

IN SEARCH OF LORD STRANGE: Dynamic Patronage in the North West

Sally-Beth MacLean

Henrye Earle of darbye: with his sonne. fardinando. Lord Strange.
Came to this Cittye in August. And was honorably received. by the
mayor into his howse and did lye there two Nightes: mr parvise
Scollers: playd A Commodie out of the book of Terence before
hym. The Shepeards playe played at the hie Crosse. with other
Trivmphes vpon. the Rode eye ...

(Mayors List 13: Cheshire and Chester Archives
and Local Studies, ZCR 60/83 fol. 13V)¹

Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, appears in the *Cheshire including Chester* dramatic records only once, on the occasion of a two-day visit to the city with his father in August 1578, when the pair was nobly entertained by the mayor. Quite exceptionally, they were treated to a performance of the Painters' *Shepherds Play*, despite its suppression along with Chester's other Whitsun biblical plays three years previously. The mayor, Thomas Bellin, apparently felt confident enough to allow the remounting of one of these controversial pageants for the play-loving visitors. It is evident that Earl Henry, even though some might have expected him as an ecclesiastical commissioner for the diocese to disapprove, was nonetheless amenable to this traditional entertainment. He had, in fact, a personal link with a member of the producing guild, the Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers. Thomas Chaloner, a prominent member of the guild, had been recently employed by Earl Henry to paint a magnificent new screen for the Great Hall at Lathom.²

But what of Earl Henry's companion on this occasion? Ferdinando was the son and heir of Henry Stanley, fourth Earl of Derby and Lord of the Isle of Man. Styled Lord Strange of Knokyn from October 1572, he became fifth Earl of Derby at his father's death on 25 September 1593. The family held extensive lands in many counties but their principal base was in south-western Lancashire where the palatial seat at Lathom House and another home at Knowsley a few miles from Liverpool were their preferred residences.³ They were also the dominant landowners in neighbouring Cheshire, with powerful influence in the city of Chester.⁴