Civic Government and Identity in the Provincial Towns of Late Medieval England, c. 1370 to c. 1500

By

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Declarations

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. No part of this thesis, except where specifically indicated in the text, has been submitted for any other qualification.

This dissertation, excluding the bibliography and footnotes, is 62,604 words in length and so does not exceed the limit prescribed by the Degree Committee, Faculty of History.
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Summary of thesis

My doctoral research explores civic government and identity in the provincial towns of late medieval England and particularly focuses upon urban political culture in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Unlike most lay authority figures in the period, town officials did not rule by hereditary right or by conquest, nor were they appointed by their social superiors. Instead most were selected by a group of their fellow-citizens, who were usually described as the ‘worthy’ men of the town – a loose definition suggesting both wealth and moral integrity. Consequently, it was necessary for contemporaries to develop an ideology to justify the power of these men and it is this ideology and how it was put into practice which is the chief concern of the thesis.

Civic officials needed to present themselves as worthy of exercising legitimate power. They did this through ostentatious acts of piety and charity and an intense emphasis upon the personal morality and respectability of local officials. The project considers how contemporary images of just rule were adapted by town leaders for the urban setting and how religious rhetoric influenced their decisions in government assemblies and when presiding in the local courts. Christian ideas concerning what made a good or a bad city were important to town governments. Civic records highlight the tensions inherent in attempts to emulate the heavenly Jerusalem and to augment their own power through local building, cleaning and morality campaigns. Ultimately, alas, creating heaven on earth remained an unobtainable goal, but given the attractiveness of the imagery to local rulers, it is unsurprising that they remained intent on trying: ‘The greatness and the wealth of the nations will be brought into the city. But nothing that is impure will enter the city, nor anyone who does shameful things or tells lies’ (Apocalypse 21: 26-7).
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Rosemary Horrox, for all her hard work with this project and particularly for her careful and detailed reading of the various drafts. Matthew Davies, Mark Ormod, Peter Fleming and Elizabeth New provided advice and suggestions for further reading. Helen Fulton and Clive Burgess kindly sent me advance copies of their forthcoming work. Fred Hobson explained modern legal concepts of corporations and 'limited' companies to me. Staff at the libraries and record offices where I carried out my research were uniformly helpful, and I am especially grateful to Susan Maddock and Freda Wilkins-Jones of the Norfolk Record Office and Alison Brown of the Bristol Record Office for assisting me to obtain microfilm copies of various manuscripts, as well as placing their expert knowledge of the local archives at my disposal.

During my period of doctoral study, I was fortunate enough to be employed as a Research Assistant to Anthony Musson on the British Academy-funded project ‘Law and Image in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500’, a job which provided me with an opportunity to examine a wide range of legal sources, as well as the hard cash to complete my doctorate. Indeed, given that much of this thesis explores the interplay between public and private forms of income, it is perhaps appropriate that the project was paid for by a very wide range of sources. Grants for research trips were given by the Cambridge Historical Society, the Clare College Travel Fund and the Richard III Society. The Ellen McArthur Fund provided a grant towards living costs in my final year. The vast majority of funding, however, came from my parents, Clive and Nuala Martin, and I am very grateful to them for providing me with the opportunity to proceed to doctoral research, something which would, quite literally, not have been possible without their support. My father also performed the Herculean task of proof-reading the entire thesis. I was fortunate, in fact, when it came to proof-readers, to be inundated with offers of assistance and I am also grateful in this regard to Padraig and Hilary Byrne and Abigail Wills who read various sections and made a number of very useful suggestions for improvement.

It is customary to end the acknowledgements with a vote of thanks to one’s spouse. This thesis is no exception and while the expression of gratitude is
conventional, it is nonetheless heartfelt. Andrew has assisted me in numerous practical ways – not least by acting as a 24-hour computer call-out consultant – but, above all, he married me, which made the thesis worth writing.
List of abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
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<td>BRO</td>
<td>Bristol Record Office</td>
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<td>CCALS</td>
<td>Chester and Cheshire Archives and Local Studies Record Office</td>
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<td>CCR</td>
<td>Calendar of Close Rolls</td>
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<td>EconHR</td>
<td>Economic History Review</td>
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<td>EETS</td>
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<td>EHR</td>
<td>English Historical Review</td>
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<td>KLBA</td>
<td>Kings Lynn Borough Archives</td>
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<td>NCR</td>
<td>Norwich City Records</td>
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<td>NRO</td>
<td>Norfolk Record Office</td>
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<td>P&amp;P</td>
<td>Past and Present</td>
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<tr>
<td>REED</td>
<td>Records of Early English Drama.</td>
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<td>SR</td>
<td>Statutes of the Realm (10 vols., London, 1810-28)</td>
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<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives</td>
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<td>VCH</td>
<td>Victoria County History</td>
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Editorial note

When quoting from primary material in Latin, French or Middle Scots I have placed a translation in modern English in the text. In the case of manuscript sources, all translations are my own unless otherwise stated and I have included the quotation in the original language in the footnote. Quotations in Middle English are placed in the text, with unusual words explained in the footnotes. The letter thorn is rendered as ‘th’ and the letter yogh as either ‘gh’ or ‘z’, as is most appropriate. All abbreviations have been extended and the punctuation and capitalization modernised.

Some of the manuscript sources I have used have been printed in part in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, most notably Robert Ricart’s The Maire of Bristow is Kalendar, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, Camden Society New Series 5 (1871) and The Little Red Book of Bristol, ed. F.B. Bickley (2 vols. Bristol and London, 1900). These volumes are often of variable accuracy. Where possible, therefore, I have checked the original manuscript and any direct quotations are taken from this, but I have also cited the printed source.

All biblical quotations and references are taken from The Holy Bible: translated from the Latin Vulgate and diligently compared with other editions in divers languages (Douay, A.D. 1609; Rheims, A.D. 1582) published as revised and annotated by authority, with a preface by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster (London, 1914).
List of Illustrations


2. Initial ‘E’ of ‘Edwardus from Edward III’s royal charter to Bristol, 1347. Bristol, BRO, 01250. Reproduced with the permission of the Bristol Record Office.

Introduction

This thesis explores urban government identity in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The main focus is how late medieval town officials explained and justified their power, to the king, to the people they governed and — perhaps most importantly of all — to themselves. Unlike most lay authority figures in the period, urban officials did not rule by hereditary right or by conquest, nor were they appointed by the king or a nobleman who might be regarded as possessing this ‘natural’ right to govern. Instead, in most towns, local leaders were selected by a group of their fellow-citizens, who were usually described as the ‘worthy’ or ‘worshipful’ men of the town, a loose definition indicating both wealth and moral integrity. Consequently, it was necessary for contemporaries to develop an ideology to justify the power of these men. It is this ideology, how it was projected, and how it was put into practice, which is discussed here.

In order to explore as fully as possible urban attitudes towards political authority, this research has covered a broad range of English towns. In the historiography, overviews of urban culture, which treat a wide range of case-studies, have until recently been confined mainly to introductory works, such as Susan Reynolds’ Introduction to the Towns of Medieval England and Heather Swanson’s Medieval British Towns.¹ The last five years, however, have seen two important broader studies: Lorraine Attreed’s work on The King’s Towns, which focuses on York, Norwich, Exeter and Nottingham, and Christian Liddy’s War, Politics and Finance, which uses Bristol and York as its main case-studies.² Both highlight the institutional and financial aspects of urban government, with a particular emphasis upon civic interaction with the crown. Town-crown relations were undoubtedly an extremely important aspect of urban government and identity, and this topic is given substantial treatment in this thesis, but it provides only a partial view of civic politics. In addition, therefore, this project analyses urban government interaction with other sources of authority, such as neighbouring town administrations, ecclesiastical

jurisdictions and secular lords. It also discusses how officials viewed those they governed, and how they sought to shape the urban environment to reflect their political ideals.

The main focus here is on the provincial centres, an emphasis which is intended to counter-balance the historiographical concentration on London and its plentiful, but often atypical, primary sources. In the last twenty years, research on the capital has been wide-ranging and fruitful. Derek Keene has particularly focused upon the City's physical environment and, with James Galloway, its economic relationship with the surrounding hinterland. Pamela Nightingale, Matthew Davies and Anne Sutton have concentrated on the roles of the gilds and livery companies. Other scholars, like Sheila Lindenbaum, have placed a greater emphasis upon public pageantry and ceremonial. From a medieval perspective, the most recent major publication on the capital has been Caroline Barron's monograph on London in the Later Middle Ages, which draws on both her own work on the institutions of urban government and the array of scholarship in these other areas, placing a particular emphasis upon town-crown relations and civic finance.


In terms of medieval ideas about urban centres, London was clearly important, but it does not provide the whole picture. Provincial towns provided the homes of the majority of late medieval urban dwellers and had a radiating economic, cultural and social influence over those living in the surrounding countryside. Although London has received the most attention from historians, there have been numerous studies of individual provincial centres. Many of these have focused on the now fairly moribund debate concerning the economic growth or decline of towns in the post-Black Death period. There have, however, also been a number of studies which have explored aspects of civic political culture and image. The work of David Palliser, for example, has particularly examined the development of civic liberties with reference to York, but his work has broader implications for provincial town identity as a whole and he has also written a number of studies of urban topography.

The sources which form the basis of this thesis are the documents created by borough officials, and so particularly illustrate urban values. They include civic custumals, local chronicles, charters, petitions, seals, accounts, minutes of assembly meetings and records from borough courts where civic officials presided. The majority of these records are held in local archives and for this project, manuscript work has particularly focused on Chester, Norwich, Bristol and Lynn, all of which were important towns in the period from c. 1370 to c. 1500 and have left substantial extant material. Norwich, Bristol and Lynn were some of the largest and most

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7 Baker, 'Later Middle Ages', p. 192.
prosperous cities in England at this time. According to the 1377 poll tax returns, Bristol was the second largest provincial city after York, with a tax-paying population of 6,345, while Norwich was fourth on the list, with 3,952 and Lynn seventh, with 3,217. Stephen Rigby has calculated that all these towns would therefore have had total populations of between 8,000 and 15,000, although it should be noted that population estimates in this period are notoriously difficult to make. The City of Chester, as part of the royal Palatinate of the County of Cheshire, was not included in this or other taxes, but recent estimates have placed the total population at between 3,000 and 3,700 in the mid-fifteenth century. A large amount of comparative material in print from other towns has also been used, allowing me to consider provincial civic identity more broadly. In addition, use has been made of records held by the National Archives, especially petitions to parliament and to the crown. Town administrations did not exist in a vacuum, and there is considerable discussion of how town governments responded both to the central authorities and to other local forms of government, such as nearby ecclesiastical jurisdictions.

This thesis, then, has a number of aims, but fundamentally it is an attempt to take medieval town government officials on their own terms, and to consider how they perceived their own role as local governors. It is a little acknowledged truth that self-justification is important to rulers, just as important, in fact, as legitimising their role in they eyes of those they govern. Few have the heart to lead others without some sense – however misguided – that they are morally entitled to do so.

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Chapter One: The structure of urban government

While many towns had been governed by a group of citizens for centuries, in the late medieval period the roles of civic officers became increasingly formalized through royal charters of incorporation and grants of separate county status. Charters of incorporation (a term applied to these documents by modern scholars rather than by contemporaries) gave the urban community a collective legal personality.¹ The first places to receive such grants were Coventry and Hedon, in 1345 and 1348 respectively. In the fifteenth century, beginning with Hull in 1440, grants of incorporation became more elaborate and generally included what constitutional historians like Martin Weinbaum have regarded as the core values of incorporation: perpetual succession; the right to sue and be sued at law as a collective; the power to hold lands in common; the authority to issue local ordinances; the right to have and use a common seal.² Grants of separate county status, beginning with a charter to Bristol in 1373, also emphasised the distinctive legal identity and jurisdiction of urban communities, in particular by permitting municipal officers to hold their own county court within the town.³

In practice, towns could and did exercise many of these rights without a charter. London’s corporate status was so taken for granted that it did not obtain a royal grant until 1608.⁴ Smaller towns could also manage without such charters, as Cambridge did throughout the medieval period, claiming in 1530 that the borough was a legal corporation, despite the fact that no royal grant to this effect had ever been made.⁵ Many provincial urban governments, however, went to considerable trouble and expense to obtain this new form of formal, written evidence of their corporate status and Anthony Bridbury has been particularly vehement in his assertions that this expenditure was a form of ‘sheer unalloyed conspicuous consumption’, which had no

¹ See also below, pp. 187-90.
³ Bristol, BRO, 01208; Bristol Charters, 1155-1373, ed. N.D. Harding, Bristol Record Society 1 (1930), pp. 119-41.
⁴ Reynolds, Introduction, p. 144.
practical benefit whatsoever. The shift towards chartered, corporate government identity did, however, have a marked impact upon contemporary legal and cultural attitudes towards town administrations. In particular, it emphasised one of the distinctive aspects of urban self-government: the fact that it was collective. Most towns were ruled by a committee of leading men, although often one (normally a mayor) took precedence over the others. This type of formalised, collective rule was peculiarly urban. As Frederick Maitland emphasised in the nineteenth century, 'the borough community is corporate; the village community is not. This is a real and important difference'. Town populations were larger and generally more dependent upon immigration than rural communities, so taking collective decisions was accordingly more difficult. The development of a collective legal personality therefore mitigated many of these problems by creating a sense of permanence and collective responsibility in government.

