Including the most respectable sources, such as the British Library: e.g. <<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2021/06/killer-rabbits.html>> and <<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2020/04/medieval-rabbits-the-good-the-bad-and-the-bizarre.html>>.

161 Fols 59<sup>v</sup>-64<sup>r</sup>.

162 Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 298, Pontifical of Renaud de Bar, fol. 7<sup>r</sup>, bas de page. Goliath has a snail on his banner.

163 Fol. 115<sup>r</sup>, bas de page. See image above.

164 VEALE, 2003: 209-214.

*cum summa festinacione*. It reinforces what has already been said about Edward and his team-building, and the sense of camaraderie among the companions of Crécy (restricting it to the Garter Knights is too limiting). Further work needs to be done on the relationship between the headgear and the crests on tomb effigies, and the creation of self-image. It seems to confirm the mood suggested by the tournament challenges, of a group sufficiently at home with themselves to stand on ceremony while making some very rude jokes. But apart from that, we are at best just guessing. We can hear the laughter, but it will always be in the next room.

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