

JOHN RICE AND THE BOYS OF THE JACOBAN KING'S MEN

DAVID KATHMAN

As one of the actors named in the Shakespeare First Folio, John Rice has long been recognized as a significant figure by historians of the Jacobean theatre. Since the nineteenth century, historians have also known that Rice was a boy actor for the King's Men late in the first decade of the seventeenth century, apparently one of the company's leading boys, to judge by the scant evidence we have. This latter fact is especially significant, because it suggests that Rice may have originated key female roles in some of Shakespeare's late plays. Despite this importance, very little has been known about Rice apart from his appearances in theatrical records, first as a boy in 1607–10 and then as an adult in 1619–25. More than seventy years ago, Edwin Nungezer and G. E. Bentley laid out the few remaining biographical scraps: appearances by Rice in the St Saviour's Southwark token books living 'Nere the Playhouse' between 1617 and 1623, and Rice's appearance as one of two overseers (along with Cuthbert Burbage) of John Heminges's 1630 will, in which Heminges described him as the clerk of St Saviour's Southwark.¹ Rice had apparently quit acting by that time, since he appears in no theatrical records after 1625.

New documentary evidence now makes it possible to bring John Rice's life and acting career into sharper focus. The most significant new evidence is a Chancery deposition given by Rice on 16 October 1626, in which he describes himself as a clerk of St Saviour's, aged thirty-six, implying that he was born about 1590.² This information about Rice's age allows us to construct a likely timeline for his career as a boy actor with the King's Men in the first

decade of the seventeenth century. Such a timeline can be informed by the enormous amount of new information that has emerged in recent years about how boys were apprenticed in adult playing companies, and by new information about the specific boys who certainly or probably performed with the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men between the late 1590s and 1610. Rice's career is interesting in its own right, but it also serves as a useful springboard for a broader discussion of all the actors who may have first played some of Shakespeare's most famous women.

Beyond Rice's stage career, the lawsuit in which he gave his deposition provides fascinating and sometimes heart-breaking detail about the circumstances under which he left the acting profession, circumstances tied to the horrendous plague outbreak of 1625. A full examination of the St Saviour's token books and other records show that Rice was apparently living in the parish as early as 1612, that he married at least three times and had five children and that he remained as St Saviour's parish clerk until the outbreak of the English Civil War, when he was past fifty years old. His will, previously unknown, shows that he died in Sussex in 1654, nearly thirty years after he

¹ Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors and of Other Persons Associated with the Public Representation of Plays in England before 1642* (New Haven, 1929), pp. 296–7; G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1941), vol. 2, pp. 546–7.

² The National Archives (TNA) C24/528, Wicarley vs. White.

quit the theatre and a dozen years after the London playhouses where he gained fame were shuttered.³

RICE'S CAREER AS A KING'S BOY

In order to put John Rice's career as a boy actor into the proper context, it helps to know how the apprenticeship system of the early modern London theatre worked. Boy actors in the major London-based playing companies were typically bound as apprentices to adult members of the company; they were thus subject to the rules governing all London apprentices, notably a minimum term of seven years. By the early seventeenth century, theatrical apprentices were often bound to adult actors who were members, or freemen, of London livery companies such as the Grocers and Drapers; these boys were legally apprentices in these companies even when their training was entirely on the stage.⁴ While training was an important element of theatrical apprenticeships, boys also played the female roles, since women were barred by custom from the English professional stage. Despite the common assumption that early modern theatrical 'boys' were prepubescent (say, eight to twelve years old), recent research has made it clear that the term was used more or less as a synonym of 'apprentice', and that the age range for these boys was roughly the same as that for London apprentices in general. The youngest boys documented playing female roles in the adult companies were thirteen or fourteen, though the all-boy companies that came into vogue around 1600 had members as young as ten. Some apprentices transitioned to male roles in their late teens, while some continued to play female roles until the age of twenty-one or so.⁵

Surviving records of the various London livery companies have made it possible in recent years to pinpoint when many boy actors were apprenticed, and have allowed us to identify previously unknown theatrical boys. John Heminges of the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men was a freeman of the Grocers who bound ten apprentices in that company between 1595 and 1628, most of whom can be traced on the professional stage. Other members of the Jacobean King's Men, including

Robert Armin, Alexander Cooke and John Lowin, also bound apprentices in livery companies.⁶ These records, along with other pieces of evidence, allow us to reconstruct much of the roster of King's Men boys in the early seventeenth century, providing important context for John Rice's early career with that company. As we will see below, the evidence suggests that, at least in this company, the most skilled apprentices tended to arrive in clusters separated by seven or eight years, the approximate minimum length of an apprenticeship contract.

Our direct knowledge of John Rice's career as a boy actor comes not from any recent archival discoveries but from three records that have been known for more than a century. The earliest of these is dated 16 July 1607, when the Merchant Taylors' Company of London hosted an elaborate banquet to induct Prince Henry as an honorary member of the company, with King James also being present. As part of the festivities, the Merchant Taylors paid Ben Jonson £20 to devise an elaborate entertainment for the king, in which a ship was lowered from the rafters with three musicians aboard dressed as mariners, singing three songs written by Jonson and set by court musician John Cooper. Before the ship was lowered, 'a very proper child, well spoken, being clothed like

³ TNA PROB 11/234/165v-166.

⁴ David Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freeman and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 55 (2004), 1-49, and David Kathman, 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford, 2009), pp. 413-28, both discuss this system in some detail, with the latter chapter also including discussion of the early modern English apprenticeship system in general.

⁵ David Kathman, 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?', in *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 220-46, presents the robust evidence for the ages of early modern boy actors, which I also summarized in 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices', pp. 426-7, and in 'The Seven Deadly Sins and Theatrical Apprenticeship', *Early Theatre*, 14 (2011), 121-39, esp. pp. 130-2. It has been suggested that adult male actors sometimes played older women such as Juliet's Nurse, but as I discuss in 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?', evidence for such a practice is scant to non-existent.

⁶ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', esp. pp. 6-11.

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an angel of gladness with a taper of frankincense burning in his hand, delivered a short speech containing eighteen verses, devised by Master Ben Jonson the poet; which pleased His Majesty marvellously well'.⁷ The Merchant Taylors' records reveal that the 'very proper child' was John Rice, directed by John Heminges of the King's Men. Among the disbursements for the pageant were forty shillings 'To Mr Hemmynges for his direccion of his boy that made the speech to his Majesty', and five shillings 'given to Iohn Rise the speaker'.⁸ Rice was about seventeen years old at the time, demonstrating that the terms 'child' and 'boy' had a significantly broader inflection than they have today.

Rice performed in another royal spectacle honouring Prince Henry three years later, this time alongside a different member of the King's Men, Richard Burbage. On 31 May 1610, the City of London put on an elaborate water pageant on the Thames to celebrate Henry's creation as Prince of Wales, and five days later Burbage and Rice were paid for performing in it and allowed to keep their costumes. Burbage played Amphion, described in Anthony Munday's published account of the pageant as 'a graue and iudicious Prophet-like personage, attyred in his apte habits, euery way answerable to his state and profession, with his wreath of Sea-shelles on his head, and his harpe hanging in fayre twine before him, personating the Genius of Wales'. Rice played Corinea of Cornwall, described by Munday as 'a very fayre and beautifull Nimphe, representing the Genius of olde Corineus Queene, and the Prouince of Cornewall, suited in her watrie habit yet riche and costly, with a Coronet of Pearles and Cockle shelles on her head'. Michael Baird Saenger has suggested that the King's Men later used these costumes in the original production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with Prospero wearing the Amphion costume and Ariel wearing the Corinea costume when he is dressed as a sea-nymph.⁹ Again, it's worth noting that the 'fayre and beautifull Nimphe' was about twenty years old.

The third piece of evidence does not directly involve Rice as a boy actor, but it provides a

terminus ad quem to his career as a boy for the King's Men. On 29 August 1611, fifteen months after his appearance in the water pageant with Burbage, Rice was one of twelve signatories of a bond between Philip Henslowe and Lady Elizabeth's Men, a new acting company that had been created four months before the date of the bond. Those twelve signatories – John Townsend, Joseph Taylor, William Ecclestone, Giles Gary, Robert Hamlen, Thomas Hunt, Joseph Moore, Rice, William Carpenter, Alexander Foster, Francis Waymus and Thomas Basse – were apparently sharers in the new company, but they were an unusual group of sharers in many ways.¹⁰ Seven of the twelve are not traceable in any theatrical record before this one, and only one besides Rice (Thomas Hunt) is traceable in any record earlier than 1609.¹¹ Of the others, Giles Gary had performed in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* in 1609 with the Children of the Queen's Revels, a company of youths, and the same year he was called a 'boy' when he performed in Jonson's *The Entertainment at Britain's Burse*. William Ecclestone had performed with the King's Men in Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Catiline* (1611) at the age of nineteen or twenty and had probably been one of the leading

⁷ Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 238–9.

⁸ Jean Robertson and D. J. Gordon, 'A Calendar of Dramatic Records in the Books of the Livery Companies of London, 1485–1640', in *Malone Society Collections III* (Oxford, 1954), p. 172.

⁹ Anthony Munday, *Londons Love, to the Royal Prince Henrie* (London, 1610), sig. C1v, C4; Michael Baird Saenger, 'The Costumes of Caliban and Ariel qua Sea-Nymph', *Notes and Queries*, 240 (1995), 334–6.

