

“TWO MINSTRELS TOO MANY?”:
THE REMUNERATED MUSICIAN
OF THE 16th CENTURY, FROM STATUS SYMBOL
OF THE COURT TO SOCIAL OUTCAST

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Abstract: Contemporary sources use the word “minstrel” to describe a wide social range of musical entertainers. Legal and other documents of the period provide a rich social tapestry of these late medieval entertainers, and point to the beginnings of the schism between court and country and the attitude(s) of Tudor society/ies to those whom they paid to sing to them. The paper investigates how the minstrel’s art was exploited and abused by non-minstrels, and how this contributed to the stigmatization of these “musical vagabonds”.

Keywords: medieval singers, contemporary music

In the course of my research into the remunerated singer I became very interested in the idea of a possible connection between the dissolution of the monasteries and the sudden emergence of the minstrel as a member of the less desirable section of society. In the summer of 2000 I spent time in the Public Records Offices at Kew and in Somerset’s county seat of Taunton, looking for some evidence that would support my hypothesis... unfortunately, without success. However, as happens so often in libraries and archives, I did accumulate sufficient information to put together some kind of picture of the minstrel’s fall from favour.

Upon the dissolution of the monasteries there was a sudden overspill of ecclesiastics and lay hangers-on without any useful trade, religiously and hence politically undesirable, and without knowledge of the itinerant pedlars’ infrastructure which, one suspects, then as now involved individuals with specific territorial ‘patches’ which rivals would have done well to avoid. From the Robin Hood ballads of an earlier age – but still popular with Elizabethan audiences, as can be inferred from the various references to Robin Hood in the works of Shakespeare¹ – we have evidence of the fact that the pedlar, whose way of life required it, was often more than capable of self-defence, and that homeless men of all kinds grouped together in bands for reasons of either defence or attack (or both). The expelled monastic was thrust suddenly into this world where one had to fend for oneself in order to survive. It is even possible that he operated as a disseminator of Catholic sentiment in the guise of a balladeer, as was later the case with Richard Cropland, “seized in Leices-

¹ For instance, in *Hamlet*, IV. v., Ophelia in her madness sings of “Bonny sweet Robin”.

ter around the time of the Gunpowder Plot, [who] catered for the recusant market”², or the balladeers of whom officials in Commonwealth England complained.

Previously, the people dwelling inside the monasteries would have encountered the travelling salesmen of their day, if only to feed them when hungry or tend them when sick, so we cannot say that they were totally ignorant of them. I am convinced that there were those of them who eventually joined them on the muddy or dusty roads of the country to provide themselves with the barest of livings. However, to date I have been unable to discover any proof of such a change in lifestyle, and such proof is exceedingly difficult to come by. Clues would be most likely found in records of criminal misdemeanor. Unfortunately, the Calendars of Assize Records only date from the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England, published in 1837 and edited by Sir Harris Nicolas, contain no information referring to singing priests during the reign of Henry VIII, although we do find that immediately after the dissolution ‘prist parsonnes’ were both accused and acquitted of uttering ‘sundry traitorous wordes,’ as occurred in the case of Sir Robert Moore, who upon March 3, 1541 was ‘apprehended and comytted to sure and safe custodie’ at Hampton Court, but released on the eighteenth day of the same month as the accusation was ruled slanderous, and the culprit, one Thomas Dawes, sentenced either to public forgiveness in the parish church or to a day in the pillory upon the nearest market day³. There is also mention of a “vagabonde, presented by the Constable of Howslow to the Cownsaile for certayne seditious words...committed to the sayede Cownstable, to be had agayne to Howslow, and there to be whipped,” but apart from his being a vagabond we know nothing further of him. He could have been a disenfranchised priest, a ballad seller, or one of a host of any number of people lumped together under the Tudor vagrancy acts.

The credentials for these new ex-monastic vagrants for becoming budding ballad sellers were at least twofold. They were literate and they were accustomed to singing at length. While they were already officially *persona non grata*, they had many supporters dotted about. The suspicions of the authorities about the ballad singer as propagandist would hardly have been credible without some truth appertaining to the matter. What better butt of suspicion and phobic fear than the homeless pamphleteering evicted papist? Of such suspicion there is evidence in documents such as the legislation suggested after the events of 1569, which states that “learned itinerants were natural suspects, because of their education and travels to the continent: after the rebellion of 1569 a bill was proposed against disguised priests.”⁴ However, further research elsewhere will be necessary in order to ascertain whether what seems to be a logical assumption can indeed be backed up by hard proof.