Town governments varied somewhat in their structure and in the terminology used to describe officials. By the late fourteenth-century, for example, both Bristol and Chester had a long history of administration headed by a mayor, with records of these officials dating back to 1217 and 1251 respectively. Thirteenth-century Norwich, however, was governed first by a reeve and, by 1248 at the latest, by four bailiffs, although a charter did not record their existence until 1305. As this discrepancy indicates, a charter was not always considered a prerequisite for urban constitutional change; indeed, grants such as Henry VII’s 1499 charter to Bristol described numerous posts in civic government as if they were new creations, but in fact most already existed. Sometimes, however, charters did have a clear impact upon the practice of local government and Norwich first elected a mayor only

8 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 60; Robert Ricart, The Maire of Bristow is Kalendar by Robert Ricart, ed. L. Toulmin-Smith, Camden Society New Series 5 (1871), p. 27; J. Latimer, The "Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar": its list of civic officers collated with contemporary legal MSS, Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society 26 (1903), 110; R.H. Morris, Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Reigns (Chester, 1894), p. 575; VCH Cheshire: City of Chester, V.i, 58.
following receipt of this chartered right from Henry IV in 1404. This constitutional transformation made very little difference in practice to the type of men who were chosen as civic leaders, however; in the first ten years of the mayoralty, five of the men elected had previously served as bailiffs.

Towns which were ruled by a mayor commonly regarded this as a particular source of pride. In Bristol in 1479, the common clerk Robert Ricart boldly claimed that 'there hath been alwayes maires in this worshipfull toune seth the Conquest and before', indicating that this office was regarded as a sign of 'worship' for the whole community. In Norwich, the mayor was paid considerably more than the bailiffs: in c. 1397, the Norwich Domesday Book recorded that the bailiffs, between them, were to receive £10 for their fee and £3 for making their account, while by c. 1406, the treasurers' accounts indicate that the mayor received 50 marks per annum, although this fee was reduced to £20 by 1421. Nonetheless, some important towns were governed by different officials without any apparent diminution of civic identity: Colchester, for example, was headed by two bailiffs, while government in Beverley was carried out by twelve 'keepers'. The variety of valid forms of urban government was illustrated in the parliament of November 1461, which declared legal the grants made to towns and corporations by the Lancastrian kings and listed the forty-four possible terms used by contemporaries to describe urban political communities.

The main duties of a mayor or equivalent civic leader were to preside in assembly meetings and in some borough courts; to maintain the king's peace, in particular by enforcing the assize of bread, ale and other victuals within their jurisdiction; to take part in processions; and to provide hospitality both to

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11 This charter is no longer extant, but is rehashed in the 1417 charter, Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 26a/15. An abstract of the 1404 charter is provided in Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 31-2.
13 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 153v; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 69. Elsewhere in this volume, however, Ricart contradicts this assertion, claiming the first mayor was Adam le Page in 1217: Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 60; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 27. Discussion of the accuracy of Ricart’s list of civic officials is provided by Latimer, "Maire of Bristol is Kalendar": its list of civic officers', 110-12.
14 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Domesday Book), f. 58; Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7c/8; NCR Case 7c/23. For ambiguities in the dating of the early fifteenth-century treasurers’ rolls, see, M. Grace, 'The chamberlains and treasurers of the City of Norwich, 1293-1835', Norfolk Archaeology 25 (1933), 188.
15 PROME, November 1461, v-489.
distinguished visitors and to their fellow civic officers on important occasions. In many towns, the mayor was also the king's escheator, which meant that he was responsible for ensuring the Crown received all its rents, inheritances and other dues from the area. This position was usually enshrined in a royal charter, particularly in the grants which made a town a separate county from the surrounding area. These multiple and varied roles were illustrated in Bristol in 1479 by Robert Ricart, who stated that the mayor was responsible not only for presiding in the city courts and ensuring the king received his land rents, but also for personally visiting every brewer in the city twice a week, to taste their ale and to ensure it was of the correct standard.

Mayors (or officials of a similar status) were usually supported by one or two bailiffs or sheriffs, who assisted with matters of law enforcement, often presiding in borough courts and having ultimate responsibility for borough gaols, as well as joining the mayor in processions and providing him with advice about the good governance of the town. In some places, they also took a leading role in corporate hospitality for civic officers and distinguished guests. A royal grant of separate county status to a city sometimes stipulated that those formerly described as bailiffs should become sheriffs and take on additional rights and responsibilities as sheriffs of a shire, such as presiding in the county court. When Norwich became separated from the County of Norfolk in 1404, it was granted that in place of the four bailiffs, the citizens could choose two sheriffs, who would carry out 'all that pertains to the office of Sheriff and is done by other Sheriffs in other counties of our kingdom'. It appears to have been an accepted anomaly, however, that although usually in counties the sheriff was the king’s representative, in towns the mayor claimed this role, with the sheriffs being kept firmly subordinate to him.

Chamberlains or treasurers managed the 'common money' and were required to give accounts of the town’s income and expenditure. The exact terminology and form of this office varied slightly from town to town. In 1414 in Norwich, for

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16 E.g. Bristol, BRO, 01208; Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 26a/15; Bristol Charters, ed. Harding, I, pp. 120-1; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 31-2.
17 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 157-8,162v-163; Ricart, Kalender, pp. 72-4, 83.
18 Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, p. 34.
19 Relations between the Crown and civic governments are more fully discussed pp. 116-46.
example, a complaint from the commonalty requested that the post of chamberlain should be created for two men, who would oversee the treasurers and ensure that the use of public money was correctly audited.\textsuperscript{20} Chester, meanwhile, had one treasurer who oversaw city rents from at least the 1390s and two by the 1430s, but no chamberlains.\textsuperscript{21} Sometimes these officials were responsible for paying for every day expenses and some public works out of their own pockets and then reclaiming the money later, a factor which could make the role onerous and unpopular. The sums involved could be very large. In York in 1484, the outgoing chamberlains were paid £160 in part payment of the city’s debt to them and in the same year it was agreed that the number of chamberlains should be increased from three to four ‘to bere soch great chargez as is to be born in thys Cite’.\textsuperscript{22} The resentment felt towards these financial burdens was most directly expressed in Coventry in 1494, where a troublesome chamberlain, Laurence Saunders, refused to pay labourers working on the city wall as was customary ‘seying presumptuously to the seid Maire that they that set them awarke shuld pay for thym’.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to these key roles, many urban centres developed ‘common councils’ in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, often with names such as ‘the Twenty Four’ or ‘the Forty Eight’, although these figures did not necessarily correspond exactly to the number of members. Sometimes the members of these councils were described as aldermen. The primary duties of most common councils were to take a leading role in the election of senior officers and to advise the mayor, particularly when drawing up new civic ordinances.\textsuperscript{24} In the 1373 charter to Bristol, a council of ‘forty of the better and more worthy men of the town’ was given the power to alter local customs by making new by-laws.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, in 1380, it was granted by Richard II to Norwich that the bailiffs ‘with the agreement of twenty four of their fellow citizens’ could change any faulty customs in the city and make new

\textsuperscript{20} Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8c/3; 

\textsuperscript{21} VCH Cheshire: City of Chester, V.i, p. 59.


\textsuperscript{23} The Coventry Lett Book or Mayor’s Register, ed. M.D. Harris, EETS OS 134, 135, 138, 146 (1907-1913), p. 431.

\textsuperscript{24} E.g. Kings Lynn, KLBA, KL/C9/1, f. 3v; Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), f. 184v; 

\textsuperscript{25} Bristol Charters, ed. Harding, I, pp. 136-7.
ordinances to remedy the problem.\(^{26}\)

In many towns each ward or leet was represented by a designated number of councillors or aldermen. In Hull, for example, from 1442 onwards the six wards of Humber, Blackfriars, Trinity, Whitefriars, St. Mary and Trippett were each represented by two aldermen. While in this case the wards did not have a judicial function, they did have important administrative purposes, such as being used as units for tax collection.\(^{27}\) In other towns, such as Norwich, aldermen were responsible for organising the policing of the leets or wards.\(^{28}\) Selection procedures for these officials varied from place to place, but there was normally an element of choice by the wider burgess community or by the enfranchised inhabitants of the ward. In Hull, for example, vacancies in the council were filled by the surviving aldermen submitting two names to the whole community (i.e. all the burgesses), who then chose between them.\(^{29}\) Usually selection was for life, unless an individual committed a major breach of the law, although it was not uncommon for aldermen to be required to renew their oath of office each year. The frequency of fines for poor attendance and lateness among common councils suggests that members felt their position to be fairly unassailable.\(^{30}\)

In most towns, the high civic offices (particularly of mayor and sheriff or bailiff) were dominated by wealthy merchants. Merchants were engaged in wholesale trade, which often involved transporting goods over long distances. Businesses of this kind required considerable capital and a wide network of contacts which broadened a merchant's sphere of influence both at home and further afield. Their businesses were unlikely to need personal, daily attention, giving them the necessary leisure time to devote to civic office. Artisans, in contrast, were skilled workers, such as carpenters, butchers or tailors, who produced and sold their wares on a smaller scale.\(^{31}\)

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\(^{26}\) Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 26a/14. The translation is from Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tinge\(^{\prime}\), I, p. 30.

\(^{27}\) VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, I, p. 36.

\(^{28}\) The role of civic officers in policing is discussed pp. 63-6.


\(^{31}\) For further discussion on this point, see, H. Carrel, 'Food, drink and public order in the London "Liber Albus"', Urban History 33 (2006), 185.
artisans sometimes took a role in civic office – in York for example, there were a number of artisan chamberlains – they were much more rarely found in the top posts. 32 In Norwich, between 1453 and 1504, just over seventy-four per cent of mayors were engaged in occupations involving wholesale trade, such as mercers, merchants, grocers, drapers and goldsmiths, while just over twenty per cent were artisans (usually dyers). The remaining mayors were lawyers. 33

Dyers and butchers were the artisans most likely to break into the ranks of high civic office. This reflected the profitability of their trades in the post-Black Death period, when higher wages allowed for greater consumption of meat and more money to be spent on clothing. 34 In Chester, nine butchers became sheriff between 1390 and 1500. 35 In Norwich, a butcher became mayor in 1434 and in the second half of the fifteenth century, eight mayors were dyers. Indeed the fifteenth-century Norwich dyer Richard Ferrour held the office of mayor five times, the most of any individual in the medieval town. 36 The enhanced ‘worshipful’ status of butchers and dyers may have been in part linked to the fact that some of these more well-to-do artisans owned rural property. For example, the Colchester dyer, John Craton, at his death in 1490 held land, woods and meadows in West Bergholt. 37 Butchers from Lydd and Folkestone invested in grazing land in the marshland near Romney. 38 Butchers seem to have been particularly attracted to properties situated in the extramural suburbs of towns, which in less built-up areas would have provided space for grazing livestock or for holding animals before slaughter. 39 This would not only help

33 These statistics are based upon figures in T. Hawes, An Index to Norwich City Officers, Norfolk Record Society 52 (1986), p. xviii.
a butcher’s business to thrive, but would also possibly provide some claims to land-based gentility.40

On occasion, the social and economic aspirations of such artisans could cause problems within urban governments. In the 1480s there was a dispute in York between butchers who had obtained land for pasture in the city suburbs and the local authorities. In April 1480, the York administration forbade butchers to have pasture land within six miles of the city, on pain of loss of the town freedom and a 100s fine. Butchers who already owned such land were ordered to surrender it. This requirement pushed butchers’ land well beyond the city jurisdiction and would have made it difficult for them to own property that was useful to their business. The dispute reached its peak in December 1480, when six butchers were committed to prison for ‘obstinacy’ in this matter. They were subsequently fined varying amounts in January 1481. The next month the controversial ordinance was again introduced and this time apparently passed without dispute.41

No explanation is given in the sources for the York administration’s hostility towards butcher-graziers. The local government probably feared infringement of the city’s rights of common pasture in the meadows outside the walls; unlike towns such as Lincoln, Leicester, Cambridge and Nottingham, York did not have extensive extramural fields and much of the land that was available was owned by religious houses, making rights of common pasture a hot political issue.42 It is also possible that the predominantly mercantile elite which made up the York government resented the increased wealth and status of these artisans. Butchers could be regarded as problematic for a number of reasons by civic authorities: their trade was potentially anti-social, something indicated by numerous local ordinances concerning the mess and stench caused by the illicit slaughter of animals within the city walls.43 In addition, they had control over the raw materials for a number of other industries,

40 The question of urban and rural gentility is discussed below, pp. 28-33.
43 E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/2, f. 82v which is probably copied from ZCHB/1, f. 25; Morris, Chester, pp. 261-2. For the contemporary association between the stench of slaughter and the spread of disease, see, C. Rawcliffe, 'Sickness and health', in Rawcliffe and Wilson, eds., Medieval Norwich, p. 309; G. Rosser, 'Urban culture and the Church, 1300-1540', in Palliser, ed., Cambridge Urban History, I, p. 341.
notably over the hides needed for leather goods and tallow to make candles, making them a potentially powerful group. The fact that the York ordinances were combined with legislation encouraging alien competition to the civic butchers certainly suggests a desire to limit their monopoly of the trade. While the provision of cheap food was a priority of all urban governments, in this instance concern for the common good may have been only part of the motivation to curb butchers' profits.

Sometimes those in low-status occupations were actively barred from high office, as occurred in Norwich in June 1463, when the shoemaker Thomas Antyngham was chosen as one of 'the Sixty' by the common council, but was then prevented from taking his oath while it was decided whether receiving someone of such low occupational status was compatible with the 'worship' of the city. A marginal note shows that after this consultation he was not permitted to take office. In practice, most artisans could simply not afford the time and money required to hold the top positions in government. Presiding over the city courts, in particular, could prove time consuming. In Chester, for example, after 1300, the mayor sat in the Portmote, which met on Mondays every two or three weeks (with recesses at harvest, Christmas, Easter and – until the 1480s – Midsummer). From the late fourteenth century, he also presided at the Crownmote, which met at approximately six-week intervals and held gaol deliveries and heard criminal trespass trials. The two sheriffs presided at the Pentice court, which heard personal actions and sat up to three times a week. The voluminous records created, in the form of the Mayors' and Sheriffs' Books, are ample testimony to the amount of business conducted by these courts. Similar or greater time commitment was required in other provincial towns and in Bristol the mayor and sheriffs settled trade disagreements by sitting together at the Counter each weekday from eight to eleven in the morning and from two until five in the afternoon, except afternoons on Saturday and on the eves of festival days.

