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John and Lawrence Dutton, leaders of the Queen's Men

Relatively little-discussed today, the brothers John and Lawrence Dutton were significant figures in the Elizabethan theatrical world.¹ From the early 1570s to the early 1590s, they are visible in several categories of records obtaining funding; recruiting actors; commissioning plays; negotiating the right to perform; and accepting payments. They are recorded at court and touring the regions, and, in particular, between 1588 and 1593 they were co-leaders of the Queen's Men, the most significant theatre company of its era.² They were, as it appears, in charge of that company when it produced many of the best-known of its nine surviving plays. And if, as is widely thought, Shakespeare was involved with the Queen's Men in some way in his early career, then he will have had to work with the Duttons.

This article, first, outlines the career of the theatre Duttons, arguing that they were pivotal creative figures both before, and during, their time in the Queen's Men, in the period which is, to use its currently contested name, “before Shakespeare”. Next, it reviews and reinforces the case, most recently made by the scholar Richard Dutton, that they had some claim to gentry status and that we might expect to find their origins somewhere on the fringes of the Duttons of Dutton, a significant family of Cheshire landowners.³ Thirdly, it presents information about a John and Lawrence Dutton from Cheshire who are recorded in several contemporary documents, most importantly Lawrence's submission to the 1623 *Visitation of Gloucestershire*, and attempts to identify them with John and Lawrence Dutton, theatre makers. Finally, it argues that if the players are these particular Cheshire Duttons, then their apparent retirement around 1593 becomes more intelligible: but that even if they remain merely unidentifiable Cheshire Duttons, that local affiliation is still useful leverage for discussing their career and the career of the Dutton-era Queen's Men.

The theatre Duttons

Nothing is known about the theatre Duttons *qua* actors: there are no known passing allusions to parts they took or to their acting ability, hence their relative lack of celebrity. There is, however, a long paper trail relating to their roles in theatre leadership. They first appear in the winter of 1571/2, when Lawrence received a payment for performances at court by the company of Sir Robert Lane.⁴ As early as June 1572, John and Lawrence Dutton clearly saw themselves as leaders in their field, commissioning, together with their fellow-actor Thomas Gough, eighteen plays from an otherwise unknown gentleman playwright, Rowland Broughton, for a company that they were in the process of recruiting.⁵ The venue that they had in mind is not specified, but it is perhaps significant that one of the key meetings alluded to in the lawsuit took place at the Bell Inn in Gracechurch Street, which is known to have been in use by 1576 as a theatrical venue.⁶ As R. Mark Benbow has documented, the deal with Broughton collapsed into litigation, and Gough and the Duttons sued Broughton, aiming to activate a penalty clause in the contract. This demonstrates, firstly, that the Duttons, young though they were – since it is known from a later lawsuit that John Dutton can only be around twenty-four at this point – possessed a certain amount of social capital, being prepared to contract with, and start litigation against, a gentleman. It also shows that, as early as 1572, they were seeking to develop an entire theatrical project, procuring funding, commissioning playtexts, and hiring personnel. In integrating different aspects of the theatre process, they were already acting almost like forerunners of Philip Henslowe.

From 1572 onwards, the Duttons progressed through a number of theatrical patrons. In 1573-4, as Lord Clinton's Men, they performed at court, with plays including what sounds like a

romance, "Herpetulus the Blue Knight and Perobia".⁷ In 1575, they are recorded under the patronage of the Earl of Warwick, where their colleagues included Jerome Savage, who in 1576 built the playhouse at Newington Butts, so that they may have been involved in that foundational theatre: indeed, while the records are rather cryptic, one reading of them suggests that they managed to "squeeze Savage out" of the playhouse he had built.⁸ Their companies appear in the Revels Accounts at court, and a significant detail, especially when read in conjunction with the Broughton lawsuit, is that the plays they are involved with are often identified not by the patron or the company, but by the names of the Duttons, often the two Duttons together. These records include the payment of 4s 4d for "A tree of Holly for the Duttons play" in 1572-3; a payment to musicians at "the prooffe of Duttons play" the same year; another reference to "the Duttons [*interlineated* play]" in 1574-5; a payment in 1576 to the drummer John Kelsey for playing in "the Duttons plaie".⁹ These records suggest that the Duttons are the defining creative force of the company, and further demonstrate the breadth of their involvement: they were linked not just to the hiring of writers and actors (as in the Broughton lawsuit) but also in this case to all the practicalities of performance such as properties and music. In 1579 their company played at court "The Knight of the Burning Rock", a romance play whose expensive properties and special effects are unusually well documented.

In 1580 both brothers and their fellow-players switched allegiance to become the Earl of Oxford's Men, but in 1583 John was poached from there to become one of the members of the newly-formed Queen's Men, appearing (without his brother) in that company's list of founding players. As is well known, the Queen's Men quickly became, as Tilney and Walsingham intended them to be, the defining theatre company of the era, dominating performances at Elizabeth's court and touring the country relentlessly. John Dutton may

have brought some Oxford's Men plays to the new company: this possibility was suggested by Roslyn L. Knutson, and it looks all the stronger in the light of the information above about how the Duttons in particular were seen as progenitors and owners of the plays that their company performed.¹⁰

In 1588-9 Lawrence first turns up in a record of payments to the Queen's Men, and from then until around 1593 the Dutton brothers seem to have been co-leaders of the company together with their colleague John Laneham. The Queen's Men routinely split into two to go touring, and in these five years one or both Duttons are recorded in regional records leading the Queen's Men at Nottingham, Lyme Regis, Southampton, Coventry (probably) and Cambridge; they also picked up the money for the Queen's Men's court appearances in these years, except for a couple of occasions where the payee is Laneham, who is generally thought also to have led the other arm of the touring operation.¹¹ Not much is known about the internal organization of the Queen's Men, and as well as Laneham clearly there were also other experienced players such as Robert Wilson who might well have had a say in the running of the company. And yet the paper trail suggests that the Duttons were in a leadership role, something they were experienced in after fifteen years of leading previous companies. As such, it is hard to see how they cannot have been involved in choosing Queen's Men plays in these years. The company had some writing talent of their own – Robert Wilson and, early on, Richard Tarleton, for instance – but they also used plays bought in from writers including Robert Greene and George Peele. The Duttons, indeed, are the only members of the Queen's Men who are known to have undertaken those kinds of negotiations with writers, documented in the earlier lawsuit with Broughton. They were surely key figures in the commissioning process for the Queen's Men, and thus in shaping the repertory of the company as we have it.

