
Of Place and Men and Women: Gender and Topophilia in the “Haxey Hood”

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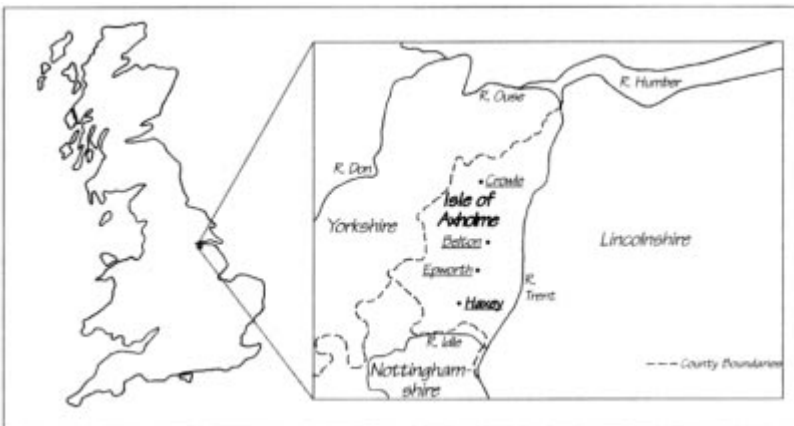
Hoose agen Hoose,
Toon agen Toon,
If a man meets a man
Knock 'im doon
But do'ant 'ot 'im¹

For as long as the people of Haxey can remember, and according to documentary evidence since at least 1815, this rallying cry, belted out in the dialect of north Lincolnshire, has announced the start of “The Hood.” The custom is a rare survivor—one of those rough, wide-ranging “folk-football” games that flourished in pre-industrial England but largely disappeared in the early to mid-nineteenth century. There are only a handful of places where such games are still played and Haxey, a village and parish in the Isle of Axholme, the northwesternmost part of the county of Lincolnshire, is one of them. My central concern in this article is with the meanings that can be read in the Hood, and specifically with what it has to say about the people and the place of Haxey and about their connections with the game and with each other. It is helpful in this context to understand the Hood as a narrative, or rather, a set of narratives. These comprise the game itself, the rituals and practices that precede and surround it, the histories and stories written and told about it, and the Lady de Mowbray legend that locates its origins in medieval land tenure customs. Each of these helps to define Haxey as a distinctive place and Haxonians as a distinctive people, to produce a sense of community and attachment within and across generations, even across centuries, and to evoke feelings of belonging to the land and locale. But a sense of place and belonging are not the only meanings and feelings that the Hood shapes and expresses; it also speaks of divisions, and the ones that most interest me

are those between women and men. The Hood communicates clear notions of gender and, in an especially powerful way, of masculinity. In the game and the narratives that construct it, women and men play distinct roles and bear distinct gender identities, and gender differences are the main hallmarks of the relationships between them—and between them and the game. My purpose here is to trace these themes through the Hood narratives and to indicate how they seem to me to construct a certain sense of the place and people of Haxey.

The rituals conducted between New Year’s Eve and Twelfth Night constitute the core of the Haxey Hood.² On New Year’s Eve, a select band of thirteen central actors, dressed in distinctive costumes, takes the “Sway Hood” from its place of honour: behind the bar of one of Haxey’s public houses. The Hood is a leather cylinder about 24 inches in length and 3 inches in diameter, and it is the object over which participants in the Twelfth Night game contest. The players’ goal is to secure the Hood and carry it to the pub to which they owe their strongest allegiance, in which it will be proudly on display until the following New Year. In the week between New Year’s Eve and Twelfth Night, the Hood officers—the “Lord,” the “Fool,” and eleven “Boggins” (one of whom is designated the “Chief Boggin”)—travel through the Isle of Axholme, visiting forty or so pubs and private homes. At each port of call, they are treated to beer and rum, they display the Hood and themselves, and they lead the gathering in singing three songs: “Drink Old England Dry” (also known as “Cannons”), “John Barleycorn,” and “Farmer’s Boy.” And, in keeping with the old Lincolnshire tradition of “largus” (largesse), at each place visited, the Hood band receives donations to a cash collection that it disburses later to scout troops, playgroups, and other voluntary organizations in Haxey.

On January 5, Hood Eve, the final preparations for the game are made. The Lord makes the “Wand” that is part of his regalia: thirteen willow strips collected from the banks of the River Trent or the River Idle, bound thirteen times. The Chief Boggin and his helpers roll up and tie twelve canvas sack hoods used in the “Running Hood” games, which are the preliminary to the contest for the “Sway Hood.” And the Lord, Fool, and Boggins tour Haxey, finishing up last of all in the pub which holds the Hood. Twelfth



The Isle of Axholme (not to scale). *Provided by author*

Night, January 6, begins at midday very much as Hood Eve left off, with visits to Haxey's public houses, beer and tots of rum, and the singing of the three songs. In one pub, the Fool has his face painted. At around 2 PM the Lord, Fool, and Boggins make their way along the main street of the village to a small green by the church. During this procession, the Fool attempts a scripted escape, is recaptured, carried shoulder high to a mounting stone on the green, and "smoked." (Damp straw is placed around the base of the mounting stone and set alight.) From the mounting stone, with smoke and flames rising up around him, the Fool delivers a speech proclaiming that the Hood is about to begin and inviting all to join. This culminates in the Hood rallying cry, and the Lord and Fool then lead a crowd numbering upwards of several hundreds to the top of Haxey Hill. On the boundary between Haxey and the nearby village of Westwoodside, they arrive at the site of the ploughed field in which the game proper begins.