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45 For comparative civic preoccupations with the provision of cheap food in London, see, Carrel, 'Food, drink and public order', 184-7.  
46 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 16d/1, f. 57.  
47 VCH Cheshire: City of Chester, V.ii, pp. 21-4.  
48 The relevant manuscript series are Chester, CCALS, ZMB/1-8 and ZSB/1-4. It is worth noting that Chester was unusual in having the mayor presiding over criminal trials: D.J. Clayton, The Administration of the County Palatine of Chester, 1442-1485 (Manchester and New York, 1990), p. 31.  
49 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 163v: Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 84-5.
only men who employed enough trained subordinates to run their business in their absence who were able to devote the necessary time to urban government.  

Another factor which made the wealthy more likely to be chosen for civic office was the widespread contemporary rhetoric that the rich were more likely to be virtuous, especially in relation to judicial matters, as they would be less inclined to accept bribes or to steal from civic funds.  

John Gower wrote in the *Voice of One Crying* that poverty in a mayor was particularly dangerous, as he was responsible for dispensing justice,

> The power of the man (i.e. the mayor) is more greatly to be feared in the city, 
> When he rages in his office of judge, 
> In the same way that a single spark can burn down a home, 
> So one unworthy man weighs heavily upon his home town. 
> ...[This occurs] When a pauper is elevated in the city through an unexpected fate

And the unworthy one is permitted to have the greatest honour.

A very similar type of rhetoric was found in John Fortescue’s *In Praise of the Laws of England*, with regard to the poverty of kings. He wrote that ‘no realm may prosper, nor be worshipful, under a poor king’. In particular, he argued that poverty forced a monarch to be unjust, accusing subjects who were innocent in order to obtain money or being unduly lenient to the guilty who could provide him with funds.  

An aura of incorruptibility was naturally important for those who were involved in handling public money and in dispensing justice. The mayoral oath in Norwich, therefore, was typical in its stipulation that the mayor should ‘do justice and egall ryght aswell to the pore as to the riche’, while members of the Common Council swore to ‘mayntene non singular profite ayens the comoun profite of the Citee’.  

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50 For further discussion of this point in Norwich, see, Frost, ‘Urban elite’, pp. 242-3. 
54 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), ff. 182v, 184v; *Records of Norwich*, eds. Hudson and Tinge, I, pp. 122-3. See also, Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 158; Ricart, *Kalendar*, p. 74.
Another factor which made a man sufficiently 'worshipful' to hold civic office was his involvement in a profession which required a high level of literacy. In particular, lawyers and professional administrators in the service of royal, noble or ecclesiastical lords were regarded as of a similar social class to merchants and were particularly likely to be involved in civic government. This was illustrated during the Norwich Corpus Christi processions, when 'mercers, drapers, lawers and skryveners' marched under the same banner and took a pre-eminent position in the parade.\(^55\) Chaucer obviously expected lawyers and merchants to have a high level of social interaction, as it was from a merchant that the 'man-of-law' first heard the tale he relates.\(^56\) Attorneys could be the sons of burgesses and this was regarded as a suitable alternative profession to trading as a merchant. The merchant and Bristol mayor Thomas Young, sr., was the father of the famous lawyer, Thomas Young, who proposed in the 1451 Parliament that Richard, duke of York, should be recognised as heir to the throne.\(^57\) The close association between lawyers and merchants was enhanced by the fact that the two occupations were not mutually exclusive, with a number of men who were practising attorneys also being involved in commercial trade. William Alexander of Salisbury, for example, who practised as a lawyer from 1398 onwards, also increased his income by trading in cloth and in 1437 obtained a royal licence to ship goods from Southampton.\(^58\)

The reasons for the sons of burgesses turning to the law as a profession are not difficult to ascertain: firstly, commercial trade frequently involved legal cases and so legal expertise was a useful skill for a merchant, or a merchant family, to have. In 1428, therefore, William Alexander appears to have been engaged in law suits against a local tucker and tailor, which arose from his own mercantile interests in the cloth trade.\(^59\) There were, of course, differences between the common law, in which lawyers were formally trained, and the customary law of the borough, but it is evident that towns valued all forms of legal expertise and often had trained common law

\(^{55}\) Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), f. 172v; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, pp. 312-13.
\(^{58}\) Ibid, II, pp. 23-4.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
lawyers sitting in their local customary courts. Secondly, and more importantly, legal training could greatly facilitate a citizen's son in becoming a member of civic government, with all the attendant power and status that such a position brought. Lawyers sometimes held the high-ranking posts of mayor, sheriff or aldermen. In 1483, for example, Stephen Bryan was admitted to the freedom of Norwich as a scrivener or lawyer and went on to become sheriff in 1491 and mayor in 1494. Similarly, the lawyer Walter Rowden was mayor of Gloucester three times, while William Bastard served as alderman, town clerk and bailiff of Shrewsbury at various points in his legal career. In general, however, lawyers were involved in town politics as town attorneys, common clerks, recorders or parliamentary representatives.

The administrations of most major towns included a recorder, who was usually a lawyer and it is possible that some towns had recruitment links with specific Inns of Court, with Bristol recorders, for example, predominantly coming from the Middle Temple. Recorders frequently sat as justices on commissions of the peace, oyer et terminer and gaol delivery, as well as being heavily involved in the town courts, usually acting as legal advisors to the mayor and sheriffs. This role was made explicit in the White Book of Norwich, which stated that the recorder was required to give,

> good trewe and holsom counsell...to the Maire and Aldermen of the Cite in use and excucion of governaunce of comoun right as well in offices of Mairalte, Justice of Pes and Esthrie accordyng to the lawes of the lond and lawes and goode customes of the Cite after your witte and cunning.

The specialist skills required for this post meant that it was not usually subject to an annual selection process, unlike most of the other leading roles. In a fairly typical account of the annual selection of civic officers in Coventry in 1449, therefore, a list of the twenty-four electors was given, but it was noted that the new recorder, Thomas

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60 Cozens-Hardy and Kent, Mayors of Norwich, p. 36.
64 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), f. 182r; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, p. 125.
Littelton, was instead chosen for life by a much smaller group consisting of the previous recorder, the mayor and three other leading men.65

Recorders were generally not expected to be resident full-time in the town, a point made very evident in the reply of Thomas Keble in 1485 when he was offered the post of recorder of Coventry. He emphasised that the recorders of York, London and Bristol at the time all held important posts elsewhere and therefore regarded the Coventry requirement for him to be resident ‘in diuers thynges...full streyte...And on-lesse than I may haue liberte to duell out of the Citie, ant to be absent at thassises tymne, yt neded be, I can nott occupie that office’.66 Although there was occasionally some friction when a town administration felt they did not have enough attention from their recorder, in general towns prized candidates with illustrious connections and particularly those who held posts within the royal household. The late fourteenth-century Bristol recorder, Simon Oliver, was mentioned in a letter from Anne of Bohemia to the town in 1393 as her steward.67 William Huddesfeld, Exeter recorder from 1479 to 1497, was attorney-general to Edward IV from 1477 to 1483.68 Recorders were occasionally called upon to exercise their diplomatic skills in relation to the king, especially when the town government feared they might invoke royal wrath. Thus the Great Red Book of Bristol related how the recorder, Thomas Young, was asked to make the city’s case to the royal administration when there was the possibility that Bristol merchants might be implicated in treachery in 1456, ‘we pray you, Thomas Yonge, to enforme the Lorde Chamberleyne, so that by his meanys the kingys highnesse heroff may haue redy knowledge yff neede bee’.69

The other post which was commonly held by lawyers was that of the town (or ‘common’) clerk. As the oath of the common clerk at York indicated, his main duty was to keep the civic archives – ‘all thinges that shall be enterd of recorde, ye shall truly enroull and registre’.70 This task included enrolling important documents

65 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 235-6.
66 Ibid, p. 527. For discussion of potential conflicts of interest when civic officers held official posts outside the town, see pp. 24-5.
67 GRB, I, pp. 222, 223.
69 GRB, I, p. 138.
regarding property transactions and keeping the records of the town courts. Like the recorder, he was frequently required to act, in effect, as the town’s solicitor, offering legal advice to the executive officers or prosecuting cases on behalf of the town in the courts of other boroughs. Town clerks were generally resident in the town and the specialist skills of the role meant that most served for a number of years and so can be regarded as professional administrators. In fifteenth-century Hull, Richard Doughty held the post from 1458 to 1484 and his immediate successor, Nicholas Gysburgh, was still serving in this capacity in 1500. Similarly, in Beverley only six men are known to have held the office during the whole of the fifteenth century.

Both the posts of town clerk and recorder were in theory lower status than mayors or aldermen. Rosemary Horrox has highlighted that,

there is no doubt that, whatever their professional expertise, they [i.e. town clerks] were considered the subordinates of the mayor and council, a relationship nicely displayed in the duty of the Bristol clerk to provide the dice for the mayor and aldermen when they played dice in St. Nicholas’ church while waiting for the arrival of the boy-bishop on St. Nicholas’ eve.

Certainly the Bristol ritual reflected the theoretical lower status of the town clerk in the government hierarchy, but the studied subservience of his role as dice-finder was something of a jest. As Sir Humphrey Appleby reminded his junior in the 1980s television series Yes Minister, ‘power goes with permanence. Impermanence is impotence. And rotation is castration’. The fact that the post of town clerk, like the recorder, was generally held for successive years by the same person must have given these officials much greater actual power in the administration than was formally acknowledged in urban muniments and ceremonies.

Lawyers were not simply involved in civic government through roles as administrators. In addition, many towns employed legal counsel on either a permanent or ad hoc basis. The Norwich bailiffs’ account for 1397-8, therefore,

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72 VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, I, p. 34.
73 Ibid, VI, p. 205.
75 J. Lynn and A. Jay, Yes Minister, the Diaries of a Cabinet Minister by the Rt. Hon. James Hacker MP (3 vols. London, 1982), II, p. 120.
included the payment of 20s to Thomas de Lexham for acting as attorney to the community for that year.\(^\text{76}\) James Andrew was frequently used as an attorney in his home town of Ipswich by the authorities as well as holding civic office there, but was also hired in 1399 by the Colchester administration to defend the town’s case when Richard II claimed the full fee farm. This was clearly not regarded as disloyalty to Ipswich, however, as he was subsequently appointed the town’s ‘tronager’ (toll-collector) in 1404 and in 1425 was granted a 20s annuity for life, in recognition of his services to the town.\(^\text{77}\)

A wide network of connections, combined with knowledge of the law and an ability to argue a case effectively in public, meant that lawyers were particularly favoured by towns as parliamentary representatives. Throughout the period, lawyers frequently acted as members of parliament, for both urban and rural constituencies, with about twenty percent of the Commons being lawyers by the 1420s.\(^\text{78}\) The idea that lawyers were not ‘true’ burgesses, that their profession inherently tied them to a non-urban sphere, is one that is widespread within the older historiography, with Patricia Jalland claiming that in the mid-fifteenth century there was a ‘transformation in the character of borough representation whereby true merchant burgesses were being replaced by non-resident outsiders, such as lawyers’.\(^\text{79}\) This false premise is largely based the parliamentary legislation of 1372 which attacked the high profile of lawyers in the commons.\(^\text{80}\) Importantly, however, this ordinance applied only to ‘knights of the shires’ and not to urban representatives.

Scholars of late medieval parliamentary representation have been much preoccupied with the question of whether those returned to the Commons were

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\(^\text{76}\) Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7a/6.
\(^\text{77}\) Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe, _History of Parliament_, II, pp. 32-4.
\(^\text{78}\) Ibid., I, pp. 168-70.
\(^\text{80}\) _PROME_, November 1372, ii-310-13. See also, _SR_, I, p. 394.
resident in the communities they represented. This was required by the statute of 1413, which stipulated that representatives of the towns should be 'elected men, citizens, and burgesses who are resident, dwelling, and enfranchised in the same cities and boroughs, and no others whatsoever'. May McKisack highlighted this and similar local legislation as evidence that borough authorities came under increasing pressure in the fifteenth century from outsiders who wanted to influence local elections. Certainly there were some attempts on the part of local gentry to ensure particular candidates were returned, although such schemes were generally only successful in the smaller boroughs and not in major cities like Bristol or Norwich. Fraud was apparently a problem in borough elections, as a petition of 1445 claimed that town sheriffs had made false returns and that some correctly elected candidates had been ousted from their position while on route to parliament. Nonetheless, it is inaccurate to link suggestions of corruption with the return of many lawyers to parliament. Most attorneys had close links with the urban communities they represented. Men-of-law who acted as parliamentary representatives of the town often owned property there, had townspeople and women as clients, and were frequently involved in urban administration. Many came from merchant stock, or married into burgess families. They tended to be preferred by the boroughs as members of the commons because their professional training and contacts often made them more active and influential borough representatives and as local figures they could be relied upon to represent the community's interests.

Professional administrators were another occupational group which could have an important influence upon urban governments. This was particularly the case in towns which acted as major royal, noble and ecclesiastical administrative centres. In Durham, for example, the fifteenth-century town administration included a high number of professional clerks and notaries who were employed by the bishop or

82 PROME, May 1413, iv-8-20.
83 McKisack, Parliamentary Representation, pp. 60-4; Jalland, 'Northern borough representation', 30-49.
Officials could have occupational ties with local lords in any town, however. Roger Bickling of Norwich formally entered the service of Margaret Marshall, countess of Norfolk, in 1382, when he was granted custody for life of park, warren and game on the manor of Lopham and yearly vertue as one of her esquires. He remained, however, heavily involved in the affairs of the city, acting as bailiff on three occasions, helping to arrange a civic reception for the Duke of Lancaster in 1390, acting as constable of the local staple in 1391 and working as a Justice of the Peace in Norwich throughout much of the late fourteenth century. Similarly William Gunther, mayor of Southampton in 1477, 1485 and 1493, was in receipt of an annual rent of 20s from the Prior and Convent of St. Denys for ‘good counsel’ given to the priory, without any apparent diminution of his ‘civic’ credentials. Friction could occasionally arise in cases where there was a suspected conflict of interest. In Norwich in c. 1448 it was alleged that the former recorder, John Heydon ‘takyng of the sayd Mayr and citesens a resonable fee’ had ‘interlacyd hym selfe’ with the Prior of Norwich, disclosing to him evidence on which the city planned to base its case against the priory. Even setting aside an assessment of the justice of this accusation (which, given the local political friction of the time, is questionable), it is evident that Heydon’s links with the priory were only considered problematic when they involved a breach of confidence about a specific case concerning the town.