The Duttons continued to innovate. In 1590 they took the Queen's Men on tour with a "Turk" or "Hungarian" whose rope-dancing act astonished his early audiences – “the lick was never seene in shrewsburie before”, according to one observer.¹² In June 1591 they visited Southampton as joint leaders of a company which travelled as "the Queenes players" but which seems to have consisted, according to the warrant from Tilney with which they travelled, of themselves plus some child actors.¹³ As John Astington suggests, one or other of them may well have taken as their apprentice John Shank, a comedian and rhymer who went on to establish his reputation in jigs.¹⁴

And then, around 1593, they disappear from theatrical records, something which, as William Ingram notes, is puzzling because they continue to be visible in other records in London. John Dutton remained in St Botolph's Bishopsgate from the 1580s until his death there in 1614, becoming increasingly respectable. For instance, in 1602 he was appointed to look after the portions of three orphan sons of Thomas Wyley, citizen and founder, until they came of age. By 1606 he was the owner of the Dolphin Inn in Bishopsgate. By 1608, his business interests also included a share in the farm of the subsidy and alnage of the new drapery which the King had granted to the Duke of Lennox.¹⁵ Lawrence Dutton, however, fared less well, becoming mixed up in a series of increasingly unlikely schemes: in 1594 he somehow obtained a potentially lucrative official post as auditor of the Keepers of the Registers, a project designed to crack down on the selling of stolen goods, and in 1595 he was involved in a complicated and baffling scam to do with money exchange. By 1596, though, he was in prison for debt, from which he managed to escape leaving his brother to foot the bills, and after 1597 he disappears from London records altogether.¹⁶

The Dutton brothers, then, enjoyed a stellar career in drama, jointly running the most successful theatrical company in the country. In the five years that they were so clearly dominant figures in the Queen's Men, that company is thought to have produced most of the plays that make it famous, including *King Leir*, *The Troublesome Reign of John*, and *The True Tragedy of Richard III*. And yet they seem to have abandoned their career abruptly around 1593 in favour of other forms of business. Where did the Duttons come from? And where did they go? One starting-place is the Cheshire gentry family to which they have often been linked.

The Duttons of Dutton

The Duttons of Dutton were a powerful family of Cheshire gentry who could trace their lineage, and their wealth, back to the Norman Conquest. Based at Dutton Hall, a manor which stood near the modern town of Runcorn, they held extensive lands throughout the county palatine of Cheshire. Duttons of Dutton had been involved in many of the foundational events of English medieval history: in the words of the family historian, "one was a Crusader, another sided with Hotspur, two were at Agincourt, another with his son and brother fell fighting on opposite sides in the Wars of the Roses".¹⁷ In the words of another family historian, "the Duttons enjoyed a good fight. Where there was trouble there was invariably a Dutton".¹⁸

They also enjoyed a strong local powerbase. Members of the extended Dutton clan were prominent in Chester, including several lord mayors. In medieval times the Duttons of Dutton acquired the sole authority to license minstrels within the county palatine of Cheshire, a privilege that they jealously guarded into the early modern period, so that the Elizabethan

Statutes of Vagabonds still continued to reserve the rights of the Duttons of Dutton when it comes to licensing entertainers in Cheshire. This power was particularly on display in the city of Chester, where as part of the midsummer festivities each year the Duttons would hold a “minstrel’s court”, featuring a procession and performances, where Cheshire entertainers would come to acknowledge the Duttons’ continuing authority over them.¹⁹

This paper will return later on to a more detailed look at Dutton family history, but the immediate task is to outline reasons why the theatre Duttons might be related to this family. The first, and perhaps most obvious, was noted by E. K. Chambers: the actors’ forenames. The Duttons of Dutton frequently used the name “John” – as who did not? – but the much rarer “Lawrence” is much more diagnostically a family forename, borne by at least two medieval heads of the family. In broad terms, the actors’ forenames link them to the Duttons of Dutton.²⁰

Chambers also noticed that there were Duttons connected with the Elizabethan court, since there are numerous separate records of people named "John Dutton" and "Lawrence Dutton" being paid for delivering messages at court. A "Lawrence Dutton" is first recorded in this role in 1561 and frequently thereafter, and a "John Dutton" appears in 1578, which would imply some sort of court connection or elevated status. The problem is that, as William Ingram has demonstrated, not all of the records of Lawrence Dutton, court messenger, can belong to Lawrence Dutton, actor, which causes doubt as to whether any of the records are.²¹ However, even if none of these messengers are the actors, these records show that there is a network of Duttons on the fringes of the Elizabethan court to which the theatre Duttons might plausibly belong.