¹⁰ One copy of the bond, lacking Giles Gary's signature, is Dulwich College MS XVIII, Article 9, and is transcribed in Walter W. Greg, *Henslowe Papers* (London, 1907), p. 111. Another copy, which includes Gary's signature but lacks Francis Waymus's name entirely (in both the text of the bond and the signatures) is Dulwich College Muniments, Series 1, no. 47; it is transcribed in Greg, *Henslowe Papers*, pp. 18–19, and a digital photograph of it is available online at www.henslowe-alleyne.org.uk/images/Muniments-Series-1/Group-047/01r.html.

¹¹ Hunt had been a hired man with the Admiral's Men in the late 1590s, and was later with that company's successor, the Palsgrave's Men, in 1621. Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 201.

boys of the King's Men alongside Rice, as we will see below. All this suggests that Lady Elizabeth's Men was organized as a company of young men, many of whom had recently been apprentices. Two years later in March 1613, it merged with the Children of the Queen's Revels, and the combined company continued into the 1630s.¹²

Rice must have been considered an adult when he signed this bond, and so he cannot have been too much younger than twenty-one years old. If the age he later gave in his deposition is accurate, he was born in about 1590 and thus exactly twenty-one in 1611. However, it was not uncommon in that era for ages given in depositions to be off by a year or two, so we cannot be certain in the absence of further documentation. I previously suggested that the actor may have been the John Rice who was baptized in St Bride's Fleet Street on 22 September 1591; the evidence of the new deposition makes that identification less likely, but does not absolutely disprove it.¹³ Assuming for the moment that Rice gave the correct age in his 1626 deposition, he would have been sixteen or seventeen when he performed in the 1607 Merchant Taylors' banquet, and nineteen or twenty when he performed with Burbage in the 1610 water pageant.

We thus know when Rice's apprenticeship ended, but when did it begin, and to whom was he apprenticed? Though no direct evidence of Rice's binding survives, a variety of evidence suggests that he was apprenticed in the King's Men in 1603 or 1604, soon after the company (formerly the Lord Chamberlain's Men) was granted a royal patent dated 19 May 1603. Rice would have been thirteen or fourteen years old then, the most common ages for boy actors to be apprenticed; thirteen is the lower limit found in the record, so Rice is unlikely to have been apprenticed before 1603. The minimum length of an apprenticeship term was seven years, so if Rice's move to Lady Elizabeth's Men in 1611 came soon after his term ended, he could have been apprenticed no later than 1604.¹⁴ In any case, he presumably had several years of experience before being selected for the high-profile Merchant Taylors' entertainment in 1607.

The fact that Rice was called John Heminges's 'boy' in 1607 suggests that he was apprenticed to Heminges, though this idea is not without its problems. As we saw above, the Grocers' records show Heminges binding ten apprentices between 1595 and 1628, most of whom also appear in theatrical records, but those records contain no trace of John Rice. This is not necessarily a deal-breaker, though. Heminges bound no apprentices in the Grocers between 26 January 1597, when he bound Alexander Cooke for eight years, and 4 July 1610, when he bound George Burgh, also for eight years. The time of Rice's binding (1603–04) is right in the middle of this thirteen-year span, and it seems likely that Heminges bound at least one apprentice around that time. There was a severe plague outbreak in 1603–04 that closed the playhouses and disrupted regular life in London, so it is possible that Heminges did bind Rice as his apprentice, but the binding was never recorded in the Grocers' records for some reason.¹⁵

RICE'S PREDECESSORS: COOKE, GOUGH, TOOLEY AND OTHERS

There is considerable evidence that, in addition to the plague closures and change in patronage, the King's Men in 1603–04 were in particular need of

¹² Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 85, 127; Scott McMillin, 'Jonson's Early Entertainments: New Information from Hatfield House', *Renaissance Drama* n.s.:1 (1968), pp. 153–66. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 397–401, summarizes the company's history during this time, though Gurr's account is not without its problems.

¹³ Kathman, 'How Old?', pp. 231–2.

¹⁴ For thirteen as the minimum age for theatrical apprentices and boy actors in the adult companies, see Kathman, 'How Old?', pp. 244–5, and 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices', pp. 426–7. For seven years as the minimum apprenticeship term, see 'Players, Livery Companies, and Apprentices', p. 415.

¹⁵ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', esp. pp. 6–12. Apprentice bindings for all London livery companies were recorded in the Guildhall, but these records were nearly all destroyed by fire in the late eighteenth century, and do not survive before that time except for a few years in the mid-sixteenth century.

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new boy actors, because several key members of a previous generation of boys were simultaneously becoming too old to play women easily. One such boy was the above-mentioned Alexander Cooke, who had been apprenticed to Heminges on 26 January 1597 for a term of eight years. Cooke is almost certainly the 'Sander' who appears in the manuscript plot of *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*, playing the leading female roles of Queen Videna and Progne for the Lord Chamberlain's Men around 1597–98. Thomas Belte, who had been apprenticed to Heminges on 12 November 1595 for nine years, certainly appears in the plot as 'T Belt', playing Panthea (a minor female role) and a servant.¹⁶ Cooke appears to have been one of the leading boys for the Chamberlain's Men in the late 1590s, to judge by the *Sins* plot and his status as Heminges's apprentice, but in 1603 he turned twenty years old, at the upper end of the age range for boys to play women. The same year, he got married (two years before his apprenticeship term was scheduled to end) and also appeared in the cast list for Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, suggesting that he was transitioning to male roles.¹⁷ In 1604, Cooke appeared for the first time in the token books of St Saviour's Southwark, the parish of the Globe playhouse, living in Hill's Rents. He continued to appear in the token books until 1613, the year before his death, and he had four children baptized in the parish between 1605 and 1614.¹⁸ Cooke became a prominent enough adult member of the King's Men to be listed among the 'Principal Actors' in the Shakespeare First Folio; he was also freed as a Grocer in 1609 and bound an apprentice of his own, Walter Haynes, on 28 March 1610.¹⁹

Robert Gough is another key boy actor who was reaching the end of his useful career as a boy by 1603. There are no certain notices of Gough in a theatrical context before that year, but he is almost certainly the 'Ro Go' who played the major female roles of Aspatia and Philomela in the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot. On 13 February 1603, Gough married Elizabeth Phillips, the sister of Augustine Phillips, and on 22 July 1603, Thomas Pope bequeathed all of his wearing apparel and arms to be divided

equally between Gough and John Edmonds, who had probably been his apprentices. Gough's marriage, like Alexander Cooke's the same year, shows that he was no longer a boy, and both of these records demonstrate close connections to members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, connections that must have taken years to develop. Like Alexander

¹⁶ For many years the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot was assumed to originate with Strange's or the Admiral's Men in the early 1590s, but in 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre*, 7 (2004), 13–44, I argued that the evidence as a whole points to an origin with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597–98. Heminges's bindings of Belte and Cooke in 1595 and 1597 are key pieces of this evidence, but by no means the only ones or even the most important. Andrew Gurr, 'The Work of Elizabethan Plotters and 2 *The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre*, 10 (2007), 67–87, challenged this redating, but in 'The *Seven Deadly Sins* and Theatrical Apprenticeship', *Early Theatre*, 14 (2011), 121–39, I rebutted Gurr's argument in considerable detail.

¹⁷ He is probably the Alexander Cooke who was baptized in Sandwich, Kent on 15 December 1583, along with a twin sister Anna; see Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', pp. 28–9 and n.49, and Kathman, 'How Old?', p. 230. He is most likely the Alexander Cooke who married Thomazine Wiles on 14 July 1603 in Godmersham, Kent (according to the International Genealogical Index). In any case, he was presumably the 'Mr Cooke and his wief' who sent their commendations to Edward Alleyn in a letter by Joan Alleyn on 21 October 1603 (Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 102).

¹⁸ London Metropolitan Archive P92/SAV/253 p. 4; /254 p. 5; /255 p. 6; /256 p. 4; /257 p. 7; /258 p. 5; /201 p. 18; /202 p. 18. Nungezer (*Dictionary*, p. 102) notes four of Cooke's token book appearances, but misses four others. These records are available online at <http://tokenbookslma.cityoflondon.gov.uk>, as photographed, transcribed, and indexed by William Ingram and Alan H. Nelson. Ingram's very useful outline of what token books were and how they were compiled can be found in the 'Manual' section of the site. Essentially, they recorded the purchase of required tokens for Easter communion by all parish residents aged sixteen or above, listed according to the head of each household.

¹⁹ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', p. 8. Since apprentices were not allowed to marry, Cooke must have left his apprenticeship early when he got married in 1603, but if this was so, then it is not clear why the Grocers granted him his freedom in 1609. Such discrepancies are not uncommon in livery company records of this period, suggesting that some companies were sometimes lax in enforcing their own rules.