The Boggins form a wide cordon around the perimeter of the field and the Lord throws up the first of twelve sack hoods for the Running Hood game. Individual players compete to capture a hood and make off to the nearest pub where they are rewarded with a small cash prize. The Boggins' role is to prevent this. If they manage to tackle a player and recover, or even touch, a hood before it is carried off the field, the cry "Boggined!" goes up, the hood is "dead" and is returned to the Lord who throws it up for a fresh game. Once all twelve sack hoods have been carried off, the Sway Hood begins. The leather Hood is thrown out, usually by a local dignitary, and a mass of men scrummages for possession and tries, by sheer collective force, to "sway" it to whichever pub they favour. As daylight fades, and one or another side gains momentum, the Hood moves more quickly to its final destination. At the entrance of the pub, the landlord, while keeping one foot on his doorsill, reaches out to grasp the Hood from the Sway and at that moment, the game is won.

Scholars have seen the fate of games like the Haxey Hood as part of a larger struggle over land rights, a conflict that was especially heightened during the capitalization of agriculture and the rise of industrial, urban society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They suggest, further, that the loss of playing areas associated with these processes significantly contributed to killing off mass "football" games. Anthony Delves, for example, sees attempts to stamp out Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday football (or "hugball") in Derby in the 1840s as a way of denying working-class people the possession and use of the streets and other public spaces they had come to enjoy during these holidays. Robert Malcolmson has shown, too, that in some parts of England, football playing was intimately connected with popular agrarian protests, notably those against the enclosure movement and other "improving" schemes by which private landowners seized common land and deprived the lower and middling classes of customary access and usage rights. Like poaching, football could be a symbolic expression of people's resentment at the curtailment of rights they had long assumed to be theirs, and a wilful act of occupying space and repossessing the land.³

Folklorist Venetia Newall speculates that the Haxey Hood may well have emerged in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries out of just such circumstances of displacement from and conflict over land. She explains that in 1626, Charles I sold the right to drain the Isle of Axholme to Dutch land speculator Cornelius Vermuyden, claimed one

third of the drained land for himself, gave Vermuyden another, and allotted each of the original tenants a portion of the remainder. Vermuyden subsequently sold some of his shares in the land to other Netherlanders, many of whom settled in the Isle, and they and their successors found themselves in a protracted battle with the native Isonians. This raged from the 1630s through to the early 1700s. During its course the Isonians vigorously campaigned against the latecomers' usurpation of their land rights and the area's transformation from marsh and rough pasture supporting an economy based on fowling, fishing, and small-holding to rich farmland ideal for intensive, capitalist agriculture. Their protests included burning houses and barns, destroying drainage ditches, and harassing and attacking engineers and labourers whom the Dutch employed. Newall believes that the Hood developed at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a "ritual perpetuation" of this disorder, disorder that had become by then "a regular feature of life" in the Isle.⁴

Newall's main concern is with the origins of the Hood, but also implicit in her essay is the notion that the game says something about Haxonians' attachment to place, locale, and the land. It is this aspect of the Haxey Hood that I turn to consider now, and I draw upon the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, David Harvey, Rob Shields, John Bale and others to do so.⁵

Of Place

Cultural geographers argue that people imbue places and spaces with meanings, images, and identities. Although not inherent in the physical environment or landscape, these derive in part from them and are produced through a complex of social and cultural processes. In this view, place and space are neither simply "natural" nor topographical matters, but live as much in people's hearts, minds, and imaginations as they exist in any physical sense.⁶ They inspire powerful emotions that are not always or necessarily the consequence of direct experience. Tuan observes, for instance, that scholar and author C.S. Lewis was captivated by "The North" and a "northernness" that he had encountered only through literature, art, and music. Lewis's passion was for "a vision of huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer," a "sadness and sternness [that] appealed to something very deep in his nature."⁷ When such meanings and emotions merge with the feelings of belonging and affection that a homeland often evokes, the senses of self and place are almost one. As Tuan writes, "with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time" comes a "quiet attachment.... to that World which is the counterpart of a Self" This loving sense of place and belonging is what Tuan refers to as *topophilia*.⁸

Social theorists insist, too, that place and space are central axes of social relationships, and that the control of them is as fundamental a dynamic in power relations as the control of time and money. David Harvey explains that in organizing, inhabiting, assigning meanings to, and representing place and space, people define relationships between each other and between practices, objects, and ideas. The possession and control of the topographical elements of society and culture gives even subordinate groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and the working classes a means to articulate their identities and advance their agendas. Municipal socialism in Thatcherite Britain, women's refuges, and African-American and Women's Studies departments in universities can all be understood

in this way: as exercises in building community and forging strong connections between personal, social, and political being and place—what Harvey terms “place-identity.”⁹

When people craft such identities, they evoke and affirm distinct conceptions of place and self. Collectives and communities construct these images by marking out who and what they are and by asserting who and what they are not, by differentiating themselves from others. They do this in various ways: by excluding those considered unworthy or “foreign,” as John Pettmann argues whites have excluded Aboriginal people from the images and language of Australian nationalism, for example. Or, by disavowing certain characteristics and claiming others, as Shields suggests Northerners in England have embraced the attributes of warm-heartedness and industriousness while displacing snobbishness, softness, and laziness on to southerners.¹⁰ Shields uses the term “social spatialization” to denote the various mechanisms that work thus to meld images, emotions, and ideas with places and spaces. In four case studies, he details how material forces and cultural practices ranging from industrialization and urbanization to the literary and visual arts contributed to developing particular understandings of Niagara Falls, the “True North of Canada,” Brighton, and the north of England. All of these “places on the margin,” Shields argues, have been constructed as “peripheral” and “low” relative to the metropolitan centres of Toronto, Montreal, and London. One of the most important of the cultural practices constituting their images and identities (“imaginary geograph[ies]” or “space-myths,” in Shields’s terminology) is the telling, re-telling, and re-formulating of stories, yarns, and legends. Shields points out that there is a consistent space-myth of the north of England. Elements of this “myth of the north” appear in narrative forms as diverse as the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell and others, “kitchen-sink” films such as *A Taste of Honey* and *A Kind of Loving*, the long-running television series *Coronation Street*, and the print and broadcast media of the 1980s. The myth has been a necessary counterpoint to the construction of London and the south as the cultural and political heart of England. But it has also—importantly—provided a store of values which northerners have been happy to seize to proclaim their own and their region’s identity and worth vis-à-vis the south.¹¹ And the South has its own space-myth, one which idealizes a rural past peopled with a benevolent gentry and contented peasantry bound together through rituals such as cricket, the quintessentially “English” game, played out on that most “English” of sport stages, the village green.¹²