If so far it has been impossible to uncover information related to the breadwinning activities of dispossessed brethren, there has at least been the satisfaction of discovering a great deal more about the status of the much-maligned minstrel. The

² BEIER 1985: 92–3.

³ NICOLAS 1837: (no page nos.) Acts of Privy Council 1540–1542.

⁴ BEIER 1985: 102–3.

suggestion that has often come up is that by the second half of the 16th century the social position of the minstrel had already sunk considerably. Tessa Watt states that

“The term ‘minstrel’ did not mean the same thing in 1570 as it had a century earlier. Puttenham’s derogatory attitude to ‘taverne minstrels that give a fit of mirth for a groat’ bears witness to the sixteenth-century descent of the ‘minstrel’ from respected professional musician to the status of vagabond. The official seal on this debasement was Elizabeth’s statute of 1572, which applied the vagrancy laws to all ‘common players in interludes and minstrels’ who were not under aristocratic or royal patronage. There had always been a hierarchy of music makers, based on both patronage and skill, from the king’s trumpeters down through the minstrels attached to noble households to the independent wayfarers. However, by the sixteenth century there was another factor: musical literacy. To merit the newer respectable term ‘musician’, one now had to be able to read music, to sing as well as to play, to teach wealthy amateurs, and even to compose part-music for domestic recreation.” (WATT 1991: 15).

However, the situation is rather more complex, for although it is true that minstrels *were* sliding down the social ladder at this time, there was no such clear distinction between those minstrels with and those without patronage of some kind as Watt suggests. The records of early English drama compiled by the team at Toronto University provide us with a rich selection of information from which to sift out the status of freelance minstrels and balladeers. It can be stated fairly safely that Elizabethan contemporaries used the word minstrel to cover a wide variety of musicians, and that the word can be found just as frequently in a positive as in a negative context. The wealth of instances where musicians have been at odds with the authorities is such that for the sake of practicality I have confined myself to those recorded in the county of Somerset. I have collated all examples of musicians of one kind or another, but especially of minstrels and waits, who seem to have been interchangeable in their vocal function except that whereas minstrels have been recorded both in the singular and the plural, waits unsurprisingly appear exclusively in the plural, their musical form essentially being that of part-singing.

It would appear especially justified to place the waits and minstrels in one category if one of the hallmarks of the itinerant musician is his shady character. Volume II of *Records of Early Drama: Somerset* provides a long list stretching from the beginning of the fourteenth century to the end of the second third of the fifteenth century:

“The earliest references to local waits and musicians appear in the patent rolls between 1314 and 1568. Many of the waits before 1350 were probably watchmen, not performers... They include the son of

Henry le Wayt, given a licence to convey lands and properties in Bathwick (1314); Richard le Pipere... mentioned as one of a group who assaulted a man at Thurlbear, near Taunton, and carried away his goods (1338); Stephen le Harpour, charged with others for carrying away goods and documents from Compton Bishop, near Axbridge (1340); Richard Wayte, pardoned for acquiring for life, without licence, a mill in Frome that was held by the Crown (1373); John Gouer, singer, of Huish by Highbridge (near Burnham) and Huntspill, pardoned for several felonies (1453); Thomas Briker, harp-maker, parish uncertain but named among a group from Wells and Glastonbury whose arrest was ordered for counterfeiting the king's money (1468)" (501–2).

From the above it can be gleaned that, far from the status of musicians sinking in the latter years of the sixteenth century, there had always been a section of the "trade" who had lived at least partially outside of the law. Presumably the shady activities of many went no further than those of our modern-time internationally peripatetic busker, who pays no man tax but who is subsequently debarred from, for instance, making claims for unemployment benefit or health aid. Others were out-and-out criminals for whom musical performance was little more than a front to gain access and win confidence. It cannot be said that the sixteenth century, and especially the second part of it, was socially responsible for the decline in the minstrel, but that the various categories both of musician and of audience became better defined. Furthermore, a sudden increase in the number of itinerant musicians, actors and other wayfaring salesmen, proven by the necessity to introduce under Elizabeth and James legislation restricting their activities and numbers, resulted in a decline in quality at the lower end of the spectrum similar to that experienced in domestic service in the nineteenth century, when it was the second largest work category overall and the outright largest among the female sex. In short, the sixteenth-century authorities tried to do something about what is saw as being the "minstrel problem".

