

Notes for a Pilgrimage to Smithfield and St Bartholomew's

Smithfield Market was the site of the great **Tournament** held in June 1467 to celebrate the betrothal of Margaret, sister of Edward IV, to Charles the Bold (Charles le Temeraire) son of Philip the Good of Burgundy. The marriage took place the following year in Bruges and Margaret became the Duchesse Marguerite de Bourgogne. The marriage was intended to cement an alliance between England (then under Yorkist rule) and Burgundy against France and the Lancastrian opposition. It was therefore politically very important. ⁱ

The Burgundian entourage numbered around 400 -- knights, lords, stewards, taborers, trumpeters, etc., -- but no women are mentioned in the accounts. This may have been because it could be a very dangerous journey: the Burgundian group was attacked by Spanish pirates as it crossed the Channel. It was led by the Anthoine, Grand Bastard of Burgundy (eldest illegitimate son of Philip the Good) – a great enthusiast for jousting and a formidable opponent on the field.

Several performances by taborers are mentioned in these accounts, but their names are not given. “before these trumpeters came two tabor players arrayed as Turks one playing two flutes and the other two tabors”. Nevertheless, we do know the name of several Burgundian taborers from other accounts

The English group was led by Anthony Woodville, brother-in-law of Edward IV, who had married Elizabeth Woodville some years earlier. Anthony Woodville had become Lord Scales after his marriage to Scales. He likewise was an enthusiastic jousting knight. These two knights met on the jousting field and contested over several days. Both Edward IV, his Queen Elizabeth and Marguerite (soon to become La Duchesse) were present at the Tournament.

One important aspect of this Tournament is that, because it was held in a public marketplace, the working people of London were able to view and to comment on the proceedings. This is unlike much of tournament culture which was exclusive to the aristocracy. For this reason, it is plausible to suggest that the commoners might create ‘re-enactments’ of such events in the form of what have come down to us as Mummers Plays or Folk Plays. The characters of the Mummers Play are all recognizable as real personages within the Tournament, including the doctor, the combattants, heralds and idiots, along with a ‘presiding princess’ whose favors are to be fought for.

The tournament was cut short after several days on hearing of the death of Antoine's father, Philip the Good. The marriage went ahead as planned, but the greater alliance was ruptured by the death of Charles the Bold at the Battle of Nancy in 1477. Margaret lived on as ‘caretaker’ of what remained of the Burgundian estate until 1503. Edward reigned in England until his death in 1483 (aged 40).

A good case can be made for the **Church of St Bartholomew the Great** as an important pilgrimage site for taborers: The story begins with the classical tale of **Marsyas & Apollo**. In this myth, Marsyas the Satyr (and presumed taborer!) gets involved in a contest with Apollo to see whose music is most popular. Marsyas wins (due, presumably to his greater appeal as an inspiration for dancing) and the god Apollo takes his revenge by having Marsyas tied up and flayed. In the polite version, the followers of Marsyas take up the playing of flutes in memory of their hero

(usually told as water nymphs, or nyads, fashioning reed pipes to mourn their loss). In the 'true' version, the bones of Marsyas are taken by his acolytes to be fashioned into 3-hole pipes and his skin is made into tabors: flutes made from human tibia bones are frequently used in the religious ceremonies of several cultures and drums from human skulls and skin feature in Tibetan ceremonies.

The story of **St Bartholomew** follows a similar path in the Christian tradition. As one of the Twelve Apostles, Bartholomew sets forth to preach the gospel to the heathens: in his case venturing east towards India. Not surprisingly, his outspoken advocacy of Christian beliefs brings him into conflict with the local priesthood who resent his intrusion into their domain and have him, like Marsyas, flayed alive. He is said to have converted the King of Azerbaijan, incurring the wrath of the King's brother (through fear of a consequent Roman invasion) who had Bartholomew executed. Though why the flaying?

The martyrdom of St Bartholomew became the subject of many great paintings during the Renaissance, eg., Tintoretto and Titian. In contemporary culture, St Bartholomew has become the patron saint of various skin-related trades: tanners, bookbinders, dermatologists, etc.. In honour of his standing up for his beliefs he is also celebrated as a champion of free speech.

To taborers, of course, the relics of the Saint would have been reassembled by his acolytes, as with those of Marsyas, into pipes and tabors. Our noble instrument thus becomes the embodiment of St Bartholomew and a symbol both of his concern for the medical welfare of the poor – as with the founding of a hospital in his name – as well as of free speech as before.

Rahere and the Founding of the Church of St Bartholomew the Great, along with the adjacent hospital. The idea of building a church in honour of St Bartholomew came to Rahere while on a pilgrimage to Rome. He had fallen ill and in a state of hallucination, pictured St Bartholomew. He vowed that, should he recover, he would build a church and hospital to honour the Saint. This he did on his return to London.

It can be assumed that **Rahere** was a man of some means and of quite a forceful disposition in order to be able to carry through with such a project. He appears to have grown up as a member of the **Court of Henry I**, giving some clue as to his having 'good connections', and probably wealth. From our point of view, his most significant attribute is that he is said to have been the **Court Jester** for at least some period of his time at Court. Freedom of speech and pipe & tabor playing are, of course, the primary features of this role. Unfortunately, the present documentary evidence of his being Court Jester to Henry I is rather slim (clearly needs further research!).

ⁱ There are several contemporary accounts of the Tournament [see: For an overview of the event see Sydney Anglo, 'Anglo-Burgundian Feats of Arms: Smithfield, June 1467', *Guildhall Miscellany*, vol. 2, no. 7 (September 1965), 271-283. 'Jousts of my lord Antoine Bastard of Burgundy done in England [1467], (fols 44r -72v)', in *The Medieval Tournament: Chivalry, Heraldry and Reality An Edition and Analysis of Three Fifteenth-Century Tournament Manuscripts*, ed. by Ralph Moffatt, 2010, pp. 92-94, 304-331. Available online]