There was sometimes suspicion of men who had the backing of an ‘overmighty’ local lord. In 1483 in York, a conversation between two citizens, Stevyn Hoghson and Robert Rede, about the forthcoming mayoral elections was recounted at a later hearing at the council chamber. Hoghson had allegedly expressed his support for Thomas Wrangwish, on the grounds that ‘he is the man that my lord of Gloucester will do for’, while Rede replied that ‘if my lord Gloucestr wold have hym Mair, the commons wold not’. Powerful backing clearly won the day, however, as Wrangwish was subsequently selected. Concern regarding ‘overmighty’ lords was

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88 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 9c/2.
89 York Civic Records, ed. Raine, I, p. 68.
90 *Register of the Freemen of the City of York: From the City Records, 1272-1759*, ed. F. Collins, Surtees Society 96, 102 (1897-1900), I, p. 207.
also evident in the regulations in a number of towns against townsmen taking the liveries of neighbouring nobles and gentry. Such ordinances seemed to focus on the threat to law and order posed by these groups of men, who would usually have been armed. In a fairly typical instance, Gloucester complained in 1500 that ‘dyvers myscheffes and greate ennomynyes’ were committed in the town by the livery men of local gentlemen and so banned burgesses from belonging to such groups.  

On occasion, royal servants were the cause of strife within local communities, particularly when they presumed upon the Crown’s protection to provide them with immunity from punitive measures locally. This was illustrated in the Great Red Book’s description of the conflict between William Spencer and Thomas Norton, during which the Bristol administration wrote to Edward IV that Norton’s troublemaking in the town had only been tolerated for so long as ‘the saide Thomas saieth him self to be one of the Kinges moost honourable household’. Similar sentiments were expressed in York in 1485, when the civic government wrote to the Archbishop. They claimed that the former sword-bearer, John Eglisfeld ‘bot for that he sheweth himself to be the kinges servaunt we wold have punished after the kinges lawes according to his offences’. Eglisfeld was apparently held in high esteem by Edward IV and Henry VII, both of whom intervened on his behalf to secure the position of sword-bearer and to obtain money from the corporation. This royal interference was clearly resented by other civic officers, given the derogatory comments made concerning Eglisfeld’s character and competence in the House Books. Town administrations particularly disliked intervention in the selection of local officials, and in 1486, the York administration famously successfully rejected Henry VII’s suggested candidate for the posts of recorder, claiming that this imposition was contrary to their ancient rights.

Towns could not afford to spurn ties with royal servants, however, and some boroughs paid retainers to royal officials within the Chancery or the Exchequer, with

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92 GRB, IV, p. 69.
94 Ibid, I, pp. 252, 377-8, 393.
the Cinque Ports paying three attorneys in the Chancery and the Courts of King’s Bench and Common Pleas. In Beverley, Roger Rolleston was regularly chosen as Keeper in the 1430s and 1440s, usually heading the list of ‘the Twelve’ (i.e. the main governing body of the town), and was chosen to greet Henry VI on his visit to Beverley in 1448. His success was probably linked to that of his brother, Robert, who was clerk of the wardrobe during Henry VI’s minority and went on to become a royal councillor and keeper of the Great Wardrobe later in the reign, as well as being appointed Provost of Beverley Minster. Norwich was particularly fortunate in its connection with Sir Thomas Erpingham, son of the fourteenth-century city bailiff, Sir John Erpingham. Sir Thomas developed a close relationship with Henry Bolingbroke, joining him when he was exiled in Paris in the late fourteenth-century and taking a leading role in his seizure of the throne from Richard II in 1399. He used his influence with the king on behalf of the city on a number of occasions, most notably by successfully petitioning the king for Norwich’s 1404 charter.

Top-level urban gilds which had strong links with urban government often attracted a broad membership, including members of the local gentry, ecclesiastics, royal and noble servants and sometimes even members of the aristocracy. The Boston Corpus Christi gild had a long tradition of ecclesiastical membership, including numerous abbots and bishops, most notably John Russell, bishop of Lincoln and Chancellor of England. Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, was also a member of this gild and of the Gild of St. Katherine in Stamford. This reflected her substantial power-base in South Lincolnshire, where she possessed a great estate and where her officials were in regular attendance at the county assizes. Richard III and Queen Anne were members of the York Corpus Christi fraternity and attended performances of the gild plays. Local gentry were the most frequent non-urban members to be listed, however, and Sir John Fastolf, Sir Thomas Erpingham and

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97 *VCH Yorkshire: East Riding*, VI, p. 58.
101 M.K. Jones, ‘Lady Margaret Beaufort, the royal council and an early Fenland drainage scheme’, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 21 (1986), 11.
members of the Paston family all belonged to the Norwich Gild of St. George during the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{103} In 1452, when this gild wished to enhance its social status and respectability, it was specified that members from outside the city could join, provided they were knights, squires or gentlemen by birth.\textsuperscript{104}

Noble and gentry members often gave the gilds gifts, such as venison for feasts, or loaned their minstrels for important occasions.\textsuperscript{105} In some cases, it is likely that this type of patronage was a form of ‘good lordship’, particularly when it emanated from royal or noble donors. The role of gentry members in urban gilds is somewhat more difficult to gauge. Their gifts could be very valuable; Sir John Fastolf, for example, gave the Norwich Gild of St. George the relic of the arm of their patron saint in 1433.\textsuperscript{106} In addition, members of the gentry who were highly esteemed by the urban community could be shown particular honour. An early fifteenth-century account roll for the same gild showed that 10s 6d was spent on riding to meet Lady Erpingham, wife of Sir Thomas.\textsuperscript{107} This favour was no doubt related to his recent services in obtaining the 1404 charter for the city. Nonetheless, closer ties (including marriage) between local gentry and urban elites strongly indicate that these two groups generally operated as social equals and that membership of the same urban fraternities was simply one symptom of this close relationship.

Given the high levels of social interaction between town and country society, it is unsurprising that members of the rural gentry and aristocracy found it advantageous to own a town-house. Many of these properties were held in London, such as John Paston II’s ‘place’ in Fleet Street, but local towns also had their attractions and so the family also owned a house in Norwich.\textsuperscript{108} The earls of Northumberland owned a house near the east end of Chapel Lane in Hull and although they did not own property in Beverley, the earl, countess and their household

\textsuperscript{103} Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of the Gild of St. George), ff. 13, 17; \textit{The Gild of St. George, Norwich, 1389-1547: a Transcription with an Introduction}, ed. M. Grace, Norfolk Record Society 9 (1936), pp. 23, 30-1.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Gild of St. George}, ed. Grace, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{106} Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of the Gild of St. George), ff. 13, 17; \textit{Gild of St. George}, ed. Grace, pp. 30-1.
\textsuperscript{107} Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8g; \textit{Records of Norwich}, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, p. 396.
visited the town in 1423-4 and stayed with the burgess William Thixhill to watch the Corpus Christi celebrations, and the corporation paid for their dinner there.\footnote{Selected Rentals and Accounts of Medieval Hull, 1293-1528, ed. R. Horrox, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 141 (1983 for 1981), p. 175, n. 68; VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, VI, p. 28.}

For townsmen, friendships with influential members of the gentry could be useful in times of crisis. When the former Yarmouth bailiff and parliamentary representative, William Elys, was impeached in the 1376 ‘Good Parliament’ for malpractice as farmer of the petty custom in the town, Sir George Felbrigge petitioned the Crown on his behalf. Felbrigge had acted as Elys’ business partner on a number of commercial ventures and was a useful ally, as he was well-connected at court and held part of his estates from John of Gaunt, giving him access to members of the royal family directly.\footnote{A. Saul, ‘Local politics and the Good Parliament’, in T. Pollard, ed., Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History (Gloucester and New York, 1984), pp. 159, 164.} It should not be assumed, however, that assistance in times of trouble always flowed from the gentry to the urban elites. When John Paston I was imprisoned in the Fleet in London, his wife wrote to him that,

\begin{quote}
it was talkyd in Norwyche and in dyvers othyr plasys in thecontre on Saterday last past that ye were comyttidy to Flet, and in good feyth, as I herd say, the peple was ryth sory ther-of, bothe of Nowyche and in the contre... Ye ar myче behold to the mayir and to Gybert and to dyvers othyr of the aldyrmen, for feythfully the owe yow good wyll to ther porys.\footnote{Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, I, p. 271.}
\end{quote}

The mayor at this time was William Norwich. John Gilbert, grocer, was sheriff of Norwich in 1451 and mayor in 1459 and 1464. As this quotation suggests, ties between urban elites and rural gentry were close and the support and approbation of leading townsmen was regarded as advantageous to the Pastons in their difficulties.

Traditionally there was an assumption among scholars that ‘the ambition of every successful merchant was to become a landed gentleman’ and that prominent townsmen generally sought to make a wholesale move to the countryside if their finances allowed.\footnote{W.T. MacCaffrey, Exeter, 1540-1640: the Growth of an English County Town (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1975), p. 260. For similar views, see, Bridbury, ‘English provincial towns’, 19; S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500 (Chicago, 1948), pp. 280-4.} This view was challenged in the 1980s by Rosemary Horrox and Maryanne Kowaleski, along with its underlying assumption that gentility was
dependent upon the ownership of rural property. More recently, Jennifer Kermode's study of merchants in York, Beverley and Hull has indicated that it was rare for members of this class to move wholesale to the countryside prior to the sixteenth century. It is clear that owning a rural manor enhanced a man's 'worshipful' status, as it meant that he had lordship (i.e. jurisdiction) over his tenants, as expressed in the manorial court. Indeed, so vehement was John Paston III concerning his rights over the court at Saxthorpe that when William Gornay claimed the right to preside there, Paston proceeded to disrupt the session by sitting next to the steward and blotting each word as he wrote it.

Some wealthy townsmen also sought to enhance their worshipful status and that of their families by obtaining manors. One possibility was to marry an heiress to country estates. The brothers John and William Fastolf, sons of the prominent Yarmouth merchant Hugh Fastolf, both married into prominent gentry families, thus inheriting a number of manors in Suffolk and Norfolk through their wives. An alternative method was for townsmen, and especially wealthy merchants, to use the money they had accumulated to purchase rural property. In 1491, therefore, the Norwich alderman, John Tillys, bequeathed his wife a number of properties he had purchased during his lifetime, including his manor in Carleton. For some of these men, rural life clearly had an attraction and they may have regarded rural lordship as the best kind of worship to have. This was also illustrated by the behaviour of some heirs to urban fortunes, who chose to move to the countryside. Walter Ingham, for example, the son of a former mayor of Norwich, made his main home in Aylsham in Norfolk, although he continued to maintain a house in the city.

Obtaining rural manors could prove problematic, however. Eligible heiresses were sometimes a depressingly scarce commodity. Manors were also expensive and

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117 London, TNA, PROB 11/8, f. 304v.

118 Horrox, 'Urban Gentry', p. 27.
were also not always available on the property market, where land was frequently sold piecemeal. Alternatively, therefore, many townsmen focused their social and political aspirations on urban-based power, a decision which was perhaps partly based on necessity, but also was a result of the strong contemporary school of thought that the town offered a distinct form of urban worship which was very much worth having. According to John Russell’s *Boke of Nurture*, at table ‘worshipful merchades’ just preceded gentlemen in status and those holding civic office were even further up the social hierarchy. Indeed, members of the rural gentry were often keen to obtain this urban worship for themselves or their heirs and it was not uncommon for sons (and particularly younger sons) of country gentlemen to move to towns permanently, although they often maintained links with their place of birth. In York, for example, Thomas Danby, son of Robert Danby esquire of Farneley; Brian Conyers, son of Christopher Conyers esquire of Hornby; and Alan Staveley, son of Miles Staveley of Ripon Park, all obtained the freedom of the city in the fifteenth century as merchants and subsequently became members of the urban governing elite. John Proude of Canterbury was originally from the village of Sellindge, a few miles south of the city and was the first of his family to settle in the town. He became bailiff of Canterbury on six occasions and twice acted as its representative in parliament. Throughout his life, however, he maintained strong links with Sellindge, owning farmland there and frequently acting as an official for the shire, as a tax collector, commissioner and coroner.

Many leading civic families appear to have assisted their sons to continue their success in town life, rather than to move to the countryside. John Blackburn, son of the wealthy York merchant, Nicholas Blackburn, sr., acted as a mercer in the city and was received into the Gild of Corpus Christi c. 1413, probably when his father was mayor. Sometimes urban families showed their political ambitions by moving to London, either to work in the royal household or to become part of the civic government. Hugh atte Fenne was described as ‘of London’ from 1447, where he served as a senior officer in the king’s exchequer for twenty-five years, but he was

originally from a family of prominent Yarmouth burgesses, with his father serving repeatedly as bailiff during the fifteenth century and as the collector of customs there from 1451 to 1460.\textsuperscript{124} Another member of a leading Yarmouth burgess family, Hugh Fastolf, moved to the capital, probably in the early 1380s, following his marriage to the widow of a London grocer, Joan Hanhampstead, and he subsequently served as both sheriff and alderman there.\textsuperscript{125} The grandson of the fifteenth-century York burgess, William Bowes (d. 1476), became mayor of London in 1546.\textsuperscript{126} The most famous case of a provincial move to the capital was the Canynges family of Bristol. Thomas Canynges became a London grocer and in 1445 was chosen as alderman of Aldgate Ward, becoming mayor of London in 1456-7, when his younger brother, William, was mayor of Bristol. His step-brother, John Young, also became mayor of London in 1466-7, again coinciding with a mayoralty of William Canynges.\textsuperscript{127} This type of inherited urban worship, however, remained very limited, as elite, town-based families rarely produced male heirs beyond the second or third generation and many died childless.\textsuperscript{128}

In order to assist their own and their children’s ascent up the urban social ladder, some wealthy townsmen purchased urban property. Town property was apparently regarded as a sound investment and it must have also been viewed as a very palpable indicator of wealth and social status within the town environment. Walter Bixton of Norwich owned messuages, shops and a grange in the parishes of St. Gregory and St. Giles, as well as property in the parishes of St. Mary Combust and St. Michael Coselany and the suburbs of Earlham and Heigham.\textsuperscript{129} Similarly John Fitling of Hull saw fit to acquire eight houses in the town by 1434, while his fellow burgess John Day owned five houses, a garden and a dovecote.\textsuperscript{130} Wealth of this kind gave individuals a high status within the area and could also provide them with profits from rents, which provided more income.