Cooke, Gough appeared in the St Saviour's token books for the first time in 1604, living in Hill's Rents, a few doors down from Cooke; he continued to appear in the token books until 1624, the year before his death.²⁰ Gough had five children baptized in St Saviour's Southwark between 1603 and 1614, played minor roles for the King's Men in 1611 and 1616, was a sharer in the company by 1619 and was one of the 'Principal Actors' listed in the First Folio.²¹

Then there is Nicholas Tooley, who is most likely the 'Nick' who appears in the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot playing a lady and Pompeia. As with Gough, there is no documentary record of his binding as an apprentice, but in his 1623 will he refers to 'my late Mr [master] Richard Burbage', indicating that he had been apprenticed to Burbage. (Tooley had witnessed Burbage's will four years earlier.) Tooley's will also shows that at the time of his death he was living in the home of Richard's brother Cuthbert Burbage and his wife Elizabeth, to whom he expressed 'my love in respect of her motherlie care ouer me'.²² Mary Edmond made a good (but not ironclad) case that he was the Nicholas Tooley born in Antwerp about 1582–83 to William Tooley, citizen and leatherseller of London, a merchant adventurer who came from a family of Warwickshire gentry and died in late 1583.²³ If this identification is correct, then Tooley was twenty or twenty-one in 1603, at the very upper end of the age range for boys to play female roles. In any case, he was considered an adult member of the company by May 1605, when Augustine Phillips called both Tooley and Alexander Cooke 'my fellow' in his will. Like Cooke and Gough, Tooley went on to be a sharer in the King's Men and one of the 'Principal Actors' listed in the First Folio. Annotations in a copy of the Ben Jonson Folio shows that at some point between 1616 and 1619 he played the jealous husband Corvino in *Volpone* and the Puritan deacon Ananias in *The Alchemist*.²⁴

Beyond the 'big three' of Cooke, Gough and Tooley, who appear to have been the leading boys of the Lord Chamberlain's Men around the turn of

the century, several other boys of their generation had left the company by 1603–04, and/or were too old to play women by then. Thomas Belte, who as we saw above was apprenticed to John Heminges on 12 November 1595 and played two minor roles (one male and one female) in the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot, appears in no theatrical record after that plot. This suggests that he never made much of a mark and may have left his apprenticeship early, but even if he did not, his term expired in late 1604, by which time he was twenty-five years old.²⁵ More conjecturally, the 'Ned' who played the female role Rodope in *The Seven Deadly Sins* might have been William Shakespeare's younger brother Edmund, as I speculated in 2004. Even if we accept that conjecture, Edmund was twenty-three years old by 1603, and shortly before his death in 1607 he was associated with St Leonard Shoreditch, the parish of the Curtain playhouse; St Giles Cripplegate, the parish of the Fortune; and St Saviour's Southwark, the parish of the Globe.²⁶ Christopher Beeston

²⁰ LMA P92/SAV/253 p. 5; Gough's appearance in the 1624 book is LMA P92/SAV/301 p. 23. He moved to Samson's Rents in 1605 (P92/SAV/254 pp. 5, 26) and to Austen's Rents in 1612 (P92/SAV/259 pp. 31, 37). He is listed with a 'wife' in 1607 (P92/SAV/256 p. 27) and 1621 (P92/SAV/299 p. 4), and with a 'wife & daughter' in 1620 (P92/SAV/298 p. 4).

²¹ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 157–8; E. A. J. Honigmann and Susan Brock, eds., *Playhouse Wills 1558–1642* (Manchester and New York, 1993), pp. 68–71; Kathman, 'Reconsidering', p. 29. As with Cooke, Nungezer notes some of Gough's token-book appearances, but also misses some.

²² Honigmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, pp. 124–8, esp. p. 125.

²³ Mary Edmond, 'Yeomen, Citizens, Gentlemen, and Players: The Burbages and Their Connections', in *Elizabethan Theater: Essays in Honor of S. Schoenbaum*, ed. R. B. Parker and S. P. Zitner (Newark, DE, 1996), pp. 30–49, esp. pp. 36–9.

²⁴ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 374–6; James A. Riddell, 'Some Actors in Ben Jonson's Plays', *Shakespeare Studies*, 5 (1969), 285–98.

²⁵ Belte was baptized in Norwich on 16 April 1579, the son of Thomas Belte, minstrel, who had been expelled from Norwich with his family in late 1594. See Lawrence Manley, 'Thomas Belte, Elizabethan Boy Actor', *Notes and Queries*, 252 (2007), 310–13.

²⁶ Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', 29–30; Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 314–15; Wayne H. Phelps,

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was certainly with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1598, when he performed with them in Ben Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour* and he is probably the 'Kit' who played three minor roles in the *Sins* plot around the same time. Beeston was eighteen years old in 1598, the age of an older apprentice, though he may have been a covenant servant bound to Augustine Phillips for a term shorter than seven years, given that Phillips called Beeston 'my servant' in his will.²⁷ Beeston had left to join the Earl of Worcester's Men by 1602 along with John Duke and Robert Pallant, who had been hired men with the Chamberlain's Men, and he went on to become a famous and influential theatrical entrepreneur.²⁸

Finally, there is John Edmonds, who was probably apprenticed to Thomas Pope and appeared alongside Robert Gough in Pope's will in 1603, as noted above. Edmonds gained control of half of Pope's shares in the Globe and Curtain playhouses after marrying Mary Clark alias Wood, to whom Pope had bequeathed the shares; the marriage must have happened soon after Pope's death in August 1603, since a son of John Edmonds, 'player', was baptized in St Saviour's on 6 January 1605.²⁹ He appears in the St Saviour's token books starting in 1606, living in Langley's Rents, and he continued to live there until 1624, with further children of John Edmonds, 'player', being baptized in the parish in 1607 and 1615. Despite his financial interest in the Globe, Edmonds never became a sharer in the King's Men as an actor; instead, in 1618 he shows up in a travelling version of Queen Anne's Men, a company with which he was connected much earlier through Robert Pallant. Edmonds lived next door to Pallant in Langley's Rents from at least 1609 until Pallant's death in 1619, after which Pallant's widow Ann was living with John and Mary Edmonds in 1620, and Dorothy Pallant (presumably another relative) was living with them in 1621.³⁰ As noted above, Robert Pallant was a hired man with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in the late 1590s, when Edmonds was (probably) an apprentice with the company, but he moved to Worcester's Men in 1602 along with Beeston and Duke, and subsequently spent

most of his career with that company's successor, Queen Anne's Men.³¹ Edmonds must have made the move to join his former fellows at some point, perhaps after his apprenticeship term ended. No doubt opportunities in the Chamberlain's/King's for former apprentices were limited in 1603–4, especially with Cooke, Gough and Tooley joining the company as adults at the same time. The actor may be the John Edmonds, son of Simon Edmonds, who was baptized at St Matthew Friday Street, London, on 4 August 1583, which would make him a near-exact contemporary of Alexander Cooke.³²

'Edmund Shakespeare at St Leonard's, Shoreditch', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), p. 422. Edmund was buried in the St Saviour's Southwark parish church on New Year's Eve 1607, presumably due to the influence of his brother William, and he appeared in the 1607 St Saviour's token book, though his name is crossed out (LMA P92/SAV/256, p. 6).

²⁷ Honigsmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, pp. 72–5. In 1596, around the same time Beeston may have been bound, Edward Alleyn of the Admiral's Men signed seventeen-year-old Richard Perkins (a year older than Beeston) to a three-year contract as a covenant servant. See David Mateer, 'Edward Alleyn, Richard Perkins, and the Rivalry Between the Swan and the Rose Playhouses', *Review of English Studies*, 60 (2009), 61–77.

²⁸ Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', pp. 26–7; Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 36–8. Duke and Pallant both appear in the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot, and Duke appears in the 1598 *Every Man In His Humour* cast list alongside Beeston (Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', pp. 22–4).

²⁹ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 128; G. E. Bentley, 'Shakespeare's Fellows', *TLS*, 15 November 1928, 856; David Kathman, 'The Burial of Thomas Pope', *Notes & Queries*, 53 (2006), 79–80.

³⁰ LMA P92/SAV/255 p. 36; /257 p. 40; /259 p. 46; /291 p. 19; /293 p. 22; /294 p. 21; /295 p. 24; /296 p. 23; /297 p. 24; /298 p. 24; /299 p. 26; /301 p. 23.

³¹ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 263–4.

³² A. M. Bruce Bannerman, ed., *The Registers of St Matthew, Friday Street, London, 1538–1812 and the United Parishes of St Matthew & St Peter Cheap, Marriages, 1754–1812* (London, 1933), p. 9. The fact that Edmonds does not appear in the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot is a minor strike against the idea that he was a Chamberlain's boy in the late 1590s, but he could have been bound after that production, or he could have been unavailable for some reason.

RICE'S FELLOW BOYS IN THE KING'S MEN, 1603–1611

With Cooke, Gough and Tooley (and possibly Edmonds) all becoming too old to play women by 1603–04, the newly christened King's Men needed to recruit a new generation of boys. John Rice was one of them, as we have seen, but who were the others? Who were the boys who performed with Rice during his heyday as a performer of female roles, during the time when Shakespeare was writing such plays as *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*? This is not a simple question to answer, since explicit documentary evidence is scarcer than it became in the following decade. There are no relevant apprentice binding records dating from 1603–04, such as those for Cooke and Belte in 1595–97 and for the next generation of King's Men boys starting in 1610–11. The only apprentice binding by a member of the King's Men to be recorded in a livery company between 1597 and 1610 came on 15 July 1608, when Robert Armin bound James Jones in the Goldsmiths. Jones did not serve out his full term with Armin, for three years later, on 10 July 1611, he was re-apprenticed in the Drapers to the player William Perry, who was then probably with the Children of the Queen's Revels and was definitely a member of Lady Elizabeth's Men two years later.³³ Even so, Jones might have been available to play female roles in some of Shakespeare's latest plays, assuming that he stayed with the King's Men during the whole three years between his bindings.