The narratives that construct the HaxeY Hood can be seen to work similarly to express and construct identities, feelings, and images, to make and mesh the place and its people. The game is a sequence of dramatic events played out by a cast of hundreds, with elements of rising action, climax, and resolution. It is also interwoven with narrative songs and rituals that echo its main themes, and it is the climax of a longer-running tale that begins on New Year’s Eve. Finally, all of these are convergent streams within a geographically and historically broader flow of media, folklorist, and historical (popular and academic) narratives of the HaxeY Hood—including, of course, the one that I presented at the beginning of this article.

The HaxeY Hood is suffused with meanings of place identity, locality, and belonging. In the week between New Year’s Eve and the day on which the game is contested, the movements of its central characters mark out HaxeY as the figurative heart of the Isle of

Axholme. The village is the point from which the Fool, the Lord, and his Boggins set out each evening to visit homes and pubs in neighbouring communities, and to which they return in the early hours of each morning. On the eve and day of the game, hundreds of visitors, some strangers and many Haxonians who have migrated from the village, travel the same routes in reverse. With each journey, they inscribe Haxey once more as not just a physical place, but a place of meaning, a place in the geography of the imagination and the heart, because for all it is where the Hood is played, and for many it is also home.

On game day, the settings for key actions such as the Fool's face painting and his speech are focal points of the village—the green, the pubs, the main street, the parish church. Or, they are places that define Haxey, or markers that direct travellers along the road to somewhere else that—pointedly—is not Haxey. The game begins in a ploughed field on the boundary separating the village from neighbouring Westwoodside and it is there that much of the struggle is waged. The road junction at Haxey's northeasternmost limit frequently appears in old photographs as the stage for a pre-game assembly. There, around an old-fashioned signpost whose arms indicate distances to other settlements in



Phil Coggan, "The Lord" (1996). *Courtesy of the author*

and beyond the Isle of Axholme—Epworth 3½ miles, Crowle 9½ miles, Goole 22 miles—the Lord, Fool, and Boggins raise their glasses to toast the Hood. At one of the outer edges of Haxey, the signpost locates the village relative to other places, and the Hood gathering at its base highlights Haxey's status as a geographic and cultural hub around which significant events revolve. Similarly, the routes that participants take in different phases of the game begin at, move away from, and return to a central location, a home—the pub or, if (as sometimes happens) the Sway roams into the surrounding countryside, Haxey village. Such wide-range wanderings are highlighted in oral and written histories of the game, as are occasions on which the Hood has been wrenched or stolen from Haxey, or when mavericks and outsiders have defied custom and surreptitiously smuggled it out, or carried it off by some means other than “swaying,” or merely threatened to do so. These misadventures, and the Hoods safe return after them, figure as moments of high drama in narratives of the custom and boldly underline its connotations of home.¹³

On Hood Day the preliminaries and the game itself have long served as rituals that affirm belonging. Into the 1930s, the bells of the parish church signalled the start of the festivities and called the community together; one of the Boggins' roles was to shepherd strangers to the village into the Sway, to insist that everyone must take part. This coercive communality is a favourite theme in the oral and written narratives of present-day Haxonians. Tom Major remembers it as a feature of “the olden days.... Anybody who was walking down, or even... cars, if you was walking down you was thrown in t' Sway.”¹⁴ Jeremy Cooper, author of the Hood bands own history of the game, recalls a similar tale from the 1940s of a travelling salesman visiting Haxey on January 6. “When he attempted to drive by the Sway,” Cooper writes, “he was halted, taken out of the car and the keys were thrown into the middle of the struggle. He was then invited to retrieve them.”¹⁵ According to Doc Rowe, anthropologist and long-time visitor to Haxey on Hood Day, the Sway particularly symbolizes “a very intense feeling of locality and belonging.”¹⁶ The close bonds between the Hoods central characters are cemented through customary rituals. W.B. Stonehouse describes a ceremony of “salting” as part of the initiation of the Hood band, and Newall notes that salt was a traditional “seal of friendship.”¹⁷ These links extend historically, too. Among the present day Lord's company are men whose fathers and grandfathers were Boggins before them and whose sons expect to carry on the custom after them: the families of Jeremy Cooper (Boggin), Phil Coggan (the Lord), and Dale Smith (the Fool) have long been associated with the Hood. The Hood is thus a mechanism both for building the community of Haxey and making its history.¹⁸

It is all the more valuable in this regard because it has endured where other occasions for gathering have not. Customarily, both the Hood and the midsummer “Feast” and fair were days when family and friends returned to Haxey and celebrated together. Ethel Rudkin noted in her 1932 eyewitness account of the Hood that it was “a general holiday” and that “people invited their friends to come for [it] as a more important event than our modern Christmas.”¹⁹ The midsummer feast and fair died out in the late 1930s but the Hood lived on and its popularity continues to challenge that of the other major winter holidays. “You can take Christmas and take New Year,” says one Haxonian, “but there's only one day round here... that's Haxey Hood.”²⁰ “It's better than Christmas and NewYear,” former Boggin Stephen Mitchell insists.²¹

Hood narratives conjure up a distinct physical and spatial image of Haxey, too, as a place that is remote and inaccessible—adrift, almost—in time and space. This clearly has a material basis. Until Vermuyden’s engineers drained the surrounding marshes, the village was liable to be cut off from other communities in the Isle of Axholme and the rest of Lincolnshire. But for two hundred years or so, Haxey has been physically connected to and easily accessible from these places, its remoteness closed down to nothing. Yet still the sense of Haxey as somewhere and somehow distant and isolated remains. This distinctiveness and separateness continues to be expressed and felt at the cultural level, and especially through the Hood. One motif of the histories and tales that builds this image suggests subtly that the custom is and always has been unique to Haxey. The historical record indicates that at one time a number of other villages in the Isle of Axholme—notably, nearby Belton, Epworth, and Westwoodside—had their own Hoods, but those associated with the Haxey custom who acknowledge these games undercut their legitimacy even as they do so. For instance, according to Rudkin, a Hood was played as recently as 1932 in Epworth, though she adds insinuatingly that it was not “kept up as regularly” as the Haxey game and was “said to be only an imitation” of the latter. Likewise, Cooper’s *A Fool’s Game* grants that there were other Hoods but denotes them “Imitation Hood Games,” simultaneously questioning their authenticity. Haxey Hood narratives also affirm the singularity of the custom, and therefore the place, by disavowing any connection to morris dancing, mumming plays, “Plough Jags,” and other Twelfth Night practices that were once widespread in Lincolnshire and neighbouring Nottinghamshire.²² These practices share many common elements with the Hood, but admitting such close kinship would detract from the Haxey game’s uniqueness, and Haxonians who have been quizzed about these associations dismiss them. Neither Tom Major nor one of Rudkin’s main informants had “ever heard” of such a connection.²³

Haxey’s distinctiveness and separateness, then, is no longer and not merely physical; it is cultural and it is temporal. Both natives of the village and those who are foreign to it have constructed this identity. “Outsider” accounts of the Hood have characterized both people and place as so foreign as to be almost frightening or traditional to the point of backward, and these representations throw Haxey’s spatial, cultural, and historical distance into long perspective. In some instances, outsiders use the Hood as a measure of their own moral and cultural superiority. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this was the vantage point from which an item in a county newspaper was written in the 1830s at a time when many professedly forward-looking, reform-minded people attacked such customs:

The anniversary of [the Haxey Hood], which originated in the remote ages of ignorance and barbarity was celebrated on Monday last; in the open fields of Haxey in the Isle of Axholme. Although this coarse amusement is losing much of its celebrity, and the attendance was not nearly so numerous as in years gone by yet to the disgrace of our country and despite the “march of intellect,” yet several hundred persons joined in the sport [sic].²⁴

This type of characterization fits into a long-established convention of viewing fen-dwellers and others who inhabit geographical and cultural margins as retrograde. “[They are] a kind of people,” William Camden wrote of fen people in 1637, “according to the nature of the place where they dwell rude, uncivil, and envious to all others whom they call

Uplandmen [sic].” Later accounts of the HaxeY Hood, both in the literature on folk customs and in the popular press and electronic media of the late twentieth century, evoke notions of quaintness and rusticity, if not boorishness, though they are not overtly disparaging. Some of these are written from a stance often favoured by authors who wish to emphasize the primitiveness and foreignness of a place—that of the intrepid yet wary explorer. Having heard tales of the violence of the Sway, this character (typically a member of the regional or national media corps) journeys to HaxeY on Hood Day expecting to find a bleak, alien isle where people fight elemental battles for possession of a quasi-magical object. Apprehended thus, HaxeY becomes a place in which the order and rationality of the modern world is temporarily shelved, into which the mad, chaotic, frightening, and violent disorder of the past spills. Such things, it is implied, could only happen in HaxeY, a place that time and “progress” forgot.²⁵ So beyond the ken of the normal is the HaxeY Hood, suggests a 1990s county newspaper, that even that most “alien” of all aliens, the extra-terrestrial, “would turn around and go home confused” if a witness to the start of the game.²⁶

Haxonians’ sense of themselves share central elements of this image, including those which represent them as disorderly and verging on the atavistic—as the earlier allusions to



Dale Smith, “The Fool” (1996). *Courtesy of the author*

the coercive tendencies of the Sway indicate. But the cultural distance, which could be used to cast Haxey and its people as frightening and almost a pantomime of the foreign, in Haxonian hands becomes an assertion of an island people's proud isolationism and difference. This is nowhere more eloquently expressed than in Cooper's history of the Hood. There, Haxey's geographic and historical locations and identities merge, the past is rendered a mysterious place, and the place is located in a distant history. Musing on the origins of the Haxey Hood, as many others have, Cooper writes that its "secret" lies "somewhere in the dark, misty past of a marshland isle." The draining of the surrounding area transformed this "region of boggy fenland," and "quite dramatically, the ancient Isle lost its unique identity to become just another part of Lincolnshire." "As for the Istonians," Cooper writes in what amounts almost to a lament, "they traded in their hunting bows and arrows for plough shares and resigned themselves to being farmers." The nostalgic, even romanticized, tone in which Cooper chooses to cast this history of Haxey is important. It expresses regret at the removal of the fen that once cut off the place and people and gave them a distinct identity and, in doing so, re-establishes that watery barrier. And this is just how the Hood works its constitutive power. The game itself and the stories people tell about it are symbolic apparatuses (to use Anthony Cohen's term) that figuratively reconstruct Haxey's ancient topography, its boundaries and distance. Through the Hood, the people of Haxey annually re-assert their "unique identity;" because of the Hood, Haxey is much more than "just another part of Lincolnshire."²⁷