\textsuperscript{126} Kermode, ‘Merchants of three northern towns’, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{127} J.W. Sherborne, William Canynges (1402-1474), Mayor of Bristol and Dean of Westbury College, Local history pamphlets, Historical Association, Bristol Branch 59 (1985), p. 7.
\textsuperscript{128} Kermode, Medieval Merchants, pp. 41, 78-80; Thrupp, Merchant Class, pp. 199-204; Kowaleski, ‘Commercial dominance’, 379-80.
\textsuperscript{129} Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe, History of Parliament, II, pp. 244-5.
\textsuperscript{130} VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, I, p. 84.
Importantly, property purchased to demonstrate and consolidate wealth did not only need to be town-based, although from the point of view of making an urban career this was often the most useful and easily exploited. Many townsfolk purchased rural land, other than manors, that was scattered and so the town remained the best place from which to enjoy the profits.\(^{131}\) Hugh Fastolf was a man of very high urban status, acting as the town’s bailiff nine times between 1354 and 1376 and as the town’s parliamentary representative in 1354, 1361, 1366, 1373 and 1377. He held property in nineteen villages in Norfolk and Suffolk and held rural land in excess of one thousand acres, but chose to remain town-based, acting as a merchant and ship-owner in Yarmouth.\(^{132}\) There was a high level of intermarriage between the rural gentry and urban elites and so some leading urban families obtained land in this way. William Canynges, sr., five times mayor of Bristol from 1365 to 1386, married as his second wife Agnes, the widow of Sir Robert Martin. She and Canynges claimed some of Martin’s property in Somerset and Dorset as her dower.\(^{133}\) This property would have been useful for creating revenue, but it did not in itself help the family worship in the long term, as it could not pass to Agnes’ children by Canynges. It is plausible that land-ownership outside the town enhanced an individual’s worship: to be able to afford extra property indicated a thriving business and, in turn, it could be profitably exploited, providing the owner with a larger income.

Overwhelmingly, therefore, town elites and the local gentry shared many codes of worshipful behaviour and status. The concept of lordship, that is, the legitimate governance of others, was particularly important to high status in both groups, a point made evident in William Caxton’s introduction to his translation of Cicero’s *Of Olde Age*, where he claimed that he intended the book to assist ‘gret lordes gentilmen and marchauntes that haue been dayly ben occupye in maters towchyng the publyque weal’.\(^{134}\) As was highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, however, urban modes of government were distinctive in their emphasis upon the

\(^{131}\) For discussion of the scattered nature of town inhabitants’ rural landholdings, see: Horrox, ‘Urban gentry’, p. 25; Britnell, *Growth and Decline*, pp. 358-60. For similar patterns among the rural gentry, see, Carpenter, ‘English gentry’, pp. 39-40.


selection of officials by a group of their peers and in the practice of collective government. Town officers, therefore, were influenced by broader social attitudes towards worshipful behaviour and authority, but in their methods of government and in their personal behaviour some distinctively urban codes of conduct developed. It is these honour codes which are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Two: Political participation and civic ceremonial

In order to be chosen as a civic officer or to participate in the selection of officials, it was necessary to possess the freedom of the town. In addition to political rights, burgess status also gave important economic privileges, such as freedom from the payment of local tolls and, in some places, the right to own a shop or to practise a skilled trade.¹ The franchise could be acquired by apprenticeship, by patrimony (as the son of a freeman), and by purchase, with the last being the most commonly-used method.² In return for the privileges of burgess status, citizens were required to carry out certain duties for the town community, which were laid down in the oath taken by those entering the franchise. Those entering the liberty of Lynn in the fifteenth century, for example, swore to be ‘buxum’ to the mayor, future mayors and civic officers and to maintain the franchise of the town ‘withouten and withynne bi alle my power’.³ A more fulsome vow was taken in the same period by new citizens at Norwich, who swore,

the fraunchise and liberties of this Cyte of Norwich mayntene and sustene withe my body and goodes; nomannys goodes avowe but myn owyn wher throwe the Kyng or the comoun myght lese tol or custom or any other right; buxom ben to the Maior and to alle other governes ther of for the tyne beyng; truly paye myn taxes and my taliages; alle offices to the which I xal be chosen, them and iche of them accepten dilligently and non refusen; all other charges lefully leyde uppon me obeyen and perfourmen from this day forward.⁴

As the emphasis on financial and time-commitments in the Norwich oath indicated, burgess status could sometimes be regarded as more of a burden than a privilege. In Norwich in 1415, the local government ordered all shopkeepers to become free of the city, suggesting that some people were keen to avoid admission fines and the responsibilities of citizenship.⁵

The massive population decline in the second half of the fourteenth century led to frequent complaints from town governments regarding the poverty of urban centres, and generally a lack of citizens was cited as both a symptom and cause of this

¹ E.g. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8c5; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 105-6.
² For contemporary discussion of these methods, see especially Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), ff. 163v-164; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, pp. 291-4.
³ Kings Lynn, KLBA, KL/C9/1, f. 2v.
⁴ Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), f. 184v.
⁵ Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8c5; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 105-6.
situation. There were occasional references to the social status of those being accepted to the freedom being lowered. In 1455, for example, the mayor and burgesses of Oxford petitioned parliament to make it legal for the men of the town to take apprentices whose parents had less than 20s annually, the statutory requirement. As apprenticeship was a recognized method of obtaining the freedom, this meant that citizenship was available to a less socially exclusive group. Such references should not be overemphasised, however. Even before the Black Death, some town governments were anxious to widen access to the franchise, probably often motivated by a desire for greater revenue. In Norwich in 1317 and York in 1319, therefore, relatively low-status weavers had been admitted to the franchise, with similar moves taking place in Colchester and Leicester in 1327 and 1334 respectively.

While the social status of those admitted to the freedom was variable, most towns refused to admit certain occupational groups as citizens, because they were deemed to be too poor to bear the costs involved and too lowly to contribute to the 'worship' of the city. This was especially the case for unskilled labourers and those engaged in piece work. Women were particularly likely to be engaged in this type of employment, but regardless of their social status very few entered the freedom in their own right. It was often tacitly accepted, however, that when a man was admitted to the franchise, his wife shared many of his privileges, including the right to trade as a citizen or as an independent craft master after her husband's death, but it was virtually unknown for women to hold office or to take part in elections. There were very occasional instances of women possessing the franchise: prior to the sixteenth century, in Norwich there were four cases of female possession of the franchise and in York about one percent of admissions were women. These females may have entered the freedom because they were single women and therefore did not have the right to trade as a citizen via their husband. Certainly one of the women in Norwich, Elizabeth Baret, was specifically referred to as an unmarried woman and most of the York female citizens were seamstresses, a specifically female occupation which

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7 London, TNA, SC 8/28/1388.
suggests that the women were single, were operating as *femmes soles*, or were widows who were not following their husband’s former occupation. London silkwomen, who were employed in one of the highest status female trades, were not generally admitted to the freedom, although they did sometimes operate as *femmes soles*.12

Town ordinances concerning admissions frequently reflected a tension between the ideal of burgess status being prestigious and exclusive, and the practical need for the administrative and financial burdens of citizenship to be shared among a large group. Money from admissions fines was a significant source of income for most town governments. In Grimsby, for example, in 1421-2 almost one third of the chamberlains’ income came from admissions. The Hull chamberlains’ account roll for 1464-5 recorded £22 of the town’s annual income of £217 20d coming from the fines of new burgesses. As only eleven new burgesses were admitted to the freedom by fine in this year, the admission fee was presumably the substantial sum of £2 per head. Attempts were made in a number of towns to counteract this problem by charging poorer traders smaller annual licensing fees rather than making them take up the freedom. One of the most formalized methods was found in Bristol, where in March 1367 it was stipulated that an individual admitted to the freedom by purchase must be ‘known as a man of good report and honest conversation’ who could afford to pay an entry fine of £10. Those unable to meet these requirements, however, could ‘be received as portmen and pay fine to the commonalty to the discretion of the mayor and stewards’. The surviving records do not show the amounts that were actually paid. Portmen apparently did not enjoy the political freedoms of burgesses and were only permitted to trade in victuals. Under the mayoralty of William Canynges in 1449-50 it was ordered that ‘portsmen and portswomen’ were not to

14 *Selected Rentals and Accounts*, ed. Horrox, pp. 91, 93, 94, 174.
15 Ibid., p. 166.
exceed their privileges and could not 'bi ne selle in no wyse within the saide towne as a burgeys doth' unless they were food retailers. 18 This lower status, therefore, was specifically created to ensure that the civic government could regulate and make financial gain from the trade of small-time food retailers.

Many difficulties beset the historian attempting to gather accurate numerical data concerning the number of burgesses in the town population. Total population figures are in themselves always very difficult to assess, as knowledge of mortality and emigration rates from individual towns is sparse and birth rates non-existent. Figures for the proportion of burgess are all the more liable to error, for two main reasons. Firstly, it is unclear how long burgesses remained living in the town after entering the franchise. Secondly, it was usual for only those entering the freedom by purchase or apprenticeship to have their names recorded in the civic archives; those who acquired it by patrimony were not generally required to pay a fee or take an oath of good behaviour. 19 Admissions to the freedom of Chester, recorded in the Mayors' Books, were an exception to this rule, as they did include the sons of freemen and are therefore a good indicator of the number of new burgesses within the urban community. Out of thirty-seven surviving admissions lists from the fifteenth century, two are too fragmentary to provide a correct record, but the remaining thirty-five show that in only five years (1401, 1474, 1484, 1486 and 1487) were more than twenty new burgesses admitted. 20 This suggests that citizens made up a very small proportion of the total population, which the most recent estimate has placed at between 3,000 and 3,700 in the mid-fifteenth century. 21 A similarly low proportion of

18 GRBR, I, p. 133. For dating, see Latimer, "Maire of Bristow is Kalendar": its list of civic officers', 131. Further examples from other towns are provided in R.B. Dobson, 'Admissions to the freedom of the City of York in the later Middle Ages', EconHR, 2nd Series 26 (1973), 16.
19 See for example, Dobson, 'Admissions to the freedom', 8.
20 Chester, CCALS, ZMB/2a, ff. 14v-15 (1401-2), 48v (1404), 53v (1405); ZMB/2c, ff. 15v-16 (1414); ZMB/3a, f. 25 (1416); ZMB/3b, ff. 56-7 (1418), 105, 106v (1419); ZMB/4a, ff. 45-6 (1431), 67v-8 (1455); ZMB/5a, ff. 2r-4 (1454); ZMB/5h, ff. 20-22 (1458); ZMB/5c, ff. 43-5 (1459); ZMB/5d, ff. 72-3 (1462); ZMB/5e, ff. 87-8 (1466); ZMB/5f, ff. 112-3 (1468); ZMB/5h, f. 131 (1469); ZMB/5i, ff. 153, 166 (1470); ZMB/5k, ff. 183, 184-9 (1474); ZMB/6b, ff. 38-9 (1476); ZMB/6c, ff. 60-1 (1483); ZMB/6d, ff. 85-7 (1484); ZMB/6f, ff. 123-6 (1487); ZMB/7a, ff. 4-7 (1486); ZMB/7b, ff. 45-6 (1488); ZMB/7c, f. 95 (1490); ZMB/7d, ff. 122-3 (1492); ZMB/7e, ff. 160-1 (1493); ZMB/8b, ff. 47-8 (1495); ZMB/8c, ff. 62-3, 99v, 101 (1496); ZMB/8f, ff. 129v-30 (1499). Fragmentary records have been omitted.
21 VCH Cheshire: City of Chester, V.ii, p. 71.
burgesses has been suggested by Ruth Frost for Norwich and Maryanne Kowaleski for late medieval Exeter.\textsuperscript{22}

Within this small group of burgesses, only a portion took civic office or had a voice in local elections. One of the main problems facing scholars examining electoral participation in the late medieval period is the ambiguity of the contemporary terms used to describe different socio-political groups. References to ‘the commonalty’, ‘the commons’ and ‘the community’ were particularly problematic. In general, ‘community’ and the ‘commonalty’ were exclusive terms, usually referring only to the leading citizens who were directly involved in civic politics. The ‘commons’ was somewhat wider, and could mean either the citizen body or the entire population of the town. Use of this phrase in the primary sources should be treated with caution, as it was often in the local government’s interest to imply wider support and involvement in the decision than was actually the case, so that they appeared to be ruling for the common good.

In many towns elections were catalysts for unrest and violence. This presented urban leaders with a dilemma: they wanted the wider citizen body to be present at elections, so that they could assent to the choice of officials, who could then be seen to express the will of the whole community. This could, however, prove problematic, as such gatherings provided the ideal forum for dissent to be expressed. One way in which this was dealt with was to ensure that the choice of candidate was heavily circumscribed and that the ‘worthy men’ of the community had the greatest say in who was selected. The 1506 Chester charter stipulated that,

\begin{quote}
all fellow citizens of the said city, suburbs, and hamlets aforesaid, dwelling within the said city...who choose to be present at the election of the Mayor every year...may meet together freely and without denial at the...common-hall.
\end{quote}

In spite of this apparent ‘democracy’, however, the choice of mayor was in fact extremely limited. The citizens selected two candidates, who had to be ‘of the more sufficient, discreet, and honourable persons of the number of the twenty-four Aldermen’.\textsuperscript{23} From these two, the aldermen and sheriffs then selected the next mayor. The Common Assembly then chose one sheriff, while the mayor, outgoing

\textsuperscript{22} Frost, ‘Urban elite’, p. 239; Kowaleski, ‘Commercial dominance’, 358.