It is known that the theatre Duttons had pretensions to gentry status. This is exemplified by a libel made against the actors in 1580 on the occasion when "The Duttons and their fellow players... became followers of the Erle of Oxford". The Duttons, the libel alleges, "compared themselves to any Gentleman; therefore, these Armes were devysed for them". A mock coat of arms is then described in thirty lines of scurrilous verse, starting, "The Fyeld a Fart durty, a Gibbet crosse corded", and accompanied, in one of its two surviving manuscript copies, with an elaborate illustrative drawing.²² The libel's recent editors, Steven W. May and Alan Bryson, contextualize this poem in the Inns of Court, whose gentlemen members were clearly angered by the perceived class transgression of the theatre Duttons claiming to be gentry. In this connection May and Bryson mention in particular the regional minstrel-licensing rights of the Duttons of Dutton, and this is interesting because among the many symbols on the mock-arms themselves, one seems to refer to disciplining minstrels: "Three Mynstrell men pendent, on three payre of Gallowes". This seems to confirm May and Bryson's suspicion that the libel at least thinks about these Duttons in connection with the Duttons of Dutton. Certainly, the poem expends great ingenuity and energy on denying that the theatre Duttons enjoy any gentry status, something which suggests that they had enough perceived status to be worth belittling.

And the theatrical John Dutton did claim gentry status in one document from late in his life. In legal papers the theatre Duttons generally identified themselves as citizens and weavers, but in 1607/8, when he stood bail for one Thomas Enos, accused of riotous assault in Shoreditch, John Dutton of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate, called himself a gentleman. So his class status was, indeed, moveable.²³

But the most tangible evidence of the Duttons' links to the Duttons of Dutton lies in the Queen's Men's visits to the Chester area. The Queen's Men made at least six journeys to this relatively remote part of the country in four years from 1588 to 1591, years when the Duttons were leading them. No visits by the Queen's Men to South Lancashire or West Cheshire are recorded at all either before or after this extraordinary burst.

The principal evidence for it is the *Household Book* of the Stanleys, Earls of Derby, whose great houses in South Lancashire hosted the Queen's Men four times between 1588 and 1590. What is more, on two of those visits, the *Household Book* also records the presence of a "Mr Dutton". Discussion of these two records has tended to focus on the question of whether this individual is one of the theatre Duttons, or a gentleman from one of the branches of the Duttons of Dutton, since Dutton Hall lay only around seventeen miles from Knowsley Hall, across the Mersey into Cheshire. But as Richard Dutton observes, whichever way you interpret them, the records link together the performers and the gentry of the region. If "Mr Dutton" is one of the player Duttons, then that player is of interest to the *Household Book*, whose main concern is people linked to local aristocracy. If it is a local Dutton, "timing his visit to coincide with performances from the leading troupe in the land, who just happened to be led by what may well have been two family members... this association lends some substance to the possibility that the actors were at least related to gentry".²⁴

One could stop here, as the point is made. But it is worth a more detailed look at records of the "Mr Dutton" in question, because they seem to show that he is indeed a local, not a player, and to pin him down, geographically, to the area around Dutton in Cheshire. "Mr Dutton" is first seen in the week of 6-12 October 1588 at the Stanleys' house at New Park: "...on Thursday Mr Ihon Bradley & the Qwenes players on frydaye mr dvttton mr brokes

came & on satterday they went". Mr Dutton's companion, "mr brokes", has been identified as Thomas Brooke of Norton Priory, which lies, like Dutton, broadly south-east from Knowsley, over the Mersey into West Cheshire.²⁵ Indeed, it is only around five miles from Dutton. Then, "Mr Dutton" appears alongside the Queen's Men again in the week of 21-27 June 1590.

On wednesday my *Lord* returned, on Thurseday *Sir Ihon Savadge* mr dutton & the *Qwiens* playes came, on frydaye the departed & *Sir Randle brereton* came.²⁶

His travelling companion this time is Sir John Savage of Rocksavage (1554-1615). Sir John was a frequent visitor to the Stanleys, seeing at least one other performance by visiting players there, and his home too lies over the Mersey in West Cheshire, again around five miles from Dutton Hall.²⁷ Thirdly, and not I think cited previously: two months later, "Mr Dutton" appears again at Knowsley with the same companion. On 23 August 1590, when the Queen's Men are long gone and touring somewhere in the Midlands, the *Household Book* records a pair of day visitors: "Wednesdaye S^r Jhon Savadge & M^r Dvtton came & went".²⁸ In short, this "Mr Dutton" is not one of the Queen's Men. Furthermore, on three occasions when we see him with a travelling companion, the companion is from West Cheshire, so that the same is likely to be true of him.

The *Household Book* ceases in August 1590, so any Queen's Men visits to the Stanleys later than that are not recorded, but the company shows up in another local source, the Treasurers' Accounts of Chester Cathedral, which note payments to them in the autumn quarters (29 September to 25 November) of 1589, 1590, and 1591.²⁹ Chester lies around 180 miles from London, but only around sixteen miles from Knowsley and fourteen from Dutton, and it is

very much part of the sphere of influence of the Stanleys, the Savages, and the Duttons. The first of these three Queen's Men's visits recorded in the Cathedral accounts could plausibly be an extension of the trip to the Stanleys recorded on 6-7 September 1589, but the second and third are evidence for otherwise unrecorded expeditions by the Queen's Men to the north-west.³⁰ Also, the Queen's Men's international engagements in these years can be linked to the north-west. In 1589 they travelled to Dublin to perform, a journey most easily accomplished from Chester or Liverpool, and in the same year it was from South Lancashire that they set off to travel to Scotland where King James had asked them to perform at his wedding.³¹

The four records in the Stanleys' *Household Book* and the three in the Chester Cathedral accounts are the core of the argument that the Duttons favoured taking their company to the Cheshire area, but there is also an eighth possible record. At some point in 1588-9, an unknown company performed "the storey of Kinge Ebrauk with all his sonne" at Chester, in a performance which coincided with a visit from – seemingly, was in honour of – the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, Henry Stanley. This company is often thought to have been the Queen's Men, and that guess looks all the stronger in the light of the information offered here about the nexus between the Duttons, the Stanleys, and entertainment in Cheshire.³²

One way of reading these records, then, is in terms of an exchange of cultural capital. The Queen's Men, as McMillin and MacLean have demonstrated, were the highest-status players in the land, both for their reputation as performers and for the fact they were wearing the livery of Queen Elizabeth I. Their visits were local coups for the Stanleys, and "Mr Dutton"'s repeated presence at them could be seen in terms of claiming his share of the regional cultural prestige that the Queen's Men represent. Conversely, the play for Stanley in

Chester – whether or not it was the Queen’s Men – gave the Stanleys a chance to share in civic cultural success of Chester. Thus, at least in the local world of Cheshire, a relative who was leading the Queen’s Men could represent an asset.