Of Men and Women

One of the most important methods of achieving this construction of Haxey's sense of place is through the Hood's purported deep roots in the past, through the power of its tradition. Tradition is something upon which, Harvey writes, "the assertion of any place-bound identity has to rest at some point," and the Hood offers Haxonians an apparently firm base upon which to set their historical sense of themselves and their place-identity and image. This is the Lady de Mowbray legend, the most widely known of several "explanations" of the game's origins, which attributes the founding of the Hood to a Twelfth Night encounter between a medieval lady of the manor of Haxey and a group of peasants. According to the story, as Lady de Mowbray rode across Haxey Hill, a gust of wind caught hold of her hood and carried it away across the fields. Thirteen Haxey peasants working nearby saw this and took off in pursuit and, after a strenuous chase, one of them recovered the hood. A big, strong fellow, he was too shy to return the headpiece to its owner and, instead, handed it to one of his work-mates to do so. Lady de Mowbray was so entertained by the spectacle of the peasants chasing after her hood, and so pleased at their gallantry in retrieving it for her, that she promised every man a measure of land on Haxey Hill if they would re-enact the incident each year on Twelfth Night. To the man who first caught the hood but was too shy to return it, her ladyship gave the name "The Fool," while she dubbed his bolder friend, "The Lord," and the rest, "Boggins."²⁸

The details in the numerous tellings of the Lady de Mowbray story vary, but the central action and symbolism remain the same. A group of men, inspired by a woman, engage in a severe test, a demanding contest against each other, against the earth and the elements, and are rewarded with possession of a piece of land. The legend thus pulls

together into one appealing narrative both topophilic sentiments and ideas and constructions of gender. It asserts the legitimacy of Haxonians' claims to the land of which they were dispossessed in the seventeenth century. It firmly anchors the Hood, and therefore Haxe, in a romantic past which persists still in the village's place-image. It accords the men of Haxe the status of noble doers of chivalrous deeds. And it establishes a configuration of female and male roles and attributes which runs as a thread upon which all the Hood narratives can be strung.

In this gendered arrangement, women are marginal, but nonetheless crucial. They are marginal in the sense that they do not participate physically in any of the core action. Lady de Mowbray watches as the original Boggins chase after her hood. Women watch while adult men engage in the present-day Sway, and there are no women or female characters in the contemporary Hood band. But women are crucial insofar as it is a woman (Lady de Mowbray) who inspires the "original" playing for the Hood. And they are crucial in a symbolic sense because, in accordance with longstanding cultural conventions, "woman" is the metonymy for home, hearth, refuge, even the pub to which male participants in the Hood return, to which the victors bring the actual Hood once their odyssey is over. Furthermore, women are as numerous as men in the congregation that assembles for each enactment of the custom and without them much of its meaning would be fundamentally diminished. And so, although women are on the edges of the Hood, they are always in men's "field of vision," always there as potential catalysts of male action.²⁹

But clearly it is men who are at the centre of the Hoods action. And the central activity in which they engage is a bruising, physical contest which calls forth qualities that have long been bywords for masculinity: aggression, power, the courage to take hard knocks, the willingness to give them. These ideals are drawn from a well of "commonsense" notions of manliness, but the masculinity that the Hood evokes is also one that bears traces of the topophilic sentiment which Richard Holt has attributed to the sport heroes of the north of England. The "hard men" Holt describes are icons of an industrial, urban, northern masculinity, able "to give and take punishment," "tough but rarely vicious," inclined to "drunkenness, swearing and the odd punch."³⁰ Those who gather in Haxe on Twelfth Night are their rural, earthy, "agricultural", counterparts. In the Sway they lock their bodies into the heaving, sprawling battle for the Hood. They fight for hours through mud and (sometimes) manure, raising clouds of "stale alcohol and steaming sweat," trailing "torn clothes," "discarded boots," the occasional bloodied and bruised "victim."³¹ Nothing stands in the way of this mighty phalanx. Hedges, ditches, walls and vehicles are all liable to fall before it;³² also the rule of law, for custom has it that there is "no law" in Haxe on Hood Day.³³ Victorious or not, each participant emerges "muddied but unbowed"³⁴ from the annual melee, his manliness once again affirmed. There are individual local heroes, too, like Les Lowthorpe. One of the acclaimed "strong men of the village," Lowthorpe is said in his prime to have been able to stand in the middle of the Sway and swing and steer it at will. Feats of strength such as this are one way in which the men of the Hood acquire a distinctive renown; hard drinking is another time-honored test of their manly worth. The Hood band endures a prolonged trial-by-alcohol as it journeys through the Isle of Axholme in the week before Twelfth Night, and this continues through most of the next day and well into the night. Stan Boor, Lord from 1972 to 1986, recalls one comrade who "used to go home each night

with a barrel of beer in his belly,” and tells of rescuing sundry insensible others from toilet stools and stalls.³⁵ If contemporary Boggins do not aspire to these legendary feats, some certainly drink enough between New Year and Hood Day to warrant taking the week off work. On Hood Day itself they are joined by hundreds of others—male and female—who throng the main street of Haxey turning it temporarily into one long public house.³⁶

The Hoods resonant gender and topophilic tones mark it as what, after Annette Kolodny’s work, might be called a “lay of the land.” Kolodny, along with Kay Schaffer, Paul Zweig, and others, sees an enduring tradition in western cultures and literature in which the land is gendered and women’s and men’s relationships and interactions with it are of a type.³⁷ The landscape and nature in adventure literature, for example, are generally “feminine,” “metaphorical wom[e]n” to which/whom men are drawn and wish to possess, penetrate, and dominate in their search for themselves and a quest for a heightened manliness. R.S. Phillips notes that in Robert Ballantyne’s fiction, the Canadian Northwest is a feminine “literary landscape” upon which the male protagonists map their masculinity as they yarn, brag, and wrestle their way to renown. Johanna Garvey finds a similar representation of place and space—and men’s relationships to them—in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, in which the city of Dublin is initially gendered feminine, but is then “filled in and thus conquered” by men. It is only the marginal, liminal parts of Dublin—the maternity hospital and the strand—that escape the masculine imprint, that remain women’s spaces.³⁸

These gendered representations and relationships are major elements of the Hoods symbolism, and in the three songs that are sung repeatedly throughout the twelve-day period in which the custom is celebrated they are given lyric voice. “Drink Old England Dry” (“Cannons”), “John Barleycorn,” and “Farmer’s Boy” all feature male characters or metaphorical men possessing, penetrating, fighting over, defending, or winning the land (the metaphorical woman) and real women. In “Drink Old England Dry,” which probably originated during the Napoleonic Wars but also references later conflicts such as the Boer War, it is queen and country—England, Victoria, or Britannia herself—that is to be defended. The song is both a call to arms and a machismo taunt to the enemy, a jingoistic slight on their drinking, fighting, manly prowess:

1. Now come ye brave boys as I’ve told you before
Come drink me brave boys and we’ll boldly call for more
For the French they invade us
And they say that they will try will try
And they say that they shall come and drink old England dry....
2. Supposing we should meet with the Germans by the way
Ten thousand to one we will show them British play
With our swords and our cutlasses
We’ll fight until we die, we die
Before that they shall come and drink old England dry....
3. Then up spake Lord Roberts so famed and renown
He swears he be true to his country and his crown
For the cannons they shall rattle
And the bullets they shall fly, shall fly
Before that they should come and drink old England dry....³⁹

“John Barleycorn” is a much older song—a mystical, allegorical ballad that is probably rooted in pre-Christian fertility rituals and mimetic magic.⁴⁰ “John Barleycorn”—the man, the plant, and the ale which is brewed from its grain—“dies,” is buried, and in the spring comes back to life. He grows to manhood, is cut down, threshed, ground, fermented and made into “St. John” who, drunk from a nut-brown jug can “make the merriest man.” In verses two and three, John Barleycorn rises from the earth and death, both of which connote the female and “woman,” and becomes a man and “master of them all.”⁴¹ His ultimate triumph in the final verses of the song is to unmake those he has at first made merry, including a young woman reduced to a state of abandonment and rendered as vulnerable as a newborn babe:

2. So they buried him on yonder hill so high
And they threw soil over his head
And there he laid a considerable time
Till they though he was almost dead
Till they thought he was almost dead.
3. He laid till spring time of the year
Till the weather was pleasant and mild
And there St. John how he plucked up his head
And he didn't not want no harm
And he didn't not want no harm.
4. He laid till mid summers time of the year
Till the weather was pleasant and warm
And there St. John how he grew a beard
And he soon became a man
And he soon became a man....
9. You can pour red wine into a glass
Pour brandy into a can
You can pour St. John in a nut brown jug
And you'll make the merriest man
And you'll make the merriest man.
10. He'll make a maid dance around this room
Stark naked as ever she was born
He'll make a parson pawn his boots
For a little John Barleycorn
For a little John Barleycorn.



The Sway. *Courtesy Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*

“Farmer’s Boy” is the most literal of the Hoods songs.⁴² It begins with a young boy trudging the desolate winter landscape in search of work. Fetching up at a farmhouse door, he asks to be taken on or at the very least given shelter for the night. The farmer’s wife and daughter eloquently plead the wanderer’s case (the latter “whilst the tears rolled down her cheek,“) and by the final verse, the lad has earned his manhood, the father’s daughter as a wife and through her, acquired the farm. The final verse is as neat and pithy a lay of the land as one could find anywhere in the Hood’s ensemble of gendered and topophilic tales:

In length of time he grew a man
 The good old farmer died
 He left the lad the farm that he had
 And a daughter for his bride
 Now the lad that was no farmer
 How he often smiles with joy
 And he blesses the day he came that way
 To be a farmer's boy, and to be a farmer's boy.

Many other sentiments, meanings, and images could be read from the Haxey Hood; here I have sketched only those that I find especially compelling. These resonate in a very personal way, for I grew up in another village in the Isle of Axholme and can “remember” being told about the Hood and Lady de Mowbray when I was a child. I had a strong sense then of the Isle’s uniqueness in Lincolnshire, and Haxey’s uniqueness in the Isle. We were all “yellowbellies,” right enough, an appellation that others from outside the county used to denote us as fen-dwellers, but we were not from just any part of Lincolnshire. The Rivers Trent, Idle, and Don, the moors, marshes, carrs, and wastes that allowed us to claim an isolated, island status made us distinct and we were conscious of that; we had a definite sense of our place. Haxey was and still is even more distinct because of the Hood. I have indicated here how I see this “ancient” custom constructing a singular sense of the village and its people, setting them apart from other Islonians, and connecting them with each other. I have also indicated how the Hood constructs a set of hierarchical gender relationships and a sense of hidebound gender identities; how it is driven by the dynamics of power that are implicit in contemporary scholarly understandings of gender. In my reading of the narratives that make up the Hood, of the game itself with the Sway at its heart, I discern a confirmation and celebration of a patriarchal, proprietary, and pugnacious masculinity. I see a configuration of place and men and women that is deeply rooted in western culture, deeply rooted in the rich mother earth of Haxey. What else is to be made of this and other similar cultural and historical sporting texts, I leave to others and to future research.