First of all, it will be instructive for us to recognize that while the musicians themselves were evidently seen to be instigators of ungodly behaviour, it is evident that in a time of religious uncertainty, the people who had just survived life under a zealous Catholic queen and who were now learning to live under a Protestant one, some people preferred to choose the non-religious option, and performers were equally happy to earn something by gratifying them with music. The existence of legislation punishing a particular activity is always proof of the existence of such an activity. Thus the case at Bleadon on July 8, 1586:

"in the tyme of the sermon, ther was pyping tabering & [day] dancing and wold not come to the sermon nether"⁵

⁵ STOKES 1996: 40.

In the Bridgwater Quarter Sessions Order Book for 1595, a certain “Iohannes fulbrooke” is recorded as having to appear before the courts “for playing vnlawfull games & keepinge night watch in his howse with daunsinge on holydays”. The accusation in the 1593/4 Ex Officio Act Book of Butcombe against a fiddler for tempting people away from church is explicit:

“for withdrawing of the parishoners there from divine service being a fidler”

but the very staff of the church were also to be found wanting in their devotion. Such were the vicar of Pilton in 1586 or 1587, and later, in 1610, the churchwarden of Farleigh Hungerford:

“Item presentatur for that the vicar hath made rymes and lewd songes and deliverid thm vnto others to be songe to the great discontentment of the people”⁶

“Hee being a churchwarden is a common player att bowles on the sabbaoth day and that hee is a keeper of brawling & swearing companie and minstrelsy & dauncing in his howse & daunceth himself on sabbaoth & holye dayes”⁷

Age-old customs, that special English blend of paganism and Christianity, were difficult to stamp out. The Glastonbury Official Principal’s Act Book for 1580 reveals that

“contra Edwardum Cooper et Thomam Nicholes gardianos the register booke is not kept according as yt ought to be and they kept the church ale vpon the saboth daie with the Morysh daunce coming into the church” (129)

Such phenomena as the inclusion in church ritual of the pagan Morris dance were reasonably commonplace.⁸ So, it would appear, was the use of the local cemetery as a rendezvous for non-religious purposes, as occurred, according to the Frome Bishop’s Court Deposition Book for 1580, when

“he this deponent and Iohn Lewes his precontest [⟨...⟩ weare coming] ... from mr Kirkes howse ... in ffrome through the churchyard of the saide parish about seuen of the clocke in the evening

⁶ STOKES 1996: 206.

⁷ STOKES 1996: 118.

⁸ And, indeed, have been resurrected at modern Morris get-togethers, such as the Morris weekend at Thaxted every year in June, with the cooperation of the village minister. The Abbots Bromley horn dance is another vestigial pagan ritual that has been reawakened in a tolerant age.

and as they passed through the churchyard they found a minstrell
plaing in the churchyard vppon a rebick hauing many youths about
him" (121)

Apart from the sheer fact of the evening tryst, we are incidentally informed that the minstrel in question was at least sufficiently talented to perform upon the rebec, and that his entertainment had sufficient charm to entice the youths to risk discovery in the cemetery, which might well have earned them a whipping or time in the pillory, the most common minor punishments.

At the same time, the authorities did not outlaw the minstrels entirely, and indeed remunerated them for their services when they were carried out appropriately. Entries for the various common and water bailiffs of Bridgwater show payments to minstrels between 1495 and 1561. Tellingly, while the earlier entries refer to minstrels attached to noble households ("Item more payd to the Eryll off Arondellis mynstrellis" (Water Bailiffs' Accounts 1495–6)⁹; "Item Payd to my lord of derby ys mynstrellys in Monay & and wyne" (Common Bailiffs' Accounts 1503–4)¹⁰), the latter ones refer to a single "mynstryll in master myeor howsse the second day of februarye" (Water Bailiffs' Accounts 1557–8)¹¹ and remuneration for "ij mynstrells at Crismas" (Water Bailiffs' Accounts, December 25th, 1561–March 25th, 1562)¹².

Unfortunately, no fee or venue is specified for the two minstrels performing as part of the municipal Christmas, or we would have additional important information as to whether their services were better or worse-paid than that of the single musician who was paid five shillings in 1558, three years earlier. However, we have far more complete records from the St. Mary's Churchwardens' Accounts of the village of Yatton. In the years 1521–2, 1528–9, 1530–1, 1531–2, 1532–3, 1533–4, 1534–5 and 1535–6 there are entries for an "Item paid to a mynystrelle / mynstrelle / mynstrell / mynstrele / mynstrell / mynstrel."¹³ Far from going out of fashion, between 1536–46 groups of players are commissioned, with the exception of 1542, when again a solitary musician is paid to perform, as is the case between 1536–46 and in 1559, with the plural used in the 1558–9 accounts, which are for February–March. However, the fee is sometimes mentioned as being for "Wyttsontyd." Was payment so late?