A few previous scholars doing broader studies of Chamberlain's/King's Men personnel have tried to reconstruct the company's roster of boys during this period, most notably T. W. Baldwin in 1927 and David Grote in 2002. Both Baldwin and Grote made some reasonable inferences, along with others that we can now see to be highly improbable or flat-out wrong. Baldwin, for example, knew about the records we saw earlier involving John Rice, so he correctly identified Rice as one of the company's leading boys in the years leading up to 1611. Baldwin also believed that John Edmonds was a near contemporary of Rice's who played Cleopatra

in the original production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, but he was unaware that Edmonds was a married father by 1605, before that play was written. Baldwin also believed that James Sandes was a contemporary of Rice who played important female roles up to 1613, but Sandes appears to have been nearly a decade older, as we will see below.³⁴ Grote also correctly identified Rice and suggested (quite plausibly, as we will see) that William Ecclestone was another of the company's leading boys. But he also argued that George Birche was a key boy from 1604 to 1611, being unaware that Birch was apprenticed to John Heminges in 1610 and still playing female roles in 1616–19.³⁵ While a certain amount of speculation is still inevitable, new evidence along with other clues now allow us to reconstruct the company's roster of boys during this period more confidently and to eliminate some actors who might at first glance seem to be likely candidates.

Augustine Phillips's 1605 will provides some of the most obvious clues, though in the end it is not as helpful as it might at first appear. In addition to his bequests to various 'fellows' in the King's Men, including William Shakespeare, Phillips bequeathed forty shillings and various items to Samuel Gilburne, 'my Late Aprentice', and forty shillings and musical instruments to James Sandes, 'my Aprentice', to be paid at the expiration of his apprenticeship indenture. The phrasing here indicates that Gilburne had already served out his term of apprenticeship and graduated to adult roles; he presumably became a sharer, since he is listed

³³ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', pp. 12, 18.

³⁴ Thomas Whitfield Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton, 1927), pp. 277–9, 422–5. Baldwin based much of his analysis on an inaccurate assumption that theatrical apprentices were typically bound at age ten for terms of eleven years, and on the assumption that the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot dates to March 1592. This led him to believe that Alexander Cooke, for example, was a decade older than we now know Cooke actually was.

³⁵ David Grote, *The Best Actors in the World: Shakespeare and His Acting Company* (Westport, CT, 2002), pp. 135–6, 145, 195, 238–51. For Birche, see Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', pp. 8–9.

JOHN RICE AND THE BOYS OF THE JACOBEOAN KING'S MEN

among the First Folio 'Principal Actors', but he appears in no other theatrical records, so he probably died young.³⁶ James Sandes was still Phillips's apprentice in 1605, so it is natural to wonder whether he may have been part of the class of 1603–04 along with Rice, as Baldwin believed. However, previously unknown evidence makes this unlikely. Sandes also appears in the nuncupative (oral) will of William Sly of the King's Men, dated 14 August 1608, and it turns out that both Augustine Phillips and William Sly had connections to the Sands family apart from James. A Jane Sands married Phillips's former servant Christopher Beeston in 1602, and a Cicely Sands married the player Robert Browne in 1594; the Brownes became very close friends with William Sly, who bequeathed his share of the Globe playhouse to Robert and most of the rest of his estate to Cicely and their daughter Jane.³⁷ Cicely and Jane Sands were sisters, the daughters of Anthony Sands, who had an estate in Hawkshead, Lancashire but was living in St Leonard Shoreditch outside London when Cicely and Jane were born (in 1576 and 1583 respectively).³⁸ Given the connections noted above, and the rarity of the name, our James Sandes is extremely likely to be the child of that name who was baptized in Hawkshead in December 1581, the son of Charles Sands.³⁹ This would make him twenty-three when Augustine Phillips made his will, presumably near the end of his apprenticeship term, and several years past the time when he could have played female roles.

Things are more promising when we turn to William Ecclestone. As we saw earlier, Ecclestone performed with the King's Men in the original productions of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* in 1610 and *Catiline* in 1611, according to the cast lists in the 1616 Jonson Folio, but on 29 August 1611 he signed a bond for the newly-formed Lady Elizabeth's Men alongside John Rice. He was still with that company two years later when he performed in *The Honest Man's Fortune*, but he soon returned to the King's Men, performing with them for many years, and was one of the 'Principal Actors' listed in the First Folio.⁴⁰ While no record directly says that Ecclestone was a boy with the King's Men, that conclusion is extremely likely given what

we now know about his age. William Ecclestone was the son of John Ecclestone, citizen and merchant taylor of London, who died in 1604 and had his will proved in the Commissary Court of London. Because John Ecclestone was a freeman of London who died with minor children, one-third of his estate was put into a trust, with the money to be distributed to his children once they turned twenty-one. William Ecclestone claimed his 'orphan's portion' of £14 on 26 May 1612, meaning that he was at least twenty-one years old by that date, and was probably not much older than that.⁴¹ This means that he was about nineteen or twenty when he performed in *The Alchemist* and *Catiline* for the King's Men – the age of an older apprentice, too young to be an adult sharer. The previously noted annotations in a copy of the Jonson Folio shows that at some point between 1616 and 1619 Ecclestone played the 'angry boy' Kas-tril in *The Alchemist*, and this would have been an entirely appropriate role for him to have played in

³⁶ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 153.

³⁷ Honigmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, pp. 80–1; Mark Eccles, 'Elizabethan Actors IV: S to End', *Notes and Queries*, 238 (1993), 165–76, esp. p. 165.

³⁸ Christopher Matusiak has traced the history of the Sands (Sandys) family in 'Robert Browne, Christopher Beeston, and the Continental Use of Queen Anne's Men's Plays', a paper written for the 2009 Shakespeare Association of America meeting. Anthony Sandys' 1591 will, which mentions Cicely, Jane and their brother Edwin, is Lancashire Record Office DDSA 30/2/1. The relevant St Leonard Shoreditch parish register was formerly Guildhall Library MS 7493, and is now LMA P91/LEN/A/001/MS07493.

³⁹ H. S. Cowper, ed., *The Oldest Register Book of the Parish of Hawkshead, Lancashire, 1568–1704* (London, 1897), p. 43. James Sandes was presumably related to Cicely and Jane, but the exact relationship is not clear; no other Charles Sands appears in the Hawkshead register, or in the pedigree of Anthony Sandys' immediate family in J. Hall Pleasants, 'The Lovelace Family and its Connections: Sandys of Furnace Fells, Lancashire', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 29 (1921), 227–43.

⁴⁰ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 127.

⁴¹ Mark Eccles, 'Elizabethan Actors II: E–J', *Notes and Queries*, 236 (1991), 454. John Ecclestone's will is LMA DL/C/B/004/MS9171/020, f.36v, indexed in Marc Fitch, ed., *Index to Testamentary Records in the Commissary Court of London, Volume III, 1571–1625* (London, 1985), p. 133.

the original 1610 production, as a nineteen-year-old.⁴² If Ecclestone was an apprentice in 1610 and 1611 but left for Lady Elizabeth's later in 1611 when his term expired, just as John Rice did, this implies that he was bound in 1603–4, around the same time as Rice. In fact, the death of Ecclestone's father in 1604 would have been an appropriate occasion for this, since it was not uncommon for newly orphaned boys to be bound as apprentices or otherwise put into service.⁴³ All this evidence puts us on fairly solid ground in saying that Ecclestone was a contemporary of Rice among the boys of the early King's Men.

Another promising lead comes from something written decades later in the 'Sharers' Papers' of 1635. In a petition to the Lord Chamberlain, Cuthbert Burbage described how he and his brother Richard had initially leased the Blackfriars playhouse to a company of boy actors, the Children of the Chapel. He added that 'In processe of time the boyes growing vp to bee men, which were Vnderwood, Field, Ostler, and were taken to strengthen the Kings service, and the more to strengthen the service, the boyes dayly wearing out, it was considered that house would bee as fitt for our selues, and soe purchased the lease remaining from Evans with our money, and placed men Players, which were Hemings, Condall Shakespeare &c.'⁴⁴ In its broad outlines, this story is supported by the documentary record: John Underwood, Nathan Field and William Ostler all acted with the Children of the Chapel at the Blackfriars in 1600 and 1601, according to the cast lists in the 1616 Ben Jonson Folio, and all three eventually joined the King's Men.⁴⁵ The main question for our purposes is when they made this move.

First of all, we know that Underwood, Field and Ostler were not all taken by the King's Men at the same time; Underwood and Ostler were with the company by 1610, when they performed in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, but Field did not join the King's Men until sometime after 1613. Burbage appears to say that the three were 'taken to strengthen the Kings service' only after 'growing vp to bee men'; this was true of Field and Ostler, who were in their early to mid-twenties when they joined the King's

Men, but it was not necessarily true of Underwood. Both Field and Ostler were still with the Children of the Queen's Revels (the successor to the Children of the Chapel) in 1609, when they performed before the King in Jonson's *Entertainment at Britain's Burse* alongside Ostler's 'Boye' Giles Gary, and Field and Gary performed in Jonson's *Epicoene* the same year.⁴⁶ Field was twenty-one or twenty-two at the time, having been baptized in St Giles Cripplegate, London, on 7 October 1587, and he did not join the King's Men until at least four years later.⁴⁷ The fact that Ostler had a 'boy' of his own in 1609, a year before he joined the King's Men, shows that he was an adult member of the company by then. He was probably twenty-two or twenty-three years old, assuming that he is the William Ostler baptized in St Andrew's parish in Plymouth, Devonshire on 18 February 1587, or the one baptized in Long Bennington, Lincolnshire on 15 August 1586.⁴⁸

⁴² Riddell, 'Some Actors', pp. 285–98.