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1. Jeremy J. Cooper, *A Fool's Game: The Ancient Tradition of the Haxey Hood* (Haxey: The Lord and Boggins of the Haxey Hood, 1993), 11. In modern English, the Hood rallying cry is:
 House against house
 Town against town
 If a man meets a man
 Knock him down
 But don't hurt him.
 2. I attended the Haxey Hood in 1996 and 1998. This account of the game is based on my own observations, interviews, and audio and visual recordings made on those occasions, and Cooper, *A Fool's Game*, 22-23, 28-30. See also Venetia Newall, “Throwing the Hood at Haxey: A Lincolnshire Twelfth Night Custom,” *Folk Life* 18 (1980): 7-8, 9, 10-13; Ethel H. Rudkin, “An Account of the Haxey Hood Game,” *Lincolnshire Folklore*, Sep. 1932, 296-301; A. Pearson, “The Haxey Hood,” *The Lincolnshire Poacher*, Winter 195-53 31-33; W. Peck, *A Topographical Account of the Isle of Axholme*, Vol. 1 (Doncaster: Thomas & Hunsley, 1815), 277-278; Phillip D. Taylor, “Haxey Hood’ Game,” *Lincolnshire Magazine*, Sep. 1932, 61; Mabel Peacock, “The Hood Game at Haxey,” *Folk-Lore* 7

- (1896); W.B. Stonehouse, *The History and Topography of the Isle of Axholme* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme & Co., 1839), 291.
3. Anthony Delves, "Popular Recreation and Social Conflict in Derby, 1800-1850," in *Popular Culture and Class Conflicts 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, ed. Eileen and Stephen Yeo (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 97-98; Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 39-40, 82, 107, 108-09, 134-45, 166. See also Steven Tischler, *Football and Businessmen: The Origins of Professional Soccer in England* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981) 13-16; Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 10. For poaching as a protest against the denial of access and usage rights, see, for example, E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Acts* (New York, 1975); Harry Hopkins, *The Long Affray: The Poaching Wars 1760-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985); Roger B. Manning, *Hunters and Poachers: A Social and Cultural History of Unlawful Hunting in England, 1485-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
 4. Newall, "Throwing the Hood," 18 (quote). For a more complex and detailed examination of the struggles over drainage and land in the Isle of Axholme in the seventeenth century, see Keith Lindley, *Fenland Riots and the English Revolution* (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1982). On seventeenth-century agrarian protest more generally, see Robert B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1590-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
 5. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974); idem, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1991); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Robert Sack, *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought: A Geographic Perspective* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); John Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994).
 6. Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 4.
 7. Helen Gardner, "Clive Staples Lewis," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 51 (1965): 421, quoted in Tuan, *Space and Place*, 184-85.
 8. Tuan, *Space and Place*, 159, 162.
 9. On the importance of place and space to social and cultural analysis, see, for example, Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 206-209, 224; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 203-04, 226-39, 302-07.
 10. John Pettmann, "Learning About Power and Powerlessness: Aborigines and White Australia's Bicentenary," *Race and Class* 29 (1988): 69-86; Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 4, 212; Anthony I? Cohen, ed., *Symbolising Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in British Cultures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 1-9, 11, 13, 16-17; Scott K. Phillips, "Natives and Incomers: The Symbolism of Belonging in Muker Parish, North Yorkshire," in Cohen, *Symbolising Boundaries*, 141-54.
 11. Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 34, 7-9, 207-51.
 12. Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport*, 148-65. On sport as a mechanism for binding people to place, see Bale, *Sports Geography*, (London: E. & F.N. Sport, 1989), 14-26, 164-76.
 13. Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 12, 14, 25, 35, 47; Tom Major, interview by author, tape recording, Haxeys, 5 Jan. 1996.
 14. Major, interview; Stan Jarvis, interview by author, Haxeys, 5 Jan. 1996; Newspaper cutting, n.d., Haxeys Folder, Local Studies Library, Lincoln; Taylor, "'Haxeys Hood' Game," 61; Rudkin, "An Account of the Haxeys Hood," 296.
 15. Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 45.

16. *Ibid.*, 5.
17. Stonehouse, *History and Topography of the Isle of Axholme*, MS Appendix 16, cited in Newall, "Throwing the Hood at Haxey," 9.
18. Maxine Smith, Noreen Smith, interviews with author, Haxey, 6 Jan. 1996; Pearson, "The Haxey Hood," 33; *Lincolnshire Echo*, 8 Jan. 1996; Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 29.

A Robert Coggan from Haxey was one of the victims of the seventeenth-century violence that Newall identifies as the possible origin of the game. He was shot and killed in a confrontation between Vermuyden's workers and Haxey townspeople trying to prevent the drainage work on Haxey Carr in August of 1628. Lindley, *Fenland Riots*, 73-74. From the late sixteenth century on Coggans appear regularly in a number of Haxey records—as landholders, sextons, and churchwardens. In the Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln, see the Haxey Rental Book, 1594-1625, Haxey Parish Records 23/58; Expense Account of John Curtis, Churchwarden, 1785, Haxey Parish Records 7/3; Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Catherine Shore, Mar. 24, 1710, Monson Papers 38/7/27a; Indenture of Bargain and Sale, Tong Papers 2/43.