As to how much the musicians were paid for their services, the amount is either very rhapsodic, or else there was a great discrepancy amongst the calibres of the

⁹ STOKES 1996: 41.

¹⁰ STOKES 1996: 42.

¹¹ STOKES 1996: 47.

¹² STOKES 1996: 47.

¹³ The entries also display the gradual simplification of spelling throughout the sixteenth century. By 1536 the spelling has become very close to the modern *minstrel*. The phenomenon is that more exciting, as my research has shown that for the period in question there are at most three distinguishable spellings: half the number of the spellings of the word. More research will be required before it can be stated that spelling was not only experimental in the 16th century, but also a matter of taste; in other words, spelling became a personal cultural decision based, among other factors, visual pleasure at one's creative work.

performance, reflected in the remuneration. The minstrel of 1521–2 received twelve pence. The complete list of payments for solitary performers can be seen in the table below.

Although rough-and-ready, the chart shows that there were considerable differences in payments accorded to the musicians for their services. It does not, however, reflect any significant progression down the social scale. While it is true that by far the highest payment was given to the 1531–2 performer, the third highest was received in 1559–60, the last year of the study.

Year of Account Book	Payment received	Position in payment league table*
1521–1522	12d.	13
1528–1529	12d.	14
1530–1531	2s. 8d.	12
1531–1532	13s. 4d.	1
1532–1533	6s. 0d.	8
1533–1534	8s. 0d.	5
1534–1535	9s. 0d.	4
1535–1536	10s. 0d.	2
1542–1543	5s. 0d.	10
1546–1547	6s. 0d.	9
1547–1548	6s. 8d.	6
1555–1556	5s. 0d.	11
1557–1558	6s. 8d.	7
1559–1560	10s. 0d.	3

*The chart does not take into consideration the inflation rate of the forty years covered in the accounts. However, where minstrels receive the same amount for different years, the earlier year receives a higher rating.

Not all minstrels were peripatetic, as can be seen in the cases of John Huishe of Litton and John Webbe of Blagdon described by Stokes. The latter was a carpenter who evidently earned some extra income by appearing at local weddings and other local festivities (484). However, being a local does not seem to have exempted him from suspicion, for in the 1573–4 Bishop’s Court Deposition Book for Blagdon we can read a testimony to Webbe’s good character – sure proof of suspicion that it was not:

“he this deponent hathe knowen Iohn Webbe articulate by the space of iij or fower yeares laste paste whoe is a mynstrell and a Carpynter duering which space of ... iiij yeares this deponent sundrie tymes and yn sundrye places hathe ben yn the companie of the same Iohn webbe at weddinges and other merrie meetinges of neighbors. But he sayethe he neuer sawe or knewe the said Iohn webb drunk or otherwise to behaue hym selfe then becommethe an honest man.”

Neither was the population blameless in their relationship with their occasional entertainers. A 1614 entry in the Ex Officio Act Book for Old Cleeve reveals a case against a certain Gregorium Hobbs “ffor keepeing minstrells in his howse drincking on the saboth day att the time of divine prayer,” and we have already seen how John Fulbrooke chose to amuse himself on the sabbath. At the same time, local authorities were ready to comprehend that singing and playing upon instruments were a means of income that would release them from some of the burden of the poor laws that caused them as much of a headache as the legislation against vagrancy. The Accounts of Collectors for the Poor tell how at the turn of the 16th–17th century the blind harper Edward Edwardes was given clothing for himself and ten shillings to teach the blind youth Hopkins “to play on the harpe for his better mayntenance”¹⁴. The tactic is reminiscent of tactics by present British governments to solve unemployment through retraining rather than by hand-outs.

The extraordinary exhibitionism of a mid-17th-century performer shows that at least some of the suspicions surrounding the breed were founded upon experience. A certain Henricum Pillchorne was charged with dancing

“with his britches downe about his heeles in the house of one Iohn Chute de eadem, and did shew his privie members vnto the companie most vncivillie there being then many women present, and said he did daunce Piddecocke bolt upright, and readie to fight”
(60)

Amusing it might be to read more than 360 years later; yet society still does not readily condone such ribald behaviour. However, the complaint of Oliver Chiver of Brislington in 1636 to no lesser personage than the Archbishop Laud shows that society, and even law, was divided as regards their attitude towards musical entertainment, even on a Sunday:

“Item that Cowling... together with Moggs the then reputed churchwarden inhibited the young people their lawfull sport after evening prayer, although they were orderly, & had beene at prayer before, being whitsunday and Moggs sett the musitians by the heeles, yet they suffer vnlawfull gaming & tipling almost euey Sunday & present not any for the same” (61)

However, not all men in authority were such hard-liners. Magistrates were apparently aware of the fact that they provided a sought-for service that was enjoyed by a large section of the community across the board, from the common village folk through to the country aristocracy. In other words, while a minstrel was punished for committing a crime, he was not necessarily hounded and punished for the mere fact

¹⁴ STOKES 1996: 57 and 502.

that he was a minstrel – although he might well be. One presumes that wanderers of all kinds knew which settlements were sympathetic and which were best given a wide berth. These were often identifiable by their religious affiliation, but as the following account demonstrates communities were not so clear-cut in their preference of sect:

“A controversy over a Christmas entertainment in a house at Compton Pauncefoot in 1605 caused a major confrontation between the Gilberts (a famous Catholic family) and the Hastingses, together with their respective allies from numerous parishes an east Somerset.” (454)

Performers resident in the area often received kinder treatment than their peripatetic counterparts:

“Several justices quietly refused to prosecute local minstrels... thereby seeming to confirm the view that recusant conservatism was becoming centred in country houses” (ibid.)

The employment of minstrels, morris dancers and the like, either on the sabbath day or even as part of the church ritual, was more than a mere backsliding from religious observance. It demonstrates a number of changes in society. First of all, there was the crucial social change whereby at least some of the population was alternately confused and educated out of belief. In an atmosphere where believers of any colour were likely to become martyrs, it was quite possibly safer to practice atheism, an option hitherto lacking – unless you wanted to be burnt as a heretic! By the 16th century, it would appear that atheism was at least tolerated alongside the Christian alternatives, for the dramatist Christopher Marlowe is not only known to have voiced atheistic views, but at the same time to have been in the employ of the state as a spy.¹⁵ But even among believers, there was a social divide. Catholicism had behind it centuries of experience in the toleration of pagan or vestigially pagan social rituals. In contrast, Protestantism was new and ‘pure’. Revelry in general it scorned and considered ungodly, although there was not so much purging and purification in Elizabeth’s reign as would follow in the first half of the seventeenth century. Morrill, in his chapter on the Stuarts¹⁶, states how maypole dancing returned in 1660 to the villages of rural England almost as quickly as Charles II himself returned to the country to take the crown.

One cannot place the blame entirely upon the remunerated minstrels and broadside singers. Lewdness was a part of the times, for all that – or because – the more zealous authorities attempted to clamp down on it. In 1586 (?) in the Bishop’s Court Deposition Book for West Pennard, we read of a deposition brought against two local women of unknown age for singing a bawdy song:

¹⁵ HARVEY 1973: 518.

¹⁶ STOKES 345.

“betwene easter and whitsontyde last past this deponent goinge in companie with Agnes Gee and Isabell Cooke dwellinge within the said parishe to geither rushes against whitsontyde the said Isabell Cooke songe a certaine ballade which was a verie badd and lewde thinge not to be heard of any body for that it was an abhominable thinge and toulde the said Isabell that that she might either vse better songes than those or ells to sing none at all very for shame” (390)

Isabel had learnt the “bad and lewd” ballad by heart, but it was in circulation in written form as well, for the yeoman William Warner, sick and confined to bed, had obtained a copy and read it aloud to others. Perhaps we find here an early example of the philosophy encapsulated in Thomas D’Urfey’s (1653–1723) much later “Wit and Mirth, or Pills to purge Melancholy,” published in 1719.

A phenomenon that was becoming increasingly common was the use of the ballad form to publicly defame one’s enemies or rivals. The Records of Early English Drama for Somerset provide a detailed account of the lawsuit between John Hole, a constable of the cathedral town of Wells who in 1608 had attempted to ban the traditional May games, and a group of local people who began to lampoon the constable and his friends in the entertainments provided by the various town guilds in June. Hole evidently not having broad shoulders protested vehemently instead of laughing at himself as the butt of humour, his opponents went so far as to compose, print and widely circulate “two libellous songs directed against Hole and friends” (596). The resultant lawsuit, which took place in the Star Chamber, lasted from April 1608 until November 1609, and involved scores of depositions, hundreds of sheets of paper, and a long list of punishments meted out to the perpetrators. The Hole case was only one of many, but this one escalated out of all proportion, with accusations on both sides.