\textsuperscript{23} Morris, Chester, pp. 525, 533.
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22 Frost, 'Urban elite', p. 239; Kowaleski, 'Commercial dominance', 358.
23 Morris, Chester, pp. 525, 533.
sheriffs and aldermen selected the other. A similar situation was described in 1479 in Bristol by Robert Ricart, who recorded how ‘all the worshipfull men of the Councell of Bristow’ assembled at the Council House and after praying together chose the candidate for the next mayor.

The maire first by his reason to name and gyve his voice to som worshipfull man of the seide hows, and after hym the Shrief, and so all the house perusid in the same, euery man to gyve his voice…and…hym that hathe moste voise, [is] in due fourme electid to be Maire.24

The new Bristol mayor, then, was chosen from and by those who formed the ‘common council’ in the city, a body known locally as ‘the Forty’.25

As town government actively involved such a small proportion of the urban population, considerable emphasis was placed by—town officers on publicly communicating their power and authority to a wider audience via ceremonial activities. In Bristol, the most important of these ceremonies occurred on the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel (29 September), when the new mayor was sworn in at the Guildhall.26 Ricart’s Kalendar included a contemporary illustration of the scene (fig. 1).27 As this image highlights, some were definitely more equal than others in urban politics; the lower position of the crowd reflected the fact that they were very much the junior partners in the electoral arrangements, being required to witness rather than to participate actively in the choice of leader.

Another major form of urban ceremonial was the processions and pageants which were performed on special feast days in many towns, such as the Corpus Christi celebrations held in Norwich and Chester, which included both parades and play performances by the crafts.28 The organisation of large scale pageantry, such as the cycles of mystery plays, varied from town to town. Sometimes the overall management of these events was the responsibility of a particular gild whose feast

24 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 154; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 70.
25 Bristol, BRO, 01208; Bristol Charters, ed. Cromle, pp. 136-7.
26 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 154-8; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 70-4.
27 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 152r.
was being celebrated, while on other occasions the civic government took a leading role. This division was often blurred, however, by the fact that leading gilds could be particularly associated with the town authorities. A procession organised by the gild of St. George in Norwich, for example, could be seen as an expression of the identity of civic government, as its members were frequently leading politicians and from 1452 the link between the gild and the government was formalized when it was ordered that the outgoing mayor should become alderman of the gild for the following year.29

In some towns, such occasions were regarded with enthusiasm by gild members who were anxious to demonstrate the social and economic status of their fraternity in public. Gilds also took measures to ensure that their members upheld the ‘worship’ of the organisation by appearing appropriately attired. In Beverley, therefore, ‘Cross Monday’ was a major event for the gilds, who sat in ‘castles’ consisting of a wooden frame which was to be ‘honestly covered’ at the fraternities’ expense. Gild members were generally required to appear in livery and the weavers decreed that any master too poor to buy a livery should be excluded from the castle.30 Such enthusiasm, however, could wane in times of poverty, as was indicated by requests for assistance with costs or to be excused participation.31 In addition, the frequent association of processions or pageantry with the civic government meant that such pleas sometimes reflected a more popular disillusionment with the urban authorities. In Norwich, the civic government laid out very specific ordinances in the mid-fifteenth century, detailing how the gild members ‘that ben sufficient aswell in gode as gode gouvernance’ should attend particular civic processions in which the mayor and other officers had a leading role.32 The main events were the Mayor’s Riding on the Tuesday after Trinity Sunday and processions on All Saints’ Day, Christmas Day and the Epiphany (1 November, 25 December and 6 January respectively). Gild-members were expected to attend these in their craft livery and the connection of the civic officers with the gilds was made explicit as the gild of which the mayor was a member was to walk directly in front of him in one of the

30 VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, VI, 45-6.
31 E.g. VCH Yorkshire: City of York, p. 97; VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, VI, pp. 46-7.
32 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), f. 162; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, p. 285.
most honoured positions. The fact that the civic authorities found it necessary to impose fines on those that did not attend indicates, however, that not all inhabitants were particularly enthusiastic about enforced participation in the glorification of their leaders.33

In some parades the role of the gilds was much more minimal, notably in the processions which took place before or after the mayoral elections. According to Ricart’s Kalendar, there were five main civic processions in Bristol, one of which took place following the oath-taking ceremony of the new mayor on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel (29 September) ‘with trompetts and clareners, in as joyful, honourable, and solempe wise as can be devised’.34 Brightly coloured clothing and music were often used to attract public attention in order to highlight who the new mayor was and to enhance his status within the city.35 Indeed, in 1463 mayoral sword-bearers, like minstrels and actors, were specifically excluded from sumptuary legislation, suggesting that it was considered necessary for their clothing to be particularly ostentatious.36 Such parades would have been seen by both the enfranchised and unenfranchised inhabitants of the town, as well as by visitors, highlighting civic government power over the whole population. Many processions took place just before salaries, gifts or fees were made to the officials. A major parade in Bristol on St. Nicholas’ Eve (5 December) was followed the next day by the delivery of the officers’ liveries and the payment of many of their fees.37 This reflected the idea that the civic government was accountable to the wider population; the parade was a public occasion, when the personnel of government were on show. The fact that they were permitted to carry out this ritual was intended to imply that their power was accepted by the inhabitants, and that they were therefore entitled to take their salaries.

The high level of expenditure on urban ceremonial in many late medieval towns has been linked by a number of historians to the ongoing debate concerning the economic growth or decline of urban economies in the fourteenth to sixteenth

33 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), ff. 162-162v; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, 285, 288.
34 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 158-158v; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 74.
35 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 154-154v, 158-158v; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 70-1, 74.
36 PROME, April 1463, v-505-20.
37 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 161-161v; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 81.
Charles Phythian-Adams, focusing particularly on late medieval and
sixteenth-century Coventry, concluded that the high costs of ritual and display placed
an insupportable burden upon declining town economies.\footnote{C. Phythian-Adams, 'Urban decay in late medieval England', in P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley, eds.,
Such ceremonial costs are regarded in much of the historiography as an inexplicable waste of money, with
Anthony Bridbury arguing in the case of early sixteenth-century Bristol, that,

\begin{quote}

it is perfectly clear... that Bristol citizens spent prodigiously, on feasting and
junketing, as well as on liveries and ceremonial processions; and that Bristol’s
revenues were perfectly capable of meeting the normal charges of running a
town once these extravagances had been pruned...Bristol ... was not a town
ruined by crippling charges; it was a town in which extravagant men had simply
overspent themselves.\footnote{Bridbury, ‘English provincial towns’, 13-14.}
\end{quote}

It should be noted, however, that the example used as evidence for this comment was
an action brought before the Star Chamber by the Bristol sheriff, William Dale, in
1518, concerning the new ‘gretter charges, exaccions and impocicions’ laid upon the
sherrifs by the mayor and aldermen which were more ‘then they be able to bere or of
right ought to be charged with’.\footnote{The Great White Book of Bristol, ed. E. Ralph, Bristol Record Society 32 (1979), p. 75.}
This complaint was the result of an internal disagreement within the Bristol administration regarding the payment of civic
government expenses and so cannot be regarded as an unbiased statement of actual expenditure.\footnote{A summary of the dispute is provided in *ibid*, pp. 3-4. The earliest extant town accounts from Bristol date from 1532.}

More importantly, Anthony Bridbury’s argument is based on the assumption
that the late medieval period was a time of economic growth, particularly in towns. In
his controversial work, *Economic Growth: England in the late Middle Ages*, he
describes the period from 1348 to 1485 as having ‘an astonishing record of resurgent
vitality and enterprise’. In order to fit in with this model, therefore, all pleas of
poverty found in urban petitions to parliament and the crown must have been
insincere. Indeed he dismisses such documents as ‘drafted by conniving lawyers on
behalf of corporate clients’, arguing that they are therefore fundamentally untruthful.\footnote{Bridbury, *Economic growth*, pp. 24, 42.}
While there were undoubtedly pockets of urban economic expansion in the late
medieval period, most scholars seriously question Bridbury’s thesis of overwhelmingly buoyant civic finances. Nonetheless, two of Bridbury’s key assumptions about urban finances and ceremonial remain widely accepted. The first is that ceremonial expenditure must have been comparatively worthless and therefore a luxury which could easily have been cut in times of real hardship. The second is that all ceremonial expenses were paid from the common funds, rather than the private pockets of leading citizens. Both these assumptions are challenged in the ensuing discussion.

The ceremonial expenses paid out of a town’s common money usually fell into four main categories: salaries for permanent ‘ceremonial’ officers, such as the mayoral sword and mace bearers; liveries for civic officials; gifts presented to visiting dignitaries or sent to individuals perceived to be able to offer ‘good lordship’ to the town; and the costs of entertaining important visitors, usually with feasts. The use of civic regalia, such as mayoral swords and maces, became increasingly prominent during the later middle ages and this led to the employment of attendant officers to carry these items. The precise duties of sword-bearers and sergeants-at-mace were not always clearly defined in their oaths, but Robert Ricart’s Kalendar is particularly informative about these roles in Bristol. Here, the mayor’s four sergeants and the sheriff’s sergeants (unspecified in number), were required to,

bruynge yn their suertees to be bounde with them vnto the seide Maire, eyry of them in their severall obligacion, of x li. or xx marcs of their good aberyng and trewe executing of their officez during that yere, as wele in the Staple court as othirwyse, for to make due levey, and truly pay and content almoner of flynes, issuez, mercentementez, condempacionez, and executionez, at eny tyme had and recovered in the seide Maires court.

As this entry suggests, the duties of such officials were far from purely ceremonial; instead they were the ‘public face’ of law enforcement, a point William Langland made evident when he described the ‘maires and maceres’ as ‘the menes

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44 One notable exception to this is Lindenbaum, ‘Ceremony and oligarchy’, pp. 173-4.
45 A particularly forthright expression of this view is found in, Kermode, ‘Urban decline?’, 188.
46 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 159; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 76.
In particular, ‘ceremonial’ officers, such as sword-bearers or sergeants-at-mace were often involved in arrests, as demonstrated during a dramatic case in Norwich in 1505, when the gaoler and sergeant-at-mace challenged the prior’s jurisdiction by arresting a sanctuary man for committing a felony within the city, thereby incurring the wrath of the religious community. Indeed, the role of ceremonial officers in law enforcement was so firmly engrained that when the sheriff of Yorkshire usurped the city of York’s rights of arrest in 1489, the mayor sent ‘the berer of the gyllt maise unto the said shireff’ to explain the error. Ceremonial officers were also usually required to be attendant on the mayor or sheriffs as they carried out their duties of everyday law enforcement, such as checking weights and measures. Doubtless men holding large swords or heavy maces – ceremonial or otherwise – would have made the situation more physically intimidating for the townsfolk and women involved, as well as emphasising the legal authority of the leading officers.

In this context, it is unsurprising that the employment of such officers and the use of civic regalia was sometimes the subject of friction within the urban community. An illuminating example of this occurred in Norwich in 1414 when a group styling themselves as ‘the commonalty’ claimed that the new mayor was intent upon employing a man to carry a sword in front of him ‘whereby the citizens and commonalty of the said city are in point to be put to great damage against the common right’. The right to employ a sword-bearer had been granted to the local government in Henry IV’s charter of 1404, but many in the local community increasingly resented it as it symbolized the coercive power of the urban administration, which was seen in some quarters in the early fifteenth century as unfairly elected, with disputes concerning the selection of mayor every year from 1406 to 1413. This perceived illegitimacy of urban government went hand in hand with increased ceremonial, highlighted by considerable expenditure upon lavish clothing and civic regalia for officers. In c. 1407, for example, six and a half ounces

48 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 9e/12.
50 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8c/3. The translation is taken from Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingley, I, pp. 76-7.
of silver and 27s 11d were paid for a ‘hernes’ for the mayor’s sword; 20d for a ‘bever hat’ for the mayor; and 2s for a sheath for the mayoral sword and for silk, which was perhaps to be used for a baldric. These trappings of power were presumably intended to quell local dissent by enhancing the civic officers’ appearance of authority, but in fact they had exactly the opposite effect. As part of the negotiated settlement of 1415, therefore, the citizenry were granted greater say in the election of the mayoral sword-bearer. It was agreed that the mayor could select two candidates to act in this capacity, but those present at the Common Assembly were to choose between them. This was designed to reduce the impression that the civic leaders simply chose their own henchmen, whom they could then use to act as extortionists against the rest of the community. As this example from Norwich highlights, criticism from contemporaries regarding regalia and other ceremonial expenses occurred not because these matters were regarded as an unnecessary extravagance, but because they were seen as a very real means of asserting urban government power.

Payments for liveries for civic officers were another major annual expense for most town governments. Urban records placed considerable emphasis upon the colour, cost and quality of cloth used in town officials’ formal robes, with differences in the cost and amount of the material indicating a hierarchy of importance within civic government. In 1391 in Bristol, the cost of official liveries had clearly become a matter of dispute and so the Little Red Book criticized the ‘outrageous amounts’ spent on furs for the officers and instead set out the correct amounts and prices. In general, however, contemporaries do not seem to have worried unduly about the cost of these official garments, which were clearly regarded as a standard part of the salaries of civic officials. In 1479, Ricart’s Kalendar stipulated the price and amount of material to be given to each official as their civic livery at Christmas, with the mayor receiving twelve yards of ‘scarlet’ priced at £8, with 10 marks for his fur. Sheriffs received only ten yards of material and £5 for their fur. More lowly officials, such as the sword-bearer, town clerk or steward, received no ‘scarlet’, but only fur.