There is a final dimension to the similarities between the theatre Duttons and the Cheshire Duttons: it is known that the theatre Duttons were members of the Company of Weavers in London. There are other Duttons involved in that company, since William Ingram notes a “Dutton” in their records as early as 1553, and, as we shall see, there appear to be two separate John Duttons who are weavers in London in this period. Also, there is at least one Cheshire Dutton involved in the trade of weaving. A Thomas Dutton, "webster" or weaver, died in Waverton in Cheshire in 1591. In their analysis of the Waverton Duttons, Edward Dutton and Patricia Lawton conclude that this individual is, plausibly, Thomas Dutton of the New Manor, the brother of a John and Lawrence who will feature later in this paper. But whether or not he is that brother, he shows that there are links between Cheshire Duttons and the weaving trade.³³

All this further material goes to reinforce Richard Dutton’s prediction that the theatre Duttons might be found among minor relatives of the Duttons of Dutton, Cheshire.

The Duttons of New Manor

Now to return to that family’s history. As Edward Dutton and Patricia Lawton have documented, the Dutton family history is complicated, throwing off many illegitimate branches who continued to use both the Dutton surname and the same set of forenames.³⁴ As a result, the Duttons formed a numerous and powerful group in Elizabethan Cheshire, who

worked together as a clan. This thicket of Duttons makes individuals harder to pin down, particularly since each trait that links the actor Duttons to the Cheshire Duttons – for instance, their forenames – *ipso facto* makes it hard to be sure that one has the right pair of brothers.

Nonetheless, there is a paper trail relating to two brothers, John (III) and Lawrence Dutton of New Manor at Preston-on-the Hill, a few miles north of the village of Dutton.³⁵ These Duttons are traceable principally because they are of sufficiently high social status to trouble a couple of the heralds' *Visitations*. Their father was John (II) Dutton of New Manor (d.1593), illegitimate son of John (I) Dutton of New Manor, who was himself an illegitimate son of the immensely wealthy head of the family Lawrence Dutton of Dutton (d.1527).³⁶

John (I) leased his moated manor house from his “master”, Sir Piers Dutton of Dutton, and he also owned a little land in his own right: when John (I) died, around 1540, his son John (II) is visible in litigation arising from his attempts to take control of his inheritance.³⁷

John (II) married, in 1547 or thereafter, Ellen, a gentlewoman, daughter of Robert Dukinfield of Dukinfield in East Cheshire.³⁸ John (II)'s illegitimacy means that he does not appear in Dutton family pedigrees, of course, but thanks to Ellen the family do appear as a side branch in the pedigrees of the Dukinfields.³⁹ The couple had five sons: John (III), Thomas, Lawrence, Robert, and Henry. It is difficult to constrain their dates of birth. The eldest was born no earlier than 1547 - the earliest possible date for the marriage - and the third son, Lawrence, is glimpsed in 1571, when Laurence Hatton of Hatton, a family cousin, wrote a will which included a legacy of ten shillings "Unto Lorence Dutton my godsonne sonne of John D. of New Mannour gentilmã."⁴⁰ So Lawrence and his elder brothers are certainly in existence by then, and Lawrence may be any age between zero and about twenty-one. John

Dutton of New Manor died in 1593, leaving an estate valued at £310 17s 3d, and after 1593 there is no obvious trace of the Duttons of New Manor continuing in Cheshire.⁴¹

Instead, thirty years later and 120 miles away, Lawrence Dutton of New Manor reappears unexpectedly in the rural village of Chedworth in Gloucestershire. From there he submitted a pedigree to the 1623 *Visitation of Gloucestershire*, in which he claimed to be entitled to bear arms through his descent from the Duttons of Dutton. The pedigree conceals any mention of illegitimacy, instead describing John (II) as a younger son of the Duttons of Dutton. This is, as Lawrence must well have known, a lie, and the subterfuge was no doubt emboldened both by the geographical distance from Cheshire and by the fact that by 1623 the male line of the legitimate Duttons of Dutton had itself become extinct.⁴²

Lawrence's pedigree also fills in the family history since 1593. John (III) evidently succeeded his father, being styled "John Dutton of New Manners", but by 1623 both he and the next brother, Thomas, were apparently dead without issue.⁴³ Lawrence also lists his own younger brothers, Robert and Henry, without comment, and an otherwise unknown sister, Ellen. Lawrence himself married Anne, daughter and co-heir of Robert Lombard, yeoman, of Chedworth. In 1623 they had five children, the eldest, William, being twenty-eight, which backdates the parents' marriage to no later than 1595.⁴⁴

Armed with this information, one can pick up a couple of references to Lawrence Dutton's life in Chedworth. The earliest is from 1601, in a lawsuit in which Dutton, together with co-defendants Thomas Sly and Robert Wilson, was accused of appropriating to his own use a message intended to help the poor of the parish of Chedworth.⁴⁵ He was involved in another lawsuit about property in 1611, in which again Robert Wilson and Thomas Sly were named

as his allies.⁴⁶ Tantalizingly, both Wilson and Sly are namesakes of early modern theatre personnel, but their names are too common to give much traction, and no connection has been established in either case. And a third relevant primary document takes the form of a defamation case from 1606 in which Lawrence Dutton, gentleman, of Chedworth, was said to have asked one Eleanor Robinson to have sex with a third party against the wall of a church.⁴⁷ This is documentation in its own right of Dutton's presence in Chedworth, but is also interesting because it resembles accusations made against Lawrence Dutton the actor twenty-three years before. In 1582 Dutton had been accused of managing a prostitute, when, in the course of a lawsuit, John Shawe had claimed that he had "had the use of the body of little Margaret; she is now kept at the Bell by Dutton".⁴⁸ There is thus another hint, though only a hint, of a connection between the two Lawrence Duttons.