19. *White's History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Lincolnshire* (1856; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 59; Rudkin, "Account of the Haxey Hood," 294.
20. Major interview; Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 34 (quote).
21. *Lincolnshire Echo*, Jan. 8, 1996.
22. Even after extensive draining of the Lincolnshire fens and marshes, often the easiest way of travelling through them was along the many waterways. For example, when Daniel Defoe undertook his grand tour of Great Britain in the 1740s, he embarked for his journey to the Isle of Axholme from the inland port of Gainsborough and went by boat along on the River Trent, the eastern boundary of the Isle. Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain, 1742*, vol. III, ed. Samuel Richardson, (London: J. Osborn et al., 1742; repr. New York: Garland Publishing, 1975), 9.

There are several indications that the Hood is a local variant of Twelfth Night customs that were once widespread in Lincolnshire. A regional newspaper suggests as much in a comment on the disappearance of Plough Monday rituals: "While Haxey maintains its old traditions, Plough Monday passed without any signs of the rollicking ploughboys in any other village of North Lincolnshire. I am afraid we have seen the last of them, as it is three years now since they paraded the villages along the Trent bank, which was their last stronghold." *Hull Times*, 12 Jan. 1935. On Plough Monday customs in Nottinghamshire which included "Plough Boys," "Jacks," "Jags," "Stots," and "Bullocks," see John Granby, "Nottinghamshire's Plough Mondays," *The Nottinghamshire Guardian*, Saturday, 10 Jan. 1953, 10; M.W. Barley, "Plough Plays in Nottinghamshire," *The Nottinghamshire Countryside* 13 (1951): 1-2; Newspaper cuttings, n.d., Box L39.8, Local Studies Library, Retford.

23. Major, interview; Rudkin, "An Account of the Haxey Hood Game," 300.
24. Newspaper cutting, 11 Jan. 1836, Haxey Folder, Local Studies Library, Lincoln.
25. William Camden, *Britain* (1637), 491, quoted in Lindley, *Fenland Riots*, 2; Pearson, "Haxey Hood," 31, 33; *Epworth Bells*, Jan. 12, 1929; *Hull Times*, Jan. 12, 1935; *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, Dec. 19, 1959, 36-37; Mabel A. Rees, "The Haxey Hood Game," *Lincolnshire Life*, Jan. 1979, 26-27; Dinah Lawrence, "The Haxey Hood Game," *Lincolnshire Life*, Jan. 1986, 25; Mike Feeney, "The Ancient Game of Haxey Hood," *Lincolnshire Life*, Jan. 1994; William Andrews, ed., *Bygone Lincolnshire*, Vol. 1 (Hull: A. Brown & Sons, 1981), 199.
26. *Lincolnshire Echo*, Jan. 8, 1996.
27. Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 13; Cohen, *Symbolising Boundaries*, 1, 4, 7-8.
28. Harvey, *Condition of Pastmodernity*, 303. Every account of the Hood relates some version of the Lady de Mowbray story. The present one includes only the elements that are common to all these. There are minor differences, such as whether Lady de Mowbray was an old or young woman; whether the hood was red, black, or made of silk; and the amount of land that she gave to the Boggins. It would be an interesting exercise to compare these variations and determine when and where they originated—the kind of analysis that has been done for the Robin Hood legends, an-

- other rich folk tradition from this region of England. On the latter, see, for example, Jeffrey L. Singman, *Robin Hood: the Shaping of the Legend* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998); Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); J.C. Holt, ed., *Robin Hood* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989).
29. On women as peripheral figures, yet nonetheless vital precipitants of male action in narrative, see, for example, Cathy Brigham, "Identity, Masculinity and Desire in Daniel Bradley's Fiction," *Contemporary Literature* 36 (1995), 289-316, 305 (quote). On the identification of women with home and hearth in the western literary tradition see, R.S. Phillips, "Space for Boyish Men and Manly Boys: The Canadian Northwest in Robert Ballantyne's Adventure Stories," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 5 (Fall 1996), 54, 57; Johanna X. Garvey, "City Limits: Reading Gender and Urban Spaces in *Ulysses*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41 (1995), 110-11, 116, 119. On the symbolic associations between women and public houses, see, for example, Valerie Hey, *Patriarchy and Pub Culture* (London: Tavistock, 1986); Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 151-74.
 30. Richard Holt, "Heroes of the North," in *Sport and Identity in the North of England*, ed. Jack Williams and Jeff Hill, (Keele, Staffs.: University of Keele Press, 1996), 137-64, 154-55 (quotes).
 31. Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 14.
 32. *Ibid.*, 22.
 33. Taylor, "'HaxeY Hood' Game," 61; Rudkin, "An Account of the HaxeY Hood Game," 301.
 34. Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 14.
 35. *Ibid.*, 23, 34 (quotes).
 36. *Ibid.*, 22-23; Smith interview; Martyn Halsall, "Virgin Territory for Beer and Scrimmages," *Guardian*, 6 Jan. 1988, 1.
 37. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Paul Zweig, *The Adventurer* (London: Dent, 1974).
 38. Phillips, "Space for Boyish Men and Manly Boys", 46-64, 54, 61 (quotes); Garvey, "City Limits: Reading Gender and Urban Spaces in *Ulysses*," 108-23, 108 (quote).
 39. The lyrics of all three songs as quoted here are from Cooper, *Fool's Game*, 36-40.
 40. Reginald Nettel, *Sing a Song of England: A Social History of Traditional Song* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), 23-27, 45, 171.
 41. *Ibid.*, 25.
 42. Albert L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 76-78; Newall, "Throwing the Hood at HaxeY," 10; Nettel, *Sing a Song of England*, 188; Iolo A. Williams, *English Folk-Song and Dance* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1935), 71.