⁴³ For example, Simon Halliwell was placed as a chorister and boy actor with Richard Farrant of the Queen's Chapel in 1577, two years after the death of his father, and in 1580 his younger brother George was similarly placed with Sebastian Westcott of St Paul's; see David Kathman, 'Four Choirboy-Actors in Sixteenth-Century London', *Notes & Queries*, 57 (2010), 347–9. Robert Stole of Bridgwater, Somerset, a 14-year-old whose parents had both recently died and was now a ward of the town, was apprenticed to one of a troupe of travelling players in 1597; see Herbert Berry, 'The Players' Apprentice', *Essays in Theatre*, 1 (1983), 73–80.

⁴⁴ E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of the Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1930), vol. 1, p. 66.

⁴⁵ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 136, 261, 384. All three boys appeared in Jonson's *Poetaster* in 1601, and Field and Underwood appeared in *Cynthia's Revels* in 1600.

⁴⁶ McMillin, 'Jonson's Early Entertainments', pp. 153–66. The records from the performance of the *Entertainment at Britain's Burse* do not explicitly say that Field, Ostler and Gary were with the Children of the Queen's Revels, but the cast list showing Field and Gary performing in *Epicoene* the same year does identify them as belonging to that company.

⁴⁷ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 135–6. Field was the son of John Field, an antitheatrical Puritan preacher.

⁴⁸ These are the only two William Ostlers whose baptisms are recorded in the International Genealogical Index (<https://familysearch.org/search>) in the second half of the sixteenth century. The actor did not leave a will when he died in 1614,

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John Underwood, on the other hand, does not appear with any other company between 1601 and his appearance in *The Alchemist* in 1610 alongside Ostler. Thus, he might have joined the King's Men at any time during that span, and some evidence suggests that he had been an apprentice in the company after coming over from the Children of the Chapel. He is most likely the John Underwood, son of William Underwood, baptized on 21 June 1590 in St Clement Danes parish on the Strand, a short walk west of Blackfriars.⁴⁹ If so, he was roughly the same age as John Rice and William Ecclestone, the right age to be apprenticed in the King's Men in 1603–04 (or any time after), with the added bonus of having several years of experience on the commercial stage. He would have still been the age of an (older) apprentice by the time he performed in *The Alchemist*, but on the cusp of adulthood; as with Ecclestone, it is difficult to imagine what he would be doing with the King's Men at that age unless he was an apprentice. The annotated copy of the Jonson Folio shows that between 1616 and 1619 Underwood played Corbaccio's son Bonario in *Volpone* and the law clerk Dapper in *The Alchemist*; the latter role would have been an appropriate one for him to have played in the original 1610 production, at the age of about twenty.⁵⁰ He got married around that time, much as Alexander Cooke and Robert Gough had done at about the same age, and his son John was baptized in St Bartholomew the Less on 27 December 1610. He named one of his later children 'Burbage', suggesting that he may have been apprenticed to Richard Burbage; Nicholas Tooley, who as we saw above was certainly apprenticed to Burbage and was a leading boy of the previous generation, forgave the debts of Underwood and William Ecclestone in his will of 1623. Like several of the former boys we have seen, Underwood was a sharer in the King's Men by 1619 and one of the Principal Actors listed in the First Folio.⁵¹ In addition to the Jonson roles noted above, the cast list in the 1623 Quarto of *The Duchess of Malfi* shows that Underwood played the courtier Delio, probably in the original 1613–14 production as well as the 1620–21 revival.⁵²

If we accept the likely scenario in which John Rice, William Ecclestone and John Underwood were the three most important boy actors in the King's Men between roughly 1604 and 1610, with James Jones coming on board between 1608 and 1611, then it is natural to wonder what female roles they might have played during those years, especially in Shakespeare's plays. T. W. Baldwin tried to answer this question in his 1927 study of the Chamberlain's/King's Men and their personnel, but his analysis is undermined by the biographical problems noted earlier and by his questionable assumption that each actor was narrowly typecast into a 'line' of very similar roles throughout his career.⁵³ Baldwin recognized Rice's status as a leading boy in the company but believed that he was limited to a 'comico-villainous line' that included the bawd in *Pericles*, the queen in *Cymbeline*, Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, Doll Common

so there are no clues to where he came from or who he was related to.

⁴⁹ City of Westminster Archives Centre STC/B. Another John Underwood with the same father was baptized in the same parish three years earlier on 23 April 1587, but he presumably died in infancy.

⁵⁰ Riddell, 'Some Actors', pp. 285–98.

⁵¹ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, pp. 384–5; Honigmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, pp. 124–8, esp. p. 125.

⁵² David Gunby, David Carnegie and Antony Hammond, eds., *The Works of John Webster, Volume One: The White Devil, The Duchess of Malfi* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 423–7, 468. The cast list in the Quarto lists one actor for most roles, but two for the major roles of Ferdinand (R. Burbidge and J. Taylor), the Cardinal (H. Cundaile and R. Robinson), and Antonio (W. Ostler and R. Benfield). These must refer to the original production in 1613–14, before William Ostler's death on 16 December 1614, and a revival sometime after Richard Burbage died in March 1619 and was replaced as the company's leading man by Joseph Taylor. The three boys listed as playing female roles – Richard Sharpe, John Thomson and Robert Pallant – must have performed only in the revival, since Sharpe and Pallant were apprenticed to John Heminges in 1616 and 1620 respectively. See Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', pp. 9–10.

⁵³ While there was undoubtedly some typecasting in the early modern theatre, just as there is today, Baldwin's notion of strict 'lines' for every actor is not supported by the evidence, as shown by Skiles Howard, 'A Re-examination of Baldwin's Theory of Acting Lines', *Theatre Survey*, 26 (1985), 1–20.

in Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) and Fulvia in Jonson's *Catiline* (1611). Baldwin believed that the company's two other leading boys during this period were John Edmonds (to whom he assigned Cleopatra) and James Sands (to whom he assigned Marina in *Pericles*), but these actors would have been too old to have originated these roles, based on what we now know about their ages.⁵⁴ David Grote made a similar attempt in his 2002 study of the company and, while he was less tied to the idea of acting 'lines' than Baldwin was, his casting ideas are similarly arbitrary, coloured by his idiosyncratic dating of some of the plays. The only really major female Shakespearian role that Grote assigns to John Rice is Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida*, which he argues was not written until 1607, plus arguably Cordelia in *King Lear*, who has far fewer lines than Goneril and Regan despite her importance to the plot.⁵⁵ Grote does recognize William Ecclestone as another important boy during this period, assigning him Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* and Imogen in *Cymbeline* (which he believes was first written in 1606), but he has unidentified apprentices ('Mature Boy', 'Noble Boy', 'Ostler's Boy') playing most of the other significant female roles between 1605 and 1611.⁵⁶

The King's Men must have had other boys during these years who are unknown to us, and it is entirely possible that some of them played significant female roles. But the most prominent and challenging female roles must have been taken by the most skilled boys, and the evidence suggests quite strongly that John Rice was seen as the company's most skilled boy between 1607 and 1610, given that he was selected to perform in two very high-profile events before the king and Prince Henry. The descriptions of those events show that he was able to portray a very convincing woman even at the ages of seventeen and twenty, meaning he probably had a feminine-looking face and a high voice; recall that in the 1607 Merchant Taylors' entertainment he was described as 'a very proper child, well spoken, being clothed like an angel of gladness with a taper of frankincense burning in his hand', and that in the 1610 water pageant for Prince Henry he is described as 'a very fayre and beautifull

Nimphe . . . suited in her watrrie habit yet riche and costly, with a Coronet of Pearles and Cockle shelles on her head'. We have no comparable descriptions of William Ecclestone or John Underwood, but the fact that both later became adult sharers in the King's Men, and that Underwood had experience with the Blackfriars boy company, suggests that they must have been quite skilled as well.

Assigning specific female roles to these boys is a hazardous business, but it is possible to make some reasonable guesses, as long as we keep in mind the speculative nature of the exercise. *King Lear*, written about 1605, has exactly three female roles, so it is easy to imagine Rice, Ecclestone and Underwood as the original Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, not necessarily in that order. Grote's suggestion that Rice played Cordelia is not unreasonable, though that is the smallest of the three roles, as noted above. The King's Men must have had a very skilled boy soon after that in 1606–8 to play Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* and Volumnia in *Coriolanus*, by far the most prominent female roles in their respective plays. Rice is the most obvious candidate, since his high-profile royal performance for the Merchant Taylors took place right in the middle of that period. A sceptic might object that if Rice really did have a feminine-looking face and high voice, this would make him inappropriate for such older female roles as Cleopatra and Volumnia. But this assumes that acting in Rice's time was as naturalistic as it is today, and may underestimate

⁵⁴ Baldwin, *Organization and Personnel*, pp. 277–9, 409, 422–4, 435.

⁵⁵ *Troilus and Cressida* was first entered in the Stationer's Register on 7 February 1603 and is generally dated to 1601–02, but Grote argues that this could not have been Shakespeare's play. His reasoning is rather tortured; he believes that Richard Burbage could not have played Troilus, a character described as being in his early twenties, and that the Chamberlain's Men had no other sharer in 1601–02 who could have played the role (Grote, *The Best Actors in the World*, pp. 118–19). This is only one of many instances where Grote and Baldwin place far too much weight on their highly speculative casting assignments, and on their sometimes mistaken beliefs about company personnel.

⁵⁶ Grote, *The Best Actors in the World*, pp. 238–51.

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the ability of Jacobean stage players to signal a character's age and/or social station through costume and gestures; it may also underestimate the ability of a skilled boy actor such as Rice to play women of various ages, especially when he was in his late teens.