After these law-cases, Lawrence Dutton of the New Manor goes on to live a long life in Gloucestershire, contributing his entry to the *Visitation* in 1623 and dying in 1637. If he was indeed born as early as the 1550s, as seems likely, he would have lived well into his eighties. An inquisition conducted after his death calls him "Gent.," and yet he did not have the resources one would expect of the gentry class: he only owned fifty acres of land, which in Keith Wrightson's estimate would just about qualify one to be thought of as a yeoman rather than a husbandman. For comparison, the lands of the Duttons of Dutton, which *mutandis mutatis* would have come to this Lawrence were it not for the illegitimacy, amounted in 1615 to over 30,000 acres.⁴⁹

In short, numerous documents from 1527 to 1637 tell a consistent story about the Duttons of New Manor, who carry a distinguished surname and a sense of entitlement out of step with their modest financial resources.

The two pairs of brothers

Now for the critical question: how well does all this match up with the known records of the theatre Duttons?

The first question is whether the birthdates are compatible, and here the principal clue takes the form of a lawsuit of 1608, in which John Dutton the actor described himself as around sixty years of age.⁵⁰ That would give a date of birth of approximately 1548, whereas John (III) of New Manor's possible birth dates range from 1547 to the late 1560s. Similarly, Lawrence Dutton the actor must have been born "probably by 1550 at the latest", in order to be acting in 1571/2, and that can just be accommodated by Lawrence of New Manor, whose possible birth dates start from 1549 and run to, theoretically, as late as 1571.⁵¹ So the dates are tight, but not impossible.

Perhaps the biggest single obstacle to these brothers' candidature, though, is that when the actors are named jointly in documents – for instance, the Broughton lawsuit, or the Southampton warrant – Lawrence is named first, which would tend to suggest that he is the senior of the two. And yet it was John, not Lawrence, who joined the Queen's Men first, and John who seems to have ended up wealthy and paid his brother's debts, so the evidence about the actors' relative ages remains a little unclear. New information about the relative seniority of the two actor brothers might reinforce, or disprove, the suggestion that they were the New Manor Duttons.

Equally inconclusive is the question of the brothers' marriages. There are two formal marriage records for a John Dutton in London, either or both of which could be the actor. Furthermore, baptism records show that there are two John Duttons, one described as an actor and the other as a weaver, apparently raising families at the same time in two adjoining parishes in later Elizabethan London.⁵² While this could be interpreted in various ways, I suspect that the reason may be that there are two John Duttons in the Company of Weavers, something which, incidentally, limits what can be inferred from the numerous Weavers' Company records of a John Dutton serving in an official role. There are no London marriage records known for a Lawrence Dutton, but as William Ingram notes, Lawrence Dutton the actor is associated with an unnamed wife in testimony given in 1577 - a first wife? - and there are references to Lawrence having an unnamed wife and children in legal papers from 1598.⁵³ This later detail is not incompatible with Lawrence of New Manor, whose first known child from his marriage to Anne Lombard was born around 1595. In short, there is nothing in the information about the New Manor Duttons which cannot be reconciled with what very little we know of the marriages of the theatre Duttons.

The New Manor Duttons are also of the right social rank to explain the apparent inconsistencies in the class status of the theatre Duttons. In the Broughton lawsuit and other legal documents, the theatre Duttons describe themselves not as gentlemen but as members of the Weavers' Company. At the same time, though, the 1580 libel alleges that they did think of themselves as possessing gentry status, and 1607/8, John Dutton did indeed describe himself as a gentleman. The New Manor Duttons were similarly betwixt and between, since Thomas (probably their brother) died a weaver, while Lawrence insisted on his gentry status while having very little in the way of visible assets. Both sets of brothers, then, are socially close to the line between gentry and non-gentry.

But perhaps the most striking parallel between the two pairs of brothers relates to the year 1593. It has long been noted that the theatre Duttons seem to undergo a step change in their careers around 1593, disappearing from acting records and (in Lawrence's case) becoming suddenly conspicuous in other activities. There are many possible contributory causes at work here: for instance, the long plague closure, and changing theatrical fashions.⁵⁴ But it is also the date at which the Duttons of New Manor lose their father and inherit his wealth, so that 1593 appears to be a pivotal year for both sets of Duttons.

John (III) Dutton of New Manor seems to die between 1593, when he succeeds his father, and 1623. The probate record of a John Dutton in St Botolph's, Bishopsgate in 1614 - very likely the actor - falls in that range, although one obstacle is that that probate is granted to a son, John, whom one might expect to see on Laurence Dutton of New Manor's 1623 pedigree.⁵⁵ This could be explained away by positing an early death for this John, or by seeing it as another example of that pedigree's economy with the truth, but it remains problematic. There is as yet no known death record of Laurence Dutton the actor.

To sum up all of these arguments about the two sets of brothers: John and Laurence Dutton of New Manor are born in a range of dates which means they could be the theatre Duttons, and are not obviously incompatible with them in respect of their marriages or deaths. They appear where it has previously been predicted that the actors might be found, in the orbit of the Duttons of Dutton in Cheshire. The actor Duttons are firmly linked to the Company of Weavers, and the New Manor Duttons are (albeit much more tenuously) linked to the profession of weaver through the possible record of their brother Thomas. Finally, and this is

the one respect in which they seem a particularly specific match, both pairs of brothers seem to experience significant upheaval in the same year, 1593.

Conclusion

The main argument of this paper is that the theatre Duttons are linked to the Duttons of Cheshire, and if that is accepted, then a new narrative about them can be constructed. Born in the muddy farmland of the north-west, they came from a family somewhere on the edge of gentry, part of a powerful local clan. They found their way into the entertainment business, perhaps with help from their family connections who had the right to license entertainers in Cheshire. They moved to London and became members of a trade guild, and we know that at least one other Cheshire Dutton was a weaver by profession. They set themselves up as leaders in the entertainment field from early on in their career, specializing in the business of organizing drama – hiring personnel, arranging performances, and looking after the money. They also worked with musicians and acrobats, and over time they prospered, making many enemies along the way.

By 1588-9 they had risen to become co-leaders of the Queen's Men, a task to which they brought their dominant personalities. The Duttons frequently took them (or some of them) on tour to the north-west, their home turf where they could claim kinship, albeit distant, with families including the Duttons of Dutton. They made at least three visits to Chester, a stronghold of their relatives. They made at least four visits to the Stanleys, and on two occasions there they were watched by a "Mr Dutton" who travelled from West Cheshire to see them. From Cheshire they launched the Queen's Men's international venture to Scotland, and probably the one to Ireland as well.

After 1593, though, they withdrew from theatre. John developed business interests, buying an inn and, in time, a position as alnager. He might have been some or all of the John Duttons who served as officials of the Company of Weavers, and he died in 1614. Lawrence also invested, less wisely, in a position as Keeper of the Registers. By 1596, though, he was in prison for debt, and disappeared from London after 1597.⁵⁶

So far, the narrative offered above holds true for any minor scion of the Cheshire Duttons. But if they are the New Manor Duttons, then the events of 1593 can be described more specifically. Their father's death, bringing John Dutton an inheritance, caused him to shift into other forms of investment. Lawrence also withdrew from drama, and probably at this point married Anne Lombard, given the age of their eldest child. Funded (as it may be) by whatever legacy his father left him, and whatever dowry Anne brought, he set about the money-making scheme as Keeper of the Registers, which evidently went wrong. He left London and resettled in Gloucestershire as a small farmer, farming lands inherited through his wife and raising the family recorded in the 1623 *Visitation*.

This narrative has some interesting implications for theatre history, since it opens the way to reading the Queen's Men not in terms of continuity through the company's life (which was very much the tack taken by McMillin and MacLean in their groundbreaking study) but in terms of three distinct phases which one might label pre-Dutton, Dutton, and post-Dutton. The first phase is 1583-88, the era of Knell, Bentley, and Tarleton: the "palmy days", as Chambers calls them, frequently mythologized by writers of a slightly later period. And yet, as Knutson has noted, their nine canonical surviving plays do not, by and large, seem to belong to the repertory of this era. In fact, *The Famous Victories of Henry V* is about the only

one that certainly does.⁵⁷ Then the second phase, after the deaths of those three early stars, saw some distinct changes: the company continued to dominate at court, but now Duttons were taking charge of finances and touring. The touring pattern changed in that the company suddenly gravitated towards Cheshire. Almost all of the nine surviving Queen's Men's plays certainly or probably date to this period, including ones with obvious Shakespearean interest. Indeed if, as is often suspected, Shakespeare was working for the Queen's Men in some capacity in the late 1580s, he was working specifically for the Dutton-era Queen's Men.⁵⁸

But then the theatre Duttons' apparent double retirement in 1593, if indeed that is what it was, was surely a huge blow to the company. After 1593 neither of them appears in the Queen's Men records any more, and this coincides with a change in the profile of the Queen's Men, no longer the apex predators of the theatre scene. The company more or less disappeared from court, and any playing that they did do in the city of London after this date has left no detectable impression behind it. They continued to tour successfully, of course, although their routes changed again in that they did not return to their former favourite hunting ground the north-west. A number of their former plays appeared either in print or seemingly in the hands of other companies, and none of the canonical Queen's Men plays can securely be dated to after 1593. This retreat of the Queen's Men created the conditions for the much-contested reorganizations of 1594, the rise of the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men, and the emergence of Shakespeare. When the Duttons' retirement has been considered in connection with these events, it has generally been thought of as a symptom of wider changes afoot. But we should also bear in mind the possibility that it is in its small way a cause, and one itself triggered by an external event, the death of John (II) Dutton of New Manor changing the social and financial position of both his sons at once.⁵⁹

The Duttons' Cheshire links also have broader implications for ideas of actors and social status. We are accustomed to thinking about theatre workers as lower-status figures having some upward social mobility, with Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson as famous and paradigmatic examples (although it should be added that each of those named had family backgrounds with at least some claim to be of the middling sort). These Duttons would be interesting as an example of a different social status: an illegitimate scion of a significant regional family. That status is one of the things fought over in their career, since the Inns of Court libel considers them mere "fiddlers", while John claims he is a gentleman. (This fits with the social status of the New Manor Duttons, "gentle bastards" on the line between gentry and non-gentry). What is the social status of someone who leads a theatre company at court, and is that status different in London from how it appears on one's home turf in the regions? Again, these complications make the Duttons sound a little more like Henslowe, whose own relative social privilege and complex interactions with gentry and court figures have been studied by Susan Cerasano.⁶⁰

And the Duttons' Cheshire identity, regardless of exactly which Cheshire Duttons are involved, has some implications for Queen's Men plays. For instance, *The True Tragedy of Richard III* is datable to the Dutton era. It offers a lavishly sympathetic treatment of the fifteenth-century Earl Stanley, celebrated in the play as a family man and a patriot. This treatment has already, and reasonably, been connected to the Stanleys' patronage of the Queen's Men, evidenced by the *Household Book*.⁶¹ But the lens offered here puts a particular focus on the play's treatment of "Cheshire and Lancashire", the home to which, in one key scene, Richard refuses to let Stanley return. The scene situates the north-west as a place independent from London, with its own international access to France and elsewhere through its ports, and also as the home of Stanley's wife and children. Cheshire and Lancashire, in

this play, represent a family-centered, moral world where Richard's writ does not fully run.⁶²

The play celebrates not just Stanley, but also the region of the north-west, which would certainly chime with what we can now see of the company's affiliations to the area. More broadly still, the way is open to read other Queen's Men plays of the Dutton era, such as *King Lear*, in terms of tensions around centre and provinces, legitimacy and succession.