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52 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7e/9.
53 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8c/3; NCR Case 8c/5; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 76-7, 103.
55 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 161v-162; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 81-2.
Gifts of or payments for clothing were a standard medieval practice and one which was imbued with considerable cultural significance. In the first place, clothes were costly items and accordingly a gift of clothing was a mark of particular favour. Liveries were given to royal or noble retainers by their masters as a sign of their allegiance. The bonding significance of gifts of clothing was even more evident in individual wills, where it was commonplace for testators to bequeath items of clothing to family members or close friends as an object of both financial and sentimental value. In a fairly typical will, the Bristol burgess John Bount in 1404 left his two best gowns to his uncle and a gown and doublet to his favoured apprentice. Some testators also left money to pay for clothing to be made and given to the poor as a form of charity, which was intended to inspire the recipient to pray for their benefactor's soul. Accepting a gift of clothing therefore required the recipient to demonstrate loyalty to the donor. By receiving a civic livery, an officer was obliged to show loyalty to the town in a similar way.

By giving liveries to civic officers, urban corporations used the symbolism of gifts of clothing to reinforce the unity of the collective government and to inspire loyalty to the senior officials. It was an act designed to bolster their shared corporate identity in their own eyes and also to advertise this unified status to the wider population, a point emphasised by the practice of civic officers publicly parading through the streets together, all wearing the civic livery. The exclusivity of the garments was considered particularly important and generally the gilds were prohibited from wearing liveries in the same colour as the members of the civic administration to avoid confusion. In Norwich, therefore, it was specified that 'no crafte shall take the colours departed in which the Maire and the Aldermen have ben cladde in ii yer before at any tyme that the seid craftis shall be cladde'. This indicates that scarlet was not the invariable colour, although this was usually the case.

58 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17a (Liber Albus), f. 162; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, p. 286.
Liveries, then, were a mark of power and status and enhanced the ‘worship’ of the individual wearing them. Importantly, however, they were also a symbol of collective government: the colour of the gown in Norwich, for example, was only significant because it was also worn by other civic officers and therefore was recognised as a symbol of the governing elite. Liveries were also an effective method of reducing competition for individual ‘worship’ among the leading men of a town in the matter of clothing. This prevented the need for officers to engage in unseemly one-upmanship in the matter of ‘worshipful’ clothing, which might expose the corporation to ridicule and criticism. This was particularly important as the amount of money an individual spent on clothing was a much debated topic in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the wake of Sumptuary Laws and persistent moral diatribes against those who dressed above their station.59 Dress was a particularly contentious matter in towns, which were centres of fashion, and merchants were especially vulnerable to accusations of worldliness as they often had access to fine materials and jewels from their trade. Urban governments sought to address this problem by emphasising the use of civic liveries for officers, which were ‘worshipful’ garments, designed to indicate the wearer’s status, but were also part of an official uniform, and so could not be regarded as a sign of individual vanity or overspending.

Aside from payments to civic officers, towns often spent considerable sums in entertainment and gifts for important members of the gentry, nobility and royalty. Gifts were an important part of political culture generally and urban governments reinforced their relationships with influential individuals or families by giving presents, especially in the form of wine or foodstuffs.60 In 1413-14, therefore, the Norwich administration paid for eight gallons of wine to be given to the confessor of Henry V and in 1420-1 paid for one gallon and one quart of wine to be given to the

treasurer and chief baron of the Exchequer. The Hull chamberlains’ account of 1464-5 included the payment of 10s 6d for fish as a gift to the king’s customer. Sometimes presents were given specifically to obtain support on a particular issue. During the prosecution of the mayor and citizens of Exeter by Edmund Lacy, the bishop and the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral, the mayor John Shillingford sought to gain favour by sending the chancellor salt fish to assist in his entertainment of the justices on the day the case was due to be heard. He wrote to his fellow-officials that,

...y didde as me thoghte aughte to be done and...sende thider that day ij stately pikerellis and ij stately tenchis, for the whiche my lorde Chaunceller cowed right grete thankys and made moche therof hardly, for hit came yn gode seson.

While such gifts did not guarantee favourable decisions, they were an accepted part of the search for ‘good lordship’ and were rarely challenged by contemporaries, even in times of economic hardship.

Royalty were also recipients of generous presents, usually receiving £100 in a gold cup on their first visit. Other gifts were made by urban governments. Between 1446 and 1450, for example, Bristol gave Henry VI £20 in cash and a horse worth £6 13s 4d. Usually, the civic expenses of a royal visit included a costly gift and it seems to have been generally accepted that this could not normally be paid out of the common funds and so a special collection was arranged. When Richard III and Queen Anne visited York in 1483, for example, each member of the council gave at least £5 towards their presents. Pageantry for formal royal ‘entries’ could also be very costly and it was doubtless for this reason that most provincial towns only received royal visitors with pageantry once during the reign, with other visits being

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61 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7d/17; NCR Case 7d/22.
64 For the significance of gifts of cash and cups to royalty, see pp. 144-5.
65 GRB, 1, p. 127.
66 Details of how such special collections were arranged are given pp. 148-50.
67 Kermode, "Urban decline?", 183.
conducted on a more modest scale. Expenditure from the common funds on such hospitality for royalty was apparently very rarely the subject of criticism from within the citizen body, firstly, as it could be perceived as disloyalty to both the monarch and the city and secondly, as it was seen as an essential measure to obtain ‘good lordship’ from the king and all the privileges and powerful support that that entailed.

As entertainment and feasting for nobles and kings suggests, lavish hospitality was a central aspect of town relations with important outsiders and this reflected a contemporary awareness that urban governments could only function within the broader political framework which was heavily dependent upon personal connections. Entertainment, often in the form of feasts, for other important visitors was also frequently charged to the common funds and seems to have been regarded as a legitimate outlay for the good of the whole community. To some extent this was simply a method of reducing the cost of office-bearing, but in addition it ensured that the needs of the corporation were reiterated through this hospitality, rather than the personal wishes of an individual civic officer. There was undoubtedly a contemporary expectation that visiting justices of the peace, nobles or royal servants would be treated in a hospitable and generous manner. The Norwich bailiffs’ account for 1397-8, therefore, included 4s 8d on a breakfast for the Justices of the Peace as well as 12d spent on wine for them to drink during their session. The notion that this type of expenditure was an ‘optional extra’, as expressed in the work of Anthony Bridbury and Jennifer Kermode, is misleading. As Felicity Heal has emphasised, hospitality was a key value of pre-modern culture and to send ‘worshipful’ visitors away hungry or empty-handed would be an insult both to them and to their lord. A modern-day parallel might be the practice of ‘dining’ an academic guest speaker after a seminar, a courtesy which is generally carried out regardless of the university finances because it is an ingrained act of politeness.

The importance of hospitality to outsiders made it an obvious collective concern, but urban customals and assembly books also placed great emphasis upon feasts and entertainments which focused on the townspeople alone. Feasts and

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69 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7a/6.
'drinkings' usually occurred as part of the celebrations of important events in the religious calendar, such as Christmas and the Epiphany, and also the civic ceremominal year, such as mayoral elections and 'ridings'. The descriptions of these events highlight that they were intended to promote good-will and conviviality. According to Robert Ricart, for example, the drinkings at the mayor's home on All Saints' Day (1 November) took place with 'the cuppes merilly seruyng aboute the hous'. Making merry together was regarded as a means of unifying the group and enhancing their collective identity.

Sharing food and drink had a broad religious and cultural significance in the late medieval period. The 'Last Supper' and the Mass were obvious Christian models for dining together and this symbolism was particularly echoed in the practice of drinking wine from the same cup, which appears to have been a commonplace of medieval feasts. The scriptural emphasis upon the fact that Judas betrayed Christ after dining with him was an important aspect of this communal imagery. According to St. John's Gospel, Christ predicted his betrayal by saying, 'he that eateth bread with me shall lift up his heel against me' and later identified Judas as the traitor by handing him bread dipped in sauce. This scene was at the heart of the medieval emphasis upon the sinfulness of disloyalty to those you dined with. In 1479, therefore, the Great Red Book of Bristol highlighted that the mayor, William Spencer, and a local gentleman, Thomas Norton dined together 'in frendely maner' and 'in the company of... worshipful persoues', but these 'amicable demeanyngs notwithstanding' Norton went on to accuse Spencer falsely of treason, a despicable act, which was regarded as a sign of his base character.

Eating and drinking together was therefore an important symbol of collective unity and urban governments were understandably anxious to appropriate these contemporary cultural values to legitimize and consolidate their position of power. Medieval culinary festivities also provided the opportunity for the demarcation of a strict hierarchy, generally without leading to animosity. In the royal

71 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 160v; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 79.
74 GRB, IV, pp. 66-7.
household, for example, it was customary for different status servants to eat in separate ‘messes’, as outlined in the *Black Book of the Household of Edward IV*. Similar arrangements occurred during the Christmas festivities of the lesser servants at Beverley Minster, with each group being given a special meal on a different day, depending on their status. Deacons ate together on St. Stephen’s day (26 December); choristers and thurifers, all young boys, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December), while subdeacons and clergers waited until the Feast of the Circumcision (1 January).

In the urban setting, it was fairly common for different groups within the political hierarchy to have separate annual feasts. In Bristol on the day of the mayor’s oath-taking, for example, it was usual for the common council to divide into two groups ‘a grete parte of theym with the new Maire and a parte with the olde Maire; in especial all officers to dyne with the olde Maire’. After the meal, however, they all reunited at the High Cross in the town and then went to mass together. This ritual was intended to highlight the transfer of power from the old to the new mayor in the eyes of both the members of civic government and the wider population, who would have seen the processions to and from the church. Ultimately, however, it was necessary for the whole governing body to be seen together publicly in a united procession, in order to highlight their continued collective power. Significantly, despite the fact that all members had already eaten a large meal, after Mass the entire group went back to the new mayor’s house to partake in further refreshment of ‘cakebrede and wyne’ together.

Hospitality and feasting, then, promoted conviviality and unity, but not equality. While in Ipswich in 1469 it was ordered that each burgess should pay for his own dinner and that of his wife, it was most common for these events to be the responsibility of individual leading officers, like the mayor, or the sheriffs. There is

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77 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 158; Ricart, *Kalendar*, p. 74.
79 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 158-158v; Ricart, *Kalendar*, p. 74.
a widespread perception in the current scholarship that leading men were much more likely to be extravagant with the town’s ‘common money’ than their own wealth. Jennifer Kermode, commenting on the finances of the government of late medieval York, has argued that the civic administration were inclined to overspend when dealing with the ‘common money’, but remained fairly cautious when dealing with money from their own pockets.\textsuperscript{81} In fact, the evidence in most provincial towns suggests that exactly the opposite was the case. Expenditure of common money was usually heavily scrutinised and only entertainments involving outsiders (such as royalty, nobles or visiting justices) were routinely paid for out of these funds. Feasting for town officials alone, however, was generally funded by individual officials and was apparently often carried out on a lavish scale.

A display of personal generosity was at the heart of these civic events, however formalized and anticipated they may have been. Indeed, sometimes this form of generosity was continued posthumously, as was the case in the terms of the will of John Baret of Bury St. Edmunds who in 1463 bequeathed money to ensure that,

\begin{quote}
the alderman, burgeys, gentilmen, and gentilwommen haue a dyner the same day that I am enterid, with other folks of wourshippe, preests, and good frendys, and also my tenawunts, to wiche I am moche be holde to do for hem alle, for they haue be to me right gentil and good at alle tymes.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

Feasting at someone’s expense created an obligation on the part of the guests to show loyalty to their host, a point emphasised in the popular proverb that you should not harm someone if you had ‘eaten his salt’.\textsuperscript{83} Within the broader cultural framework of late medieval society and politics, personal bonds between individuals were important and expected. Annual feasts or ‘drinkings’ were therefore an ideal opportunity for a leading official, like the mayor, to build up these relationships.

As well as being obliged to show future loyalty, the guests at these hospitable displays provided a captive audience for the officer to demonstrate his wealth and

\textsuperscript{81} Kermode, ‘Urban decline?’, 182-3, 188.
‘worship’. The size of these events varied from place to place. Evidence from sixteenth-century Coventry suggests that the new mayor hosted a feast ‘and bidds an abundance of people to make merry with him there, further as he shall like either in towne or country or in both, either riche or poore or both’. It is, of course, dangerous to extrapolate historical data backwards, but there is evidence for large gatherings in fifteenth-century towns. The mayoral ‘drinkings’ at Bristol on All Saints’ Day (1 November) included not only civic officers but also ‘many othir gentils and worshipfull comeners, suche as apperith there at that tyme’, who all went, to All Hallowen chirch, there to offer, and fro thens to walke, ... vnto the Maieres place, there to haue their ffyres and their drynkyngs with spiced cakebrede, and sundry wynes.

No explanation is given concerning exactly who qualified as ‘worshipfull comeners’. It is probable that the group was to an extent self-selecting, as only those who felt themselves to have a secure role within the city’s life would take part in such a parade and attend festivities in the mayor’s home. It is entirely plausible, however, that large numbers were involved: in a civic feast at York funded by the earl of Northumberland and the gild of St. Christopher in 1487 the York House Books claim that in addition to the civic officers and gentlemen of the Ainsty, ‘sex hundreth of the moost honest commone’ took part in this ‘worshipfull recreacion, solace and disport’. While York did have an unusually large burgess population and the earl of Northumberland was an exceptionally wealthy sponsor, the figure given does indicate that such celebrations were an important method of including the broader enfranchised community in civic ceremonial life.

Although burgesses were generally the recipients of civic feasting, it was important for the mayor and other leading officials to be seen as a hospitable figure to a broader range of inferiors. Christian doctrine was very clear on the importance of giving victuals to the needy: feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty were two of the seven corporal works of mercy and Christ was frequently depicted in the Gospels as feeding large crowds. Late medieval contemporaries were very

84 Quoted in Phythian-Adams, Desolation, p. 263.
85 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 160-160r; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 79.
influenced by this religious teaching and it was common at gild feasts and at funeral meals for a certain number of paupers to be invited or to be sent left-over food. It is unlikely, therefore, that members of civic government, ever-anxious to promote their own respectability, would have neglected such conventional acts of piety.