Imogen in *Cymbeline* is another dominant female role that Rice may have played, but the Queen is also a substantial role in that play, and the other romances written around 1608–10 also include more substantial secondary women. In *Pericles*, Marina and the Bawd each have more than one hundred lines, as do Paulina, Hermione and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*.⁵⁷ This change could mean that some of the other boys had grown and become capable of playing more complex roles, or it could reflect an influx of new boys into the company, at a time when the King's Men had just signed their lease on the Blackfriars playhouse on 9 August 1608. James Jones was apprenticed to Robert Armin on 15 July 1608, less than a month before the date of the lease, and it is possible that John Underwood joined the King's Men around this time rather than in 1603–4, though he would have been in his late teens and unable to play female roles for much longer.⁵⁸ Marina in *Pericles* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* are the largest female roles in those plays, thus perhaps the most likely roles for Rice, but it is possible that he ceded those roles to Ecclestone, Underwood or Jones and took a smaller role for himself. (Recall that Baldwin assigned the secondary but still substantial roles of the Bawd and the Queen in *Cymbeline* to Rice, along with Paulina.) Rice is also most likely to be the boy who played Desdemona when the King's Men performed *Othello* in Oxford in October 1610, four months after his performance as Corinea of Cornwall in the water pageant. One of the spectators, Henry Jackson, recorded that Desdemona, 'although she always acted her whole part supremely well, yet when she was killed she was even more moving, for when she fell back on the bed she implored the pity of the spectators by her very face'.⁵⁹

By 1610, Rice and Ecclestone (and probably Underwood) were nearing the ends of their

apprenticeship terms and the next generation of King's Men boys were starting to join the company. They are much better documented than Rice's generation. Walter Haynes was apprenticed to Alexander Cooke for a term of nine years on 28 March 1610, and George Birche was apprenticed to John Heminges for an eight-year term on 4 July 1610. Richard Robinson was apprenticed in the company around the same time, probably to Richard Burbage, but he was not bound in a livery company, so no record of the exact date survives. Haynes does not appear further in the theatrical record, but Birche and Robinson became important performers of female roles for the King's Men. Birche is presumably the 'Richard' Birche recorded as playing Lady Politic Would-Be in *Volpone* and Doll Common in *The Alchemist* for the King's Men between 1616 and 1619. Robinson played the substantial role of the Lady in *The Lady's Tragedy* (a.k.a. *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*) for the King's Men in 1611, and in Ben Jonson's *The Devil Is An Ass* (1616), 'Dick Robinson' is praised for his ability to impersonate a woman. Heminges bound yet another apprentice, John Wilson, on 18 February 1611 for eight years. Wilson was primarily a musician, writing numerous songs for the company and later becoming a well-known composer, but the Folio text of *Much Ado About Nothing* shows that he played Balthazar and sang a song in a revival of that play.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ I am using the line counts in T. J. King, *Castings Shakespeare's Plays: London Actors and Their Roles, 1590–1642* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁵⁸ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', pp. 12, 18. Baldwin (*Organization and Personnel*, pp. 49–50) assumed that Underwood and William Ostler joined the King's Men as sharers in the autumn of 1608, but he was unaware that Ostler was still with the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1609, or that Underwood was likely born in 1590. Grote (*The Best Actors in the World*, pp. 186–7) also argued that Underwood and Ostler joined the company together as sharers, but in 1610 rather than 1608.

⁵⁹ Gamini Salgado, ed., *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare: Firsthand Accounts of Performances, 1590–1890* (New York, 1975), p. 30.

⁶⁰ Kathman, 'Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers', pp. 8–9; Kathman, 'How Old?', pp. 232–3.

RICE'S ADULT CAREER: ACTING
AND CLERKING

As we saw earlier, Rice and Ecclestone left the King's Men in 1611, signing a bond as a member of Lady Elizabeth's Men on 29 August 1611. Ecclestone stayed with Lady Elizabeth's for at least a couple of years, performing for them in *The Honest Man's Fortune* in 1613 before returning to the King's Men soon afterward.⁶¹ Rice, however, appears in no other record of Lady Elizabeth's, and the evidence indicates that he soon returned to the King's Men. He played the Marquess of Pescara in *The Duchess of Malfi* in the original production of 1613–14 (and later in the revival of 1620–21); this is a relatively minor role, suggesting that Rice came back to the company as a hired man. Although there were others of the same name living in St Saviour Southwark at various times, the timing makes it likely that he is the John 'Ryce' who appears in the token books for the first time in 1612, living in 'The Close' in the Borough-side region. He was still living there in 1613 and 1614, but then he disappears from the token books for the next four years, during which he presumably lived elsewhere.⁶² This could mean that Rice remained with the King's Men but moved to a different parish, or it could mean that he tried his hand with a different company before returning to the company where he was trained.

John Rice shows up once again in the St Saviour token books in 1618, living 'near the playhouse' in the Paris Garden region of the parish. (The 'playhouse' here must be the Swan, which was in Paris Garden, rather than the Globe, which was in the Clink Liberty.) He continues to appear in the same location each year through 1624 (except 1622, when the token book for Paris Garden is missing).⁶³ In 1620 and 1621 he is listed along with a wife, but it is not clear who this wife was, or how long he was married; she must have died at some point before 1630, when Rice remarried, but there is no appropriate burial record in St Saviour's.⁶⁴ In any case, Rice was definitely back with the King's Men by August 1619, when he played a captain and a servant in *Sir John Van Olden Barnavel*. He

was not yet a sharer at that point, since he is not listed in the licence of 27 March 1619 or the livery allowance of 19 May 1619, both of which include his contemporaries William Ecclestone and John Underwood. We might speculate that the same features that made Rice so successful as a boy performer of female roles – a high voice and feminine face – were a handicap for an adult actor of male roles. In any case, Rice was finally a sharer by the time of the next livery allowance on 7 April 1621, a decade after his apprenticeship ended. Rice's name appears last in the list of 'Principal Actors' in the 1623 Shakespeare First Folio, a list that apparently includes only sharers in the Chamberlain's/King's Men.⁶⁵

The last records of John Rice with the King's Men are the list of company members attending King James's funeral on 7 May 1625, and the patent, dated 24 June 1625, by which the company was re-established under the patronage of Charles I. Soon after that, he quit acting for good. The records of St Saviour's Southwark show that Rice became parish clerk there on 7 October 1625, when he auditioned for the job (in effect) by reading a chapter of the Bible and singing a psalm openly in the church. Because 'both were well liked', he was appointed parish clerk in place of John Boston, who had recently died. By 23 February 1626, Rice had become a deacon, and he was officially granted

⁶¹ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 127.

⁶² LMA P92/SAV/201 p. 29; /202 p. 30; /203 p. 30.

⁶³ LMA P92/SAV/296 p. 5; /297 p. 5; /298 p. 5; /299 p. 6; /300 p. 6; /301 p. 7. Another John Rice appears in the St Saviour token books in 1617 and 1618, living in Clark's Alley in the Liberty of the Clink, but the notation 'dead' in the margin in the latter year indicates that this is not the actor (LMA P92/SAV/265 p. 40; /266 p. 40).

⁶⁴ A John Rice married Mabel Haywood in St Saviour's on 1 May 1616 (Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 2.546), but this cannot be the wife that John Rice the actor had in 1620–21, because she was buried (as Mabel Rice) in St Saviour's on 9 September 1618 (LMA P92/SAV/3002). Her husband is most likely the John Rice who lived in Clark's Alley and also died in 1618; the only way her husband could be the actor is if he quickly remarried in another parish between September 1618 and Easter 1620.

⁶⁵ Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 297.

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'all such duties as Mr Boston had time past before him'.⁶⁶ The St Saviour's token books show that by Easter 1626, Rice had moved from 'near the play-house' to 'the Churchyard within Chain Gate'.⁶⁷ As we saw above, Rice described himself as clerk of St Saviour's Southwark when he gave his Chancery deposition on 16 October 1626, and was described that way in John Heminges's will, dated 9 October 1630, in which Rice was named co-overseer of the will along with Cuthbert Burbage.⁶⁸

Why did John Rice quit the stage to become a parish clerk? Answering that question requires us to look at the lawsuit in which Rice deposed, which is very interesting on its own terms. Rice's predecessor at St Saviour's, John Boston, had been parish clerk for more than twenty years, and the lawsuit stemmed from the contentious circumstances surrounding Boston's death. The story of that lawsuit begins with the terrible plague outbreak that started in early 1625 and was accelerated by the crowds who descended on London and Westminster for the funeral of James in early May and the arrival of Charles I with his new bride Henrietta Maria a month later. Despite efforts by the Privy Council to get Londoners to stay at home, many people who could leave the city did so, leaving it mostly desolate by August. The weekly Bills of Mortality show that 593 people in London died of the plague the week ending 7 July, with 57 parishes infected; plague deaths then rose steadily to a peak of 4463 the week of 18 August, with 114 parishes infected. Parishes on the outskirts of London, including St Saviour's Southwark, were especially hard hit. There were 40 burials in St Saviour's in February 1625, and 43 in March, but then the grim toll began increasing: the parish had 65 burials in April, 101 in May, 180 in June, 539 named people 'and many unknown' in July, and over 800 in August (including 'John Fletcher, a poet'), before the numbers ebbed to 570 in September, 90 in October and 58 in November.⁶⁹

The person who had to deal with all these dead bodies was the parish clerk, John Boston. He lived with his wife Sarah and children in a house in the churchyard, next to the house of the parson,

Mr Archer; an inventory taken after his death shows that the house contained books and musical instruments, among much else.⁷⁰ Though Boston's main duties were to assist Archer in saying daily services and keep the parish accounts, he was also a deacon and thus authorized to perform christenings, churchings, weddings and burials if necessary. As plague deaths increased in June, the regular business of the parish continued and the churchwardens continued to meet, though no doubt with a rising sense of fear and unease. When the plague became much worse in July, the parson, several of the churchwardens and the other richer inhabitants of the parish fled to the countryside, leaving Boston to conduct funerals and bury the dead. Boston soon sent his wife and children into the country as well, 'to his greate grieve', leaving him all alone to handle the overwhelming task. His widow later reported on having heard of the 'unspeakable wacthingies, labour, and travell, both daie and night' that Boston had to endure, and said that 'sometimes, in one day, there hath been twenty or thirty corpses left at the place of buriall, and the said John Boston knew not who brought them thither . . . but after buried them, and then took greate paynes in inquiring and doing his best for knowing their names, so that he might make Certificat accordingly for discharge of his Dutie'.⁷¹ This last clause refers to the fees that

⁶⁶ St Saviour's Southwark Vestry Minute Book, 1581/2–1628 (LMA P92/SAV/0450), 547, 551. I am grateful to Alan H. Nelson for sending me transcripts of the relevant pages.

⁶⁷ LMA P92/SAV/215 p. 42. No token books survive from 1625.

⁶⁸ Honigsmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills*, pp. 164–8.

⁶⁹ The figures in this paragraph are from Winifrede Caldin and Helen Raine, 'The Plague of 1625 and the Story of John Boston, Parish Clerk of St. Saviour's, Southwark', *Transactions of the London & Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 23 (1971), 90–97, esp. p. 91.

⁷⁰ This inventory is LMA P92/SAV/1960.

⁷¹ The quotes are from the answer of Robert White and Sarah his wife (John Boston's widow), dated 24 May 1626, to the bill of complaint of Thomas Wycharley and the other St Saviour's churchwardens, in the Chancery case *White v. Wycharley*. The original bill and answer from the case do not survive, but a transcript of the answer survives in the London Metropolitan Archives as P92/SAV/799, and is discussed by Caldin and Raine, 'The Plague of 1625'. Unless otherwise

Boston was supposed to collect for each burial (and christening, churching or marriage) and record in the parish's monthly accounts before handing them over to the churchwardens.

Boston single-handedly dealt with these horrific circumstances through July, August and the first half of September, but in mid-September his wife Sarah got word that he was 'dangerously sick'. She returned to Southwark as quickly as she could but Boston died before she got there and was buried in the parish on 22 September. He had left no will, so Sarah took out letters of administration and began trying to settle his estate and organize the parish accounts, which were in terrible shape after the chaos of the previous few months. In particular, Boston had only sporadically been able to collect burial fees. Since many wealthy people had fled the city, a disproportionate number of the dead (an estimated one-third) were poor enough to be exempted from the fees; in addition, 'the Infection was so great and dangerous, and the ymployment of the said John Boston so full of continuall labour, that he could not have convenient tyme and leisure to gather up the said fees'. Boston had managed to collect the fees for July and hand them over to the churchwardens in early September, but he did not hand over any fees for August or September before his death.

On 7 October 1625, the St Saviour's vestry (including the churchwardens and other officers) met for the first time since 28 June. It was at this meeting that they named John Rice parish clerk in place of Boston, as noted above; they also named a new clerk of the vestry, Edward Collins; a new sexton, Lambert Daggett; and four new vestrymen to replace those who had died.⁷² The Vestry Minute Book also records a decision 'that some course of lawe be taken to call Mrs. Boston to an account for the money which Mr Boston received this last summer for the use of the churchwardens'. At some point in October, either soon before or soon after this vestry meeting, Sarah Boston was visited at home by Richard Wright, one of the churchwardens who was also Keeper of the Great Account, meaning he was responsible for the parish's finances. He was trying to get the money

that the parish was owed for the burials in August and September, and asked Sarah what money she had in the house. She said she did not know, but later she went to a place where her late husband had kept money received for the use of the parish, and found £37 18s in two gloves. She gave this money to Wright, whereupon he asked her for her husband's notebook 'wherein he kept the names and numbers of the dead'. She gave it to him and he subsequently refused to give it back.

The churchwardens continued to demand the money from the August and September burials, and Sarah Boston (who subsequently got remarried to Robert White, an acquaintance of her late husband) insisted that she did not have it, beyond the £37 18s she had given to Wright. Finally, in the spring of 1626, the churchwardens of St Saviour's – Thomas Wycharley, John Wattes, John Crowder, Michael Nicholson, Thomas Stoakes and William Maddox – filed suit in Chancery against Robert and Sarah White. The bill of complaint does not survive, but the Whites' answer, dated 24 May 1626, along with the interrogatories from the two sides, allow us to reconstruct the case in some detail. The churchwardens claimed that John Boston's notebook recorded fees that he had received for 1318 burials in August and the first half of September (except for the burial of George Payne and his wife), that these fees totalled £100, and that Boston had confessed on his death-bed to having the £100. In their answer, Boston's widow and her new husband said that the notebook only recorded the fees 'accustomed to be paid' for each burial, not the amount collected; they explained that many indigent parishioners were exempt from the fees and that Boston had been unable to collect many of the fees amid the overwhelming number of dead bodies, as described above. They said

specified, quotations in the following paragraphs are also from this transcript.

⁷² St Saviour's Southwark Vestry Minute Book, 1581/2–1628 (LMA P92/SAV/0450), 547. An Edward Collins was among the attendants of the King's Men listed in a ticket of privilege on 12 January 1637 (Nungezer, *Dictionary*, p. 97), and it is tempting to wonder whether this is the same man.

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that the churchwardens had always paid Boston an allowance for the burial of poor people, and that they also owed him thirty shillings for a burial cloth.⁷³

The legal wrangling continued for another five months, until in October 1626, more than a year after John Boston's death, the two sides began deposing witnesses. First the lawyers for the plaintiffs (Thomas Wycharley and the other churchwardens) deposed Richard Wright, the former churchwarden who had visited Sarah Boston shortly after her husband's death. Testifying on 16 October, Wright said that he had visited John Boston twice in an effort to get an accounting of the August fees, but that the second time, on 18 September, Boston was sick with the plague and not taking visitors. Boston told Wright out the window that he had received all the fees for August and the first sixteen days of September (except for the burial of a Mr Payne and his wife) and written out an account of them, and said to come back in an hour or two. When Wright came back, he was told that Boston was resting, and he never spoke to Boston again before the latter's death four days later. Wright said that Sarah Boston had subsequently given him her husband's book so that he might cast up the accounts and see what was due and, when he did so, the total was £103. He admitted that the parish had typically given Boston an allowance for the burial of the poor, but claimed that all but two or three of 'the better sort' had stayed in the parish through the plague outbreak. He also claimed that John Boston was worth £500 at his death.⁷⁴

John Rice gave his testimony for the plaintiffs on the same day, 16 October 1626.⁷⁵ Rice said that as John Boston's successor as parish clerk, he was supposed to collect fees, make an account, and pay the churchwardens monthly, and he believed that Boston had promised to do so as well. He said that Boston, while on his death-bed, had admitted to having £100 in fees that were due to the churchwardens, but Rice didn't know whether Sarah Boston had promised to pay any such money; however, he had heard her say that her husband had an allowance from the parish for the burial of the

poor. He also said that 'some of the better sort' had stayed in the parish throughout the plague, somewhat undermining Wright's testimony that all but two or three had stayed.

Eight days later on 24 October, the lawyer for the defendants, Sarah Boston White and Robert White, deposed their first witness: Lambert Daggett, who had been reappointed sexton of St Saviour's on the same day that John Rice was appointed clerk. Daggett testified that he had helped John Boston try to collect burial fees in August and September 1625, but that Boston had 'very littal or noe tyme at all to collect duties', and that many fees went uncollected. He had been present when Sarah Boston handed over the £37 18s to the churchwardens and also when she handed over John Boston's notebook 'at the earnest intreaty of the said churchwardens'.⁷⁶ The following day, the plaintiffs' lawyer also deposed Daggett in an attempt to weaken this damaging testimony, but the attempt did not work very well. Daggett said that Boston had stopped collecting fees on 12 September, soon before he became sick, but he denied that Boston had claimed to have collected all the fees or that he had said on his death-bed that he held money owed to the churchwardens or that Sarah Boston had promised any money to the churchwardens.⁷⁷

The day after that, on 26 October, the Whites' lawyer deposed two women who had been with John Boston in his final illness: Elizabeth Harbert and Jane Wyatt. Harbert said that she had tried to convince Boston to send for his wife, but he had

⁷³ The Whites' answer survives only in a transcript (LMA P92/SAV/799), as noted above.

⁷⁴ TNA C24/528, *Wycharley v. White* (deposition of Richard Wright).

⁷⁵ TNA C24/528, *Wycharley v. White* (deposition of John Rice).

⁷⁶ LMA P92/SAV/800, fos. 1–13. This deposition and the other three depositions for the defendants are summarized by Caldin and Raine, 'The Plague of 1625', pp. 95–6. Caldin and Raine were not aware that the depositions for the plaintiffs (TNA C24/528), including John Rice's, also survive.

⁷⁷ TNA C24/528, *Wycharley v. White* (deposition of Lambert Daggett).

refused, not wanting 'to endanger her or her children'. She had also tried to get Boston to make a will, but he also refused so as not to leave his wife indebted, adding that 'his wife was to accompte with the churchwardens . . . for a monthe's bill or thereabouts which was not summed up nor gathered in', and that once 'a juste and due accompte' was made, 'there would be more founde due from the said parishe to him than he was to pay the parishe'. Wyatt gave a largely identical account, adding that 'nothing troubled his mynde but his monthes bill, which was not summed up nor gathered in'.⁷⁸

Finally, on 2 November, the Whites' lawyer brought in Richard Wright as (effectively) a hostile witness. Wright told the same story he had told in his deposition for the plaintiffs, about how he had tried to visit Boston on 18 September to get an accounting of the fees, and how Boston had told him out the window that he had collected all the burial fees but two. However, Wright also admitted that Boston had performed his duties faithfully with no help except on the Sabbath and holy days, that he had scarcely any time left to collect the fees, and that most of those who died in August and September were 'of the poorer sorte' who were exempted from fees. Wright further admitted that the parish owed Boston 'thirte and odd shillings' for his wages and customary stipend for burying the poor, and admitted receiving £37 18s from Sarah Boston in the presence of Thomas Wycharley and Lambert Daggett. Even so, he said there was still 'a greate summe of money due from the said Boston to the said parishe'.⁷⁹

The ultimate dispute was over whether Boston's notebook recorded the fees owed to the parish or the fees actually collected, with a related dispute over whether Boston had claimed to have collected all the fees listed in the notebook. The court ultimately found the evidence presented by Boston's widow to be more persuasive, ruling against the churchwardens and ordering 'that the matter of the plaintiff's bill be from henceforth clerely and absolutely dismissed out of this Cort'.⁸⁰

In the end, John Rice's testimony was not central to this lawsuit and, by ruling in favour of the

defendants, the court effectively said that it did not believe his key claim that John Boston had confessed to having the £100 due to the churchwardens in his hands. Nevertheless, the detailed records of this suit paint a vivid picture of St Saviour's Southwark during the horrible plague outbreak of 1625 and the difficult circumstances under which Rice became parish clerk there. Rice had still been a member of the King's Men when the company received its royal patent on 24 June 1625, but the plague had already closed the playhouses by that time, two months before plague deaths peaked in August. The King's Men did survive this long plague closure, which stretched into 1626 and drastically reordered the London theatrical world, but such an outcome was far from certain as the disease ravaged the populace and effectively shut London down. Given this uncertainty, Rice's decision to leave the King's Men for a steady job at St Saviour's becomes a bit more understandable.

With the lawsuit over, Rice settled into his duties as parish clerk, living in 'The Churchyard within Chain Gate', as the token books specify starting in 1626. Soon after taking on the new job, he went through a protracted illness and began having money troubles. On 27 February 1627, 'Mr. John Reese' came to the churchwardens 'and made complaint that his means or profits arising by his office of parish clerk is not sufficient to maintain him, pretending that the whole profits thereof doth not arise to any more than £28 yearly, whereupon this house doth think fit (in respect of his long sickness, and his removing household being new come to the said place), that he shall have paid unto him (for this time only) as a free gift from this house the sum of £4'.⁸¹ After this, Rice's fortunes seem to have improved, and he became very active in parish affairs, helping the priests with their ecclesiastical duties. A parish presentment from early 1634 said that 'our Clerk doth sometimes, to help our

⁷⁸ LMA P92/SAV/800, fos. 14–17 (Harbert), 17–20 (Wyatt).

⁷⁹ LMA P92/SAV/800, fos. 20–37.

⁸⁰ This quotation is from Caldin and Raine, 'The Plague of 1625', p. 97.

⁸¹ LMA P92/SAV/450, 561.

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ministers, read prayers, church women, christen, and bury, being a deacon and allowed to do so'.⁸²

In October 1630, as we saw earlier, Rice served as co-overseer of John Heminges's will. He was a newly-wed at the time, for on 7 September 1630 he had married Frances Legat in St Saviour's. Rice was about forty years old and childless at the time of the marriage, but the couple had six children baptized in St Saviour's over the next eight years: Austin (14 July 1631), Ann (11 September 1632), Frances (3 October 1633), Anna (24 July 1635), Mary (7 June 1637) and John (13 January 1638). All appear in the parish register as the children of John Rice, 'clerk'.⁸³ The subsidy rolls show that Rice and his growing family continued to live in the St Saviour's churchyard through the 1630s; a February 1635 survey of the buildings of the parish, with their owners and tenants, shows that their landlord was John Board, gentleman, and that two other tenants occupied the same building.⁸⁴

Rice's last two appearances in the St Saviour's token books, still living in the churchyard, are in 1640 and 1641.⁸⁵ He does not appear in the 1642 books, but he makes one last appearance in the record of the lay subsidy of December 1642, when he paid 5s 10d. This subsidy was levied by Charles I for the 'necessary defence and great affaires' of the kingdom, an allusion to the English Civil War, which had broken out that year.⁸⁶ Rice does not appear in the 1643 St. Saviour's token books, suggesting that he had left the parish, and the natural assumption is that he and his family were displaced by the war. Many actors took up arms on the Royalist side, as James Wright described years later in *Historia Histrionica* (1699), but it is unlikely that Rice did so; apart from the fact that he had quit acting nearly two decades before, he was more than fifty years old.⁸⁷

However, another factor in John Rice's leaving St. Saviour's in 1642–43 may have been the death of his wife. Though there is no record of her burial in St Saviour's, Rice's second wife Frances, the mother of his children, certainly died at some point, and he then married a woman named Hanna (or Anna). A John Rice married an Anne Westbrook on 29 July 1644 in St Olave Southwark,

the parish next to St Saviour's; it appears likely that this is 'our' John Rice, marrying again quickly both for companionship and for help raising his five small children.⁸⁸ In any case, our John Rice eventually ended up in Tarring Neville, Sussex, a village on the river Ouse in East Sussex between Lewes and Newhaven, about sixty miles south of London. When he made his will on 29 April 1654, he described himself as 'John Rice of Tarring Nevill in the County of Sussex cleark being sicke in body but of perfect memory'.⁸⁹ He asked to be buried in the church of Tarring Neville, which dates from the thirteenth century and survives today as a Grade I listed building, and discharged debts to Richard Wood of Meeching, Izack Baldy of Eastbourne, goodman Swan, Mr Bernard, and Mr Pennell, all of Lewes, and 'Mr. Legat my brother' (i.e. his brother-in-law through his second wife). The remainder of his estate was to be equally divided 'betweene Hanna my now wife and all my Children', namely his sons Austin and John, and his daughters Frances, Anne and Mary, except for a mare and a colt that were to go to his son John. He named his wife

⁸² LMA P92/SAV/533.

⁸³ St Saviour Southwark Composite Register: baptisms, marriages, and burials, 1609–1653 (LMA P92/SAV/3002). I am grateful to Alan H. Nelson for searching his transcriptions of the parish register for me, and for his transcriptions of the documents cited in this and the following paragraph. The Ann born in 1632 presumably died in infancy (despite there being no record of her burial in the St Saviour's register) and the Anna born in 1635 was given a variant of the same name, a common practice at the time. Rice named a single daughter Anne in his will, cited below.

⁸⁴ LMA P92/SAV/215 p. 42; /216 p. 42; /217 p. 38; /218 p. 39; /219 p. 22; /220 p. 40; /221 p. 47; /222 p. 42; /224 p. 43; /227 p. 43; /228 p. 44; /229 p. 44; /230 p. 45; /232 p. 45. From 1627 on, Rice was given the title 'Mr' in the token books, probably because he was a deacon. Two copies of the 1635 survey are LMA P92/SAV/1325 and 1327.

⁸⁵ LMA P92/SAV/233 p. 43; /234 p. 34.

⁸⁶ TNA E179/187/470 m.6.

⁸⁷ James Wright, *Historia Histrionica* (London, 1699). Wright says (p. 7) that almost all of the players went into the king's army, 'except Lowin, Tayler and Pollard (who were superannuated)'.

⁸⁸ St Olave Southwark Composite Register: baptisms, marriages, and burials, 1639–1665 (LMA P71/OLA/010).

⁸⁹ TNA PROB 11/234/165v–166.

his executrix and two friends as overseers: Mr Jordan of Denton, clerk, and John Pierce of Tarring Neville, yeoman. There is no mention of any theatre people, which is perhaps not too surprising given that Rice had quit acting nearly thirty years before. His wife proved the will in Westminster on 14 September 1654.

John Rice led an eventful life by any standard. As a teenager, he was apprenticed in the leading acting company of England, for whom he performed before the king and originated some of the most famous female roles in the history of the English theatre. After finally becoming a sharer in that company at the age of thirty, he abruptly quit the stage a few years later to become a parish clerk in the midst of London's worst plague outbreak in years. He lost one wife, married again, had six

children (five of whom survived), lost his second wife, married again and moved far away from London, eventually dying at the age of sixty-four. Rice's career as a boy actor for the King's Men is of obvious interest to theatre historians and Shakespeare scholars, given his status as the company's leading boy during an important part of Shakespeare's career. Looking at him alongside the company's other boys from around the same time provides a much clearer picture of the skilled actors, largely forgotten today, who first brought Shakespeare's women to life. On a broader level, Rice's life story demonstrates that early modern actors led full and often fascinating lives outside the theatre and that those lives can provide windows into some of the most tumultuous times in English history.