Finally, if the theatre Duttons are the New Manor Duttons in particular, only a wedding away from having been heirs to the massive wealth of the Duttons of Dutton, then a character who seems particularly relevant is the Bastard in the *Troublesome Reign of John*, yet another Dutton-era play. He, of course, is almost absent from the historical sources, and he forms the template both for Shakespeare's Falconbridge and (it is sometimes argued) for Edmund in *King Lear*. His position, we can now see, might resemble that of the Duttons themselves. An illegitimate son making his way in the world without the inherited resources he deserves, he nonetheless puts a positive spin upon the position he finds himself in:

Then *Robin Fauconbridge* I wish thee ioy,
My Sire a King, and I a landles Boy.
Gods Ladie Mother, the world is in my debt,
There's something owing to *Plantaginet*.
I marrie Sir, let me alone for game,
Ile act some wonders now I know my name.⁶³

Bearing an illustrious surname, but landless through bastardy, he repositions himself as a free and theatrical figure who will "act some wonders". This is a sentiment that John and Lawrence Dutton might have particularly appreciated.

¹ Overall biography in Richard Dutton, "Shakespearean origins", in Takashi Kozuka and J.R. Mulryne, eds., *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson: New Directions in Biography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 69-83; William Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player: missing and presumed lost", *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 14 (2001): 122-143; and additional records in Mark Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors I: A–D," *Notes and Queries* 236 (1991): 38–49. Richard Dutton is, confusingly, both namesake and relative of many if not all of the Duttons under discussion in this paper.

² On the Queen's Men as a company see the two seminal books: Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men and their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Helen Ostovich, et al., eds., *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

³ Dutton, "Shakespearean origins".

⁴ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902-10, 2.314; Chambers also cites a "John Dutton" who in 1567-8 provided musicians for Lincoln's Inn, but this is almost certainly not our man, but rather John Dutton of Cheshire, gentleman, admitted to that Inn in 1564. Still, it is suggestive for the wider argument here that a Dutton of Cheshire is thought an appropriate person to book entertainers. See *The Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn: Admissions* (Lincoln's Inn: n.p., 1896), 72.

⁵ R. Mark Benbow, "Dutton and Goffe versus Broughton: a disputed contract for plays in the 1570s", *Records of Early English Drama Newsletter* 6. 2 (1981): 3-9; for more on Broughton, see Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors I: A-D", 47-8.

⁶ Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 2.381; "The Bell Inn", *Shakespearean London Theatres*, shalt.dmu.ac.uk/locations/bell-inn-1576-94.html

⁷ Wiggins, *British Drama*, no.553.

⁸ William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of the Adult Professional Theater in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), 174; Laurie Johnson, *Shakespeare's Lost Playhouse: Eleven Days at Newington Butts* (London: Routledge, 2017), 74.

⁹ Albert Feuillerat, *Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels* (Louvain: A. Uystpruyst, 1908), 175, 176, 244, 259.

¹⁰ Roslyn L. Knutson, "The Start of Something Big", in Griffin, Ostovich, and Syme, eds., *Locating the Queen's Men*, 99-108, esp. 101.

¹¹ See McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and their Plays*, 195.

¹² *REED Shropshire*, 198.

¹³ *REED Hampshire* project material, cited from pre-publication version at <https://reedprepub.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/soton-1575-15946.pdf> .

¹⁴ Because Shank was a Queen's Man and a weaver: John H. Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 85-6.

¹⁵ Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors I: A-D", 47-49, citing TNA: REQ 2/467; other litigation connected with Dutton's role as alnager shows that he was active in it by 1607. See TNA: STAC 8/90/19, 8/114/15.

¹⁶ See Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors I: A-D", 47-49; Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 127- 37.

¹⁷ *Memorials of the Duttons of Dutton in Cheshire: With Notes Respecting the Sherborne Branch of the Family* (London: H. Sotheran, 1901), vii.

¹⁸ G. H. Buchan, "A Brief History of the Duttons of Dutton" (1984), cited from <http://www.dunton.org/duttonhall/buchan.html>

¹⁹ See *REED Cheshire*, esp. 62.

²⁰ A point first made by Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 2.314.

²¹ Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 141; and the 1561 Lawrence Dutton the messenger cannot be Lawrence Dutton of New Manor, either, since Lawrence of New Manor was at most eleven years old at that point.

²² Poem cited from Steven W. May and Alan Bryson, *Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 279-283, including a photograph of the drawing.

²³ Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors I: A–D," 48, 49.

²⁴ Dutton, "Shakespearean Origins", 74; recently, some sources have started listing a fifth visit on 10 September 1590, but this is an error based on a misreading of *REED Lancashire* 182. Dutton Hall no longer stands in Cheshire, having been pulled down and re-erected in East Grinstead. See also *REED Lancashire* 188, the letter from William Scrope which locates the Queen's players in south Lancashire in September 1589.

²⁵ *REED Lancashire*, 180, 181; for his biography, William ffarington, *The Derby Household Books*, ed. F. R. Raines (n.pl.: Chetham Society, 1853), 174.

²⁶ *REED Lancashire*, 181, 182. See also 356 .

²⁷ A. M. Mimardière, "Savage, John (1554-1615), of Clifton, Cheshire", *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1558-1603*, ed. P.W. Hasler (1981; online edition at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>); ffarington, *The Derby Household Books*, 144-5; one must assume for the moment that it is a coincidence that the Duttons' earlier business associate, Jerome Savage, shares a surname with Sir John.