The importance of entertainment in the homes of civic officers was an important indication of how the ‘worship’ of a man’s home reflected upon his public image. After the mayoral elections in Bristol on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September), time was allowed to the mayor ‘to make his purveyaunce of his worshipfull householde, and the honourable apparailling of his mansion, in as plesaunt and goodly wise as kan be devised’ in preparation for a dinner which he hosted for the majority of the Council on the Feast of Michael the Archangel (29 September). It was specifically stated that the mayor should organise all the processions and festivities ‘in as solempe and honourable wise as he can devise do to his oune worshipp and to the honoure, laude and preysyng of alle this worshipfull towne’. The mayor’s own worship and that of the city were therefore regarded as inextricably linked.

The wife of a leading civic officer would have been expected to take a leading role in the preparations for events such as ‘drinkings’ or formal dinners. Her duty to manage the housekeeping and hospitality, to both poor and rich, was frequently cited in moral and courtesy literature,

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And yif thou schalt be a ryche wiffe, be thou nought to harde,
But welcombe fayre thin neyboures that comen to the towarde
Mete and drynke with fair semblaunte, the mor schall be thi mede,
Ilke a man aftir his state, and geue the pouer atte need.
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There is little hard evidence for the attendance of wives at such civic events, although there is one reference in the Ipswich records in June 1469 to payment for food for the

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89 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 154; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 70.
wives of the town officials attending the dinner of the Common Council.\textsuperscript{92} It is probable, however, that for events such as the Bristol mayoral drinking, which took place in the mayor’s own home, his wife would have acted as hostess. She certainly would have had a key role in the preparations, which reflected upon both her own and her husband’s worship.

During civic events, the leading ladies of the city were undoubtedly faced with the perennially awkward question of what to wear. It was considered honourable for a wife to be dressed well, as it indicated her husband’s wealth and status. A merchant’s wife commented in Chaucer’s Shipman’s Tale that,

\begin{quote}
The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye,  
He moot us clothe, and he moot us arraye,  
Al for his owene worshipe richely. \textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

It was essential, however, that she did not dress in a superior manner to him, as this might suggest that she tyrannised over him in private life, indicating a disordered household. Langland’s Reason ‘warnede Watte his wif was to blame / That hir heed was worth half marc and his hood noght worth a grote’.\textsuperscript{94} Extravagant dress in a woman was regarded as a sign that she wished to make herself attractive to other men, indicating that she was sexually ‘loose’ and dangerously uncontrolled by her husband. In the Shipman’s Tale, the idea that the merchant’s wife dressed for her husband’s honour was satirized by the fact that she soon prostituted herself in order to pay for a new outfit, thus disgracing herself and her spouse.\textsuperscript{95}

The ambiguous messages given by rich female attire among high-status townswomen were most famously demonstrated by Margery Kempe, the daughter of John Brunham, merchant, who was five times mayor and six times a parliamentary representative for Lynn between 1364 and 1391. She was married to John Kempe, who was chamberlain of the town in 1394.\textsuperscript{96} Describing her sinful pride in rich clothing, Margery recalled how,

\begin{quote}
Sche wold not leeuyn hir pride ne hir pompows aray...neithyr for hyr husband ne for noon other manmys counsel. And yet sche wys ful well that men sayden
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{92} Bacon,\textit{ Annals}, p. 128.  
\textsuperscript{93} Chaucer,\textit{ Riverside Chaucer'}, 'The Shipman's Tale', II. 11-13, p. 203.  
\textsuperscript{94} Langland,\textit{ Piers Plowman}, 'Passus V', II. 30-1, p. 43.  
\textsuperscript{96} ODNB, sub ‘Kempe, Margery (b. c.1373, d. in or after 1438)’.
hir mech velany, for sche weryd gold pypys on hir hevyd and hir hodys wyth
the typettys were daggyd...that it schuld be the mor staryng to mennyng sygth and
hir-self the more ben worshipd.

On one hand, Margery’s showy dress brought her ‘worship’ in the local community
and created admiration. On the other, it lead to her being slandered and criticized.
‘Men seyden hir mech velany’ was perhaps an oblique reference to accusations of
vanity, pride or sexual impropriety. Certainly her husband regarded her clothing as a
cause for concern, suggesting that he regarded her attire as causing him dishonour and
she claimed that ‘hir husband wold speke to hir for to leuyn hir pride [in clothing]’.97

In some towns, it is possible that these dilemmas were avoided by women
wearing a civic livery. According to Chaucer, the wives of aldermen were pleased to
‘goon to vigilies al before, / And have a mantel roialliche ybore’, but it remains
unclear whether this mantle was simply an item of fine clothing or part of an urban
uniform.98 Liveries for the wives of leading officers were not mentioned in town
accounts, but it is possible that in some towns these women were permitted to wear
equivalent clothing to their husbands on official occasions. Certainly women wore
gild liveries. Most gild ordinances simply stated that ‘all the brethren and sisteren
shall be clad in livery, at their own cost’, but occasionally more specific directions
were given for female liveries.99 The Norwich gild of St. George therefore required
that ‘euyer suster of the ffraternite and gylde schul ben cladde in o swte of hoodles,
that is for to seye reed’.100 Granting liveries to women was also carried out higher up
the social scale, with the ladies of the Order of the Garter being granted special robes
to wear for the St. George’s Day celebrations.101

It was not simply, then, the material aspects of a civic officer’s home which
were displayed during such festivities, it was also the moral integrity and generosity
of his household and its inhabitants. The emphasis upon clean living was sufficiently
great to ensure that some town leaders personally took steps to ensure that their

97 Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe: the Text from the Unique MS. Owned by Colonel W.
Butler-Bowdon, eds. S.B. Meech and E.H. Allen, EETS OS 212 (1940), pp. 9-10.
98 Chaucer, Riverside Chaucer, ‘General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales’, II. 377-8, p. 29.
100 Gild of St. George, ed. Grace, p. 34. See also, Rosser, ‘Fraternity feast’, 435, 443.
101 H.E.L. Collins, The Order of the Garter, 1341-1461: Chivalry and Politics in Late Medieval
households were seen to be bastions of morality, particularly on occasions when their own status and that of the town’s was most closely enjoined. This was indicated in a late fifteenth-century Bristol ordinance curtailing Christmas drinkings at the mayor’s house on the grounds that it was ‘inordinate so to be doon for that day [i.e. Christmas Day] when men schold be mooste holyest then were maris servauntis mooste in labour and besynesse’. It was clearly considered inappropriate by the morally squeamish civic leaders for even their servants to neglect their religious duties on an important religious feast. By recording this objection in the urban archives, this pious objection was also a reminder of their virtue for future generations, highlighting the interplay between the public and private spheres of civic officers’ lives.

102 GRB, III, p. 96.
Chapter Three: Justice in late medieval boroughs

England has many local customs, varying from place to place, for the English have many things done by custom, which they do not have by law, as in the various counties, cities, boroughs and vills... Custom, in truth ... is sometimes observed as and takes the place of law. For the authority of custom and long use is not slight.\(^1\)

This statement, presumed to have been made in the thirteenth-century by the famous lawyer Henry Bracton, remained just as pertinent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.\(^2\) Custom had two defining features: it applied within a limited jurisdiction and its rhetoric claimed it was based on the ancient traditions of the local community. In rural areas, it was enforced through the manorial and hundred courts and in towns through a variety of borough courts, such as the Crownmote, the Portmote and the Pentice in Chester, or the Staple, Mayor’s and Tolzey courts in Bristol. Senior civic government officials were responsible for recording, elaborating and enforcing the ‘ancient usages and customs’ of their town and these regulations were therefore at the heart of their collective legal and cultural identity.

Urban customals were manuscripts which usually purported to contain a complete written record of hitherto widely-known local laws, sourced both from older written records and the long-standing oral traditions of the community. The *Kalendar* of Bristol, therefore, was compiled from ‘diverse chronicles, customs, laws, liberties and other matters’, while the Norwich *Book of Customs*, compiled c. 1308, recorded ‘the laws and customs of old held and used in the City of Norwich’. This work was still considered of sufficient use in the mid-fifteenth century for it to be copied into the *Book of Pleas*.\(^3\) While ‘ancient custom’ was a powerful legal and cultural weapon in late medieval towns, the conflicting claims of oral and written evidence, as well as the efficacy of ancient custom in response to contemporary requirements, were themes frequently evoked in urban muniments. Indeed, one of the main difficulties

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\(^2\) *ODNB*, sub ‘Bratton, Henry of (d. 1268)’.

presented by the growth of written customary law, as opposed to oral record, was that alterations to tradition had to be made explicit. Obsolete or harmful customs could not simply be forgotten by successive generations, because the written civic memory kept them alive. The mayoral oath of Bristol, recorded in 1479, stipulated that ‘the fraunchisez and free custumes whiche beth gode in the saide towne I shall meyntene, and all euell custumes and wronges I shall put awaye and anyntese, by my power’.\(^4\) It was usual practice to justify alterations to tradition on the grounds that the change was for the common good. Accordingly, when new ordinances regarding the sale of ale in Bristol were created in the mayoralty of John Wykeham (1462-3), it was specified that they were ‘for the welefare, godde rule and gouernaunce the saide towne I shall meyntene and euell custumes and wronges put and anyntese, by my power’.\(^4\)

Similarly, when the reforming Southampton mayor, Thomas Overey, introduced a series of new ordinances in 1491 in response to complaints concerning poor civic government, it was emphasised that these were ‘the remedies prouided and ordeyned...for thonoure and common wele of the same toune’.\(^5\)

Most urban custom focused upon allowing people to live harmoniously in a confined space, reflecting the preoccupation of civic governments with the prevention of disorder. Much emphasis was placed on topics such as refuse disposal, the prevention of fire, house extensions and antisocial or immoral activities, such as prostitution, adultery or eavesdropping.\(^7\) The treatment of the orphans of burgesses and inheritance was another area of concern. Ordinances in Bury St. Edmunds, for example, stipulated that the wardship of such children passed automatically to the next of kin, while in London and Bristol they were made wards of the mayor and aldermen, who were responsible for finding them a good guardian (often, but not necessarily, their closest blood relative), as well for ensuring that their inherited

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\(^4\) ‘Anyntese’ is a form of ‘anydan’, meaning ‘expel’. Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 157; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 72.

\(^5\) GRB, II, p. 69; Latimer, ”Maire of Bristow is Kalendar”: its list of civic officers’, 132.


property was not squandered. In towns, custom also generally dictated how much property the widows and children of citizens received in inheritance.

Custom was regularly utilised in relation to commercial transactions taking place within the town and the strong mercantile presence within many civic governments was reflected in the swift and often severe measures taken in order to have debts repaid. In Chester, for example, a citizen who had lent chattels within the city had the right to distrain the debtor's property within the jurisdiction if payment was not forthcoming. Particular attention was paid to debts between burgesses and non-burgesses. The practice of foreigners visiting to trade for only a short time made it necessary that such cases were dealt with speedily. The informality and swift justice provided by a mixture of customary and merchant law was highly practical in such cases. In Ricart's Kalendar, it was stated that the mayor and sheriffs heard cases informally,

to sett partyes in rest and ease by theire advertiseyement, compromesse, or otherwise...which audience kepyng by the Maire and Shiref...is the grettest preseruacion of pease and gode rule to be hadde within the toune and shire of Bristowe that can be ymagened.

Although town records emphasised local regulations, in reality the borough courts did not exclusively confine themselves to matters of local custom. Borough courts were often particularly concerned with breaches of the peace and the contraventions of victualling regulations, particularly the assize of bread and ale. Such matters were in fact governed by parliamentary statute and the common law, and were simply enforced by local officials. The overlap between royal and local justice was heightened by the role of the Justices of the Peace. These officials were appointed by royal commission for each county and from 1329 onwards their powers

\[\text{References:}\]
8 Borough Customs, ed. Bateson, II, p. 145.; Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 290v; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 5, 99-100; B.A. Hanawalt, Growing Up in Medieval London: the Experience of Childhood in History (New York and Oxford, 1993), pp. 91-3. This customary right was confirmed by royal charter to Bristol in January 1331, see, Bristol Charters, ed. Harding, pp. 74-5.
10 Ibid, I, p. 111.
12 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 163v; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 84-5.
13 E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZMB/1, ff. 5-7v, 35-36, 40; ZMB/2, f. 36-36v.
were expanded to include allowing them to try felonies and trespasses.\textsuperscript{14} During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, justices of the peace were also appointed in a number of towns, including those which were not a county in their own right, like Northampton and Stamford. It was commonplace for leading members of the urban corporation to be appointed by the Crown as named officials, but sometimes royal commissions instead simply specified that ‘the mayor and bailiffs’ or the ‘mayor, bailiffs and worthy men’ were to act as local justices, without naming a particular individual.\textsuperscript{15} Effectively this meant that urban communities could select their own justices and Stamford had this right confirmed by charter in 1462, when it was granted that the twelve aldermen of the town should automatically become justices of the peace.\textsuperscript{16} The terms of the 1462 charter highlighted the fact that practical problems concerning conflicts of jurisdiction prompted this grant, as Stamford fell between three county jurisdictions, allowing offenders to evade justice easily.\textsuperscript{17}

While town officials may have acquired the right to try felonies during their term as justices of the peace, in general, borough courts did not have the right to these serious offences. Henry IV’s 1404 charter to Norwich, for example, specified that the mayor and sheriffs were not permitted to hear cases of felony without a special royal licence.\textsuperscript{18} Similarly the charter of August 1373 granting Bristol separate county status stated that in the case of felony the civic authorities were simply required to imprison suspects until they were tried by the royal justices.\textsuperscript{19} A few towns, however, most notably ports, did have borough courts with jurisdiction over felonies. In these places urban muniments often detailed local customary punishments for the offences, rather than the more usual death by hanging. As late as the fifteenth century, therