

# The Royal Entry of James I

## 1604

Professor Paulina Kewes in conversation with Professor Ian Archer

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**Paulina Kewes:** I'm with Dr Ian Archer in the Fellows' Library of Jesus College, Oxford. Ian, could tell us a bit about London around 1603-04?

**Ian Archer:** Yes. Well London was a rapidly expanding city at this time. It had grown from about 60,000 in 1550 to a city of 200,000 in 1603. And that growth is fuelled really by two factors. First of all that it's a capital city, and the place of residence of the Royal Court and the law courts, and that brings the social elites into the city. And of course those elites spend big money there. And it's also a time when the leisure facilities of the city are developing for those people, the theatres being a prime example of that. The other factor behind its growth was the fact that it was a port, that London was the centre of England's overseas trade. And indeed it had come to exercise a commanding position in terms of England's commerce. And that of course meant that it had a special relationship with the crown. The crown depended heavily on London for tax revenues, particularly through the taxes on trade. And it also depended on London as a sort of money market: as a source of loans for the crown. So that gives Londoners a certain amount of leverage over the monarchy.

**PK:** So what role does London play in the ritual surrounding the coronation?

**IA:** Well, on the eve of the coronation it was customary for the monarch to process through the city streets from the Tower of London to the Palace of Westminster. And this procession would take the form of the royal entourage all the courtiers and ministers are processing in an elaborate cavalcade, wearing their finest outfits and jewellery. The city streets were lined with the guildsmen all arranged according to their crafts. And the processional route was punctuated by a set of pageants which extolled the virtues of the monarch. Pageants in this case incorporating triumphal arches and dramatic speeches.

**PK:** What is a triumphal arch?

**IA:** A triumphal arch is a monumental structure. They had been used to celebrate the victories of Roman emperors. So if you go to Rome you will be to look at the Arch of Constantine. One might also think of Marble Arch in London as a kind of model. And these arches are used all over Europe as part of the entry rituals for monarchs visiting their major cities. So there's a degree to which London here is imitating the practices of continental monarchs.

**PK:** So when was James crowned?

**IA:** James was crowned in May 1603, soon after his accession. But it was a rather restricted event (access to it was restricted) because the plague had just broken out in London. And that necessitated a postponement of the entry until the following year. It takes place actually shortly before James's first parliament on 15 March 1604. It has been delayed because of the plague.

So the royal entry has become separated from the coronation, which took place the previous year. So this is not, as it were, a normal entry. But it is rather interesting that the crown thought it important that it be staged as a demonstration of the solidarity of the political elite behind their new monarch, and as a demonstration of London's loyalty to the crown.

**PK:** So you said that the royal entry involved arches and dramatic speeches. Who was responsible for putting it all together?

**IA:** Well it is a collaborative effort (though I think I'm going to qualify that a little bit later by showing how perhaps the people involved didn't collaborate as well as they might have done). So it involves a number of poets, who were responsible for the dramatic part of the entertainment, and here the most important ones are Thomas Dekker and Benjamin Johnson, but there was a little bit of a bit part contributed by another playwright, Thomas Middleton. So we've got three dramatists involved in putting it together. And then on top of that we've got the designer of the arches, who is a man called Stephen Harrison, by profession a joiner. Interestingly he also described himself as an architect, which suggests a certain aspiration to status on his part. And Harrison was responsible for marshalling the small army of over 200 artificers, who were involved in putting the whole thing together. So this is quite a big operation, and is overseen by a city committee, a group of aldermen and common councillors who oversee the whole thing, possibly (though this bit is obscure) in collaboration with people at the court.

**PK:** It sounds like both the arches and the speeches are trying to communicate something. And if it is a piece of political communication, what is it trying to say?

**IA:** Well it's celebrating all the virtues of James's rule. It's celebrating him as the uniter of the kingdoms, bringing Scotland, England, and Ireland together and thereby fulfilling what might be thought of as an imperial destiny. It's celebrating the peace and prosperity which is associated, that James is negotiating a peace treaty with Spain: this is a reversal of Elizabeth's policies. Peace is being brought to Ireland. So people are looking forward to a period of prosperity. James is also being presented as the legitimate monarch. A number of the arches stress James's descent from Henry VII, and also there's a certain amount of flattery of other members of the royal family: of Prince Henry and Queen Anne of Denmark.

**PK:** So is it only a matter of praise? Or there also an element of counsel, of advise?

**IA:** That's a very interesting question. Conventionally renaissance entrepreneurs of these entertainments justified them in terms of counselling the monarch, providing advice through praise. Ascribing qualities to the monarch that they wanted to see fulfilled. So you could say that Londoners were urging the king to promote policies of peace and prosperity. But this was an agenda James had very much bought into anyway so I'm not like I'm not sure there is very much critical edge there.

**PK:** Can we perhaps look more closely at one or two of the arches and see how they actually get their message across?

**IA:** Well let's look at the Londinium arch, Londinium being the Roman name for London. And on first sight some of this is quite easy to see. We can see the city is being represented there on the top, and it's got a very fine topographical detail. We can make out obviously St Paul's, but also some of the specific churches are identifiable by their steeples. But otherwise it's a very busy object. It's got Latin inscriptions on it. It's got lots of figures. It is quite difficult at first sight to decode it. And it is perhaps worth saying that contemporaries might well have faced similar

challenges to those that we have. This was one, this Londinium arch, was one of the arches that Jonson was responsible for, and that perhaps explains something of its complexity. At the apex, just below the inscription of Londinium, we have a figure representing the British monarchy. And that figure is accompanied by another called Divine Wisdom. And this is suggesting that the monarchy incorporates divine wisdom.

**PK:** What about the other arches?

**IA:** Well the arch at the end of Soper Lane in Cheapside represented the fountain of virtue, which has dried up at the death of Elizabeth and is now brought to life again by James's presence. And in the speeches which accompanied this arch, James is seen as the new phoenix risen from the ashes, able to bring the are fountain to life and to tame detraction and oblivion, which threaten to suck it dry. A similar theme was represented by the Garden of Plenty arch in Cheapside, represented the fecundity, fertility that James's rule brought. On the top of this structure we see the figure of Fortune, beneath her Peace and Plenty, and then in the next register deities associated with fertility. And then those figures on either side of the deities represent the nine muses and the seven liberal arts, which are going to flourish under James's benevolent rule.

**PK:** How likely is it that James or others who saw the arches would have understood their messages?

**IA:** I think that that is a very difficult question. I think that James of course is probably the only person who witnesses the whole thing, and people immediately close to him, because nobody else would have been able to hear the speeches that were going on. Actually whether James could hear everything is questionable because the overwhelming sensory aspect of this experience would have been the sound, the deafening shouts of the crowd and the bells of 123 city churches clanging out. Had James been able to hear and had he been patient enough to watch the whole thing carefully (and that's a little bit questionable) then I think perhaps he probably would have got it. After all, he is a philosopher king; he's extremely well educated. Quite a lot of this, however, would have gone over the heads of much of the audience, and we have some clues to that in a pamphlet produced at the time by a guy called Gilbert Dugdale. And he provides us with descriptions of the arches and something about the speeches. But he says very basic things. It's a very limited engagement with this complex iconography. I think what most people would have been getting out of it was that processional element: watching the political elite processing through the city streets in all its splendour and a demonstration of the loyalty and solidarity of the political elite. And of course I suspect there would have been a certain amount of celebrity spotting there as well.

**PK:** Was there any attempt to give a printed account of the royal entry?

**IA:** Well that's very intriguing because there are multiple accounts of the entry and that suggests something of the tension between the authors, between Dekker and Jonson in particular. It has to be said that Dekker and Jonson represented these contrasting approaches. Dekker was a popular pamphleteer, somebody who wrote primarily for the public theatres. Jonson had aspirations to be a court poet, wrote plays for the private theatre, represents a much more learned approach. Jonson made no concessions to his readers in terms of the classical framework that he was plugging into. And this tension is reflected in the fact that Jonson rushes out to get his version of the events out early. So he publishes a book which describes the arches and speeches that he was responsible for: that's two arches in the city and

an entertainment in the Strand. And that, as it were, beats Dekker's account which is more comprehensive, which includes an account of all the arches, though perhaps somewhat bitchily he cuts Jonson's speeches. And our third source for this, and perhaps the most impressive, is Stephen Harrison's book *The Arches of Triumph*, this magnificent folio volume, deluxe volume which includes the engravings of the arches which gives us a strong sense of the visual impact of this ceremony.

**PK:** Do you think that the royal entry works as a piece of political communication.

**IA:** Well it depends what kind of level we are looking at. At the basic level I think it obviously works as a demonstration of political unity because you've got the whole political establishment out there on the city streets celebrating their monarch. I think in terms of the basic messages about peace, prosperity, dynastic legitimacy, I think those basic points would have been got by quite a lot of the audience. But what they wouldn't have got was the dense framework of classical allusion with which the thing is drenched.

**PK:** What's the single most important message that everybody present on the day would actually have got?

**IA:** Well no one could have missed the articulation of the hierarchy in the procession and nobody would have missed the fact that this represented support for James on the part of the political elite. Let's not forget also that are many people in the crowd would have been enjoying the free wine that was on offer, because the city fountains were flowing with wine on that day. And we are told that some people were basically drunk

**PK:** Inebriated.

**IA:** Inebriated.

**Bodleian items featured (by shelfmark):** Malone 233 (6); Malone 602 (1); Gough Lond 145; 4<sup>o</sup> L 81 (10); Wood 537 (4).