²⁸ ffarington, *The Derby Household Books*, 90: as well as these three visits, there is also a "Mr Dutton" who visits Lathom House in June 1589 at the same time as "many strangers" (59-60); I remain agnostic about which of the Cheshire Duttons this "Mr Dutton" is, but one candidate might be John (II) of New Manor.

²⁹ REED *Cheshire*, 1. 228, 234, 239; on the general scarcity of any records of visiting players in Chester, see David Mills, "Where have all the players gone? A Chester Problem", *Early Theatre* 1 (1998): 129-137.

³⁰ As Siobhan Keenan points out, one recorded performance is likely to indicate others on the same visit: Siobhan Keenan, *Travelling Players in the Age of Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³¹ McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*, 58; REED *Lancashire*, 188.

³² REED *Cheshire*, 1.223; *Lost Plays Database*, "King Ebrauk with All his Sons", https://www.lostplays.org/lpd/King_Ebrauk_with_All_His_Sons

³³ See David Kathman, "Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freemen and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.1 (2004): 1-49; Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 142, for the earlier weaver Dutton; for Thomas, see Edward Dutton and Patricia Lawton, "Gentle Bastards in Sixteenth-Century Cheshire: A Case Study of the Dutton Family", *Cheshire History* 58 (forthcoming); for wider discussion of bastardy in early modern England, see Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994).

³⁴ Dutton and Lawton, "Gentle Bastards".

³⁵ For location see <http://historicengland.org.uk>, which includes the moat (which survives) as a listed monument.

³⁶ Family tree in *Memorials*, 228.

³⁷ Will in *Memorials*, 174-6; National Archives: C 1/1117/34-35, Dutton v Dutton; National Archives: C 1/1215/60, Dutton v Massey.

³⁸ See J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire, Past and Present, or, A History of the Hundred of Macclesfield, in the County Palatine of Chester*, 2 vols (London: printed for the author, 1877-80), 1.69, 2.11; will of Robert Dukinfield, 1546-7, transcribed in G. J. Piccope, ed.,

Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories from the Ecclesiastical Court, Chester, 3 vols ([Manchester]: Chetham Society, 1857-61), 2.24-8, instructs his executors to marry Ellen off using her brother's wife's dowry.

³⁹ John Paul Rylands, ed., *The Visitation of Cheshire in the Year 1580* (London: Harleian Society, 1882), 58; George J. Armytage and J. Paul Rylands, eds., *Pedigrees Made at the Visitation of Cheshire, 1613* (London: Record Society, 1909); see also John MacLean and W. C. Heane, eds., *The Visitation of the County of Gloucester, Taken in the Year 1623* (London: n.p., 1885), 53.

⁴⁰ Piccope, ed., *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills*, 1.86.

⁴¹ This is the common-sense interpretation, although I cannot rule out that the possibility that John (II)'s death goes unrecorded and this valuation marks the death of John (III). Were this shown to be the case, the identification with the actors would collapse.

⁴² With the death of Thomas Dutton of Dutton: *Memorials*, 191.

⁴³ MacLean and Heane, eds., *The Visitation of the County of Gloucester*, 53. The pedigree certainly gives that impression: it lists no offspring for John, and puts him with Thomas, who is unequivocally described as dead without issue.

⁴⁴ MacLean and Heane, eds., *The Visitation of the County of Gloucester*, 53.

⁴⁵ National Archives: C 78/113/19, Stone v Dutton.

⁴⁶ National Archives: C 8/21/33, Dutton v Higges.

⁴⁷ Gloucestershire Archives: GDR/100, page 166. I owe this reference to Ed Dutton.

⁴⁸ Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 123.

⁴⁹ *Memorials*, 228, 234; Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (1982; London: Routledge, 2006), 31-32.

⁵⁰ McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and their Plays*, 195.

⁵¹ Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 122.

⁵² Detailed by Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player".

⁵³ Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 123.

⁵⁴ Possible causes reviewed by Richard Dutton, "Shakespearean Origins".

⁵⁵ E. A. J. Honigmann and Susan Brock, *Playhouse Wills, 1558-1642: An Edition of Wills by Shakespeare and His Contemporaries in the London Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), 230.

⁵⁶ Ingram, "Laurence Dutton, stage player", 127-8.

⁵⁷ McMillin and MacLean, 55. One other outlier is *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, which is often conjectured to predate the Queen's Men by a decade.

⁵⁸ As proposed by most Shakespearean biographers from Malone onwards; for an overview see McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays*.

⁵⁹ See in particular three seminal articles on the 1594 debate: Andrew Gurr, "The Great Divide of 1594", in *Words that Count: Essays on Early Modern Authorship in Honour of MacDonald P. Jackson*, ed. Brian Boyd (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994), 29-28; Holger Schott Syme, "The Meaning of Success: Stories of 1594 and its Aftermath", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2010): 490-525; Roslyn L. Knutson, "What's so Special about 1594?", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2010): 449-467. Also note Francis Henslowe's purchase of a share in the Queen's Men in 1593 or 1594, from which it follows that some other sharer had left: McMillin and MacLean, 195.

⁶⁰ S. P. Cerasano, "Philip Henslowe and the Elizabethan Court," *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007): 49-57.

⁶¹ Lawrence Manley, "Motives for Patronage: The Queen's Men at New Park, October 1588", in Ostovich *et al.*, eds., *Locating the Queen's Men*, 51-64.

⁶² *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* (London: Thomas Creede, 1594), F4v.

⁶³ [*The*] *Troublesome Raigne of Iohn King of England* (London: Sampson Clarke, 1591),

B4v-C1r; on the Bastard as a hero, see Findlay, *Illegitimate Power*, esp. 201.