It was as these scurrilous libels in written ballad form became ever more common that the status of the minstrel profession began to decline. Another interesting phenomenon occurred. While the singing of ballads had been held in respect, it had provided income and patronage for a group of professionals and semi-professionals who enjoyed some degree of status. The profession gradually lost that status in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the very centuries in which vast quantities of new material were composed. It was, perhaps, the glut that induced the rot. But the reasons were many and various. Aristocracy was no longer the sole patron of the entertainer, as is evidenced above by references to local councils paying musicians, not only to perform but also to take on apprentices who would then relieve them of payment in accordance with the poor laws introduced between 1531 and 1601¹⁷. This

¹⁷ At the time of implementation these were ungenerous; as the seventeenth century progressed they became ever less efficient, and by the mid-eighteenth century, when they were still the only – if modified – legislation offering any kind of relief to the poor, they were practically useless – hardly surprising when the motivation for their being passed was based on fear rather than humanitarianism. (BRIGGS 1987: 125–127; MORGAN 1993: 276).

non-gentry layer – the “little tradition”, as it is referred to – was by the seventeenth century itself becoming more diverse, one of its breakaway markers being “the division between ‘rough’ and ‘respectable’ ... parish elites below the level of the gentry were drawing apart from the traditional world of popular culture”.¹⁸ BARRY divides the Sunday activities of the respectable and the rough into their respective environments, and also touches upon the encroachment of the written word upon an earlier, non-literate culture:

“Sunday was officially set aside for the whole household to listen to readings from religious works. Another centre where reading was possible was the alehouse; it was a place of leisure where ballads and other forms of print were often available. Almost all these settings involved experience of the printed word as part of an oral culture, read or sung aloud and shared with others – including the illiterate”¹⁹

INGRAM, in the same collection of essays, points out that the period was also the earliest when popular culture came under the threat of mass culture. His description of the interaction of the two is worth setting down, for while it does not entirely sit easily over what we have come to think of popular and mass culture in 20th-century terms, it is nonetheless useful:

“From about 1500 to 1800 the world of popular culture came under attack from elite groups (clergy, nobility, and some middle-class groups in town and country) who gradually attenuated and transformed many aspects of social life among the mass of the people. This ‘reform of popular culture’ combined to attempts to suppress many popular activities and to modify the behaviour of the common people... sponsoring... a new ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture which embodied the ideologies of the ruling classes”²⁰

The social and economic conditions of itinerant musicians were, although sometimes acceptable, nearly always precarious, and often downright dangerous. Their position in the sixteenth century did not change for the better in the subsequent one, as other examples and Spufford’s investigations demonstrate. This did not result in a decrease but rather in an augmentation of their number, for the sale of ballads was a means of income which the poorest and most degraded resorted to. It should be kept in mind that these street vendors sold not only ballads but other cheap published printed matter, mostly of a journalistic nature, and that many of the ballads themselves continued to be accepted as containing newsworthy information,

¹⁸ REAY (ed.) 1985: 12.

¹⁹ BARRY in REAY (ed.) 1985: 68.

²⁰ INGRAM in REAY (ed.) 1985: 129–130.

just as the singer-songwriter composer-minstrel had sung the Agincourt Carol in 1415 at least until its newsworthiness had trickled down to an unprofitable level. Their social, economic and popular status can be ranked with modern-day news vendors – low earners in poor working conditions believed to be loosely connected with one, the other, or both sides of the law.

As for the creators of the broadsheet ballads, DUGAW's statement that "Elizabethan balladmakers were a particularly diverse lot" who only "turned to songwriting either when they needed money or were roused to ballad polemic," not really minding whether knocking together "love lyrics, drinking songs, effusions of patriotic sentiment, moralistic warnings, biting and comical satires" or "journalistic reports of sensational and timely events²¹", is probably as fair as any, although, as has been pointed out above in the extraordinary case of the constable Hole, it should be remembered that ballad-writing was also exploited as a means of defaming one's enemies, in which case neither profit nor poesy were main motives.

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²¹ DUGAW 1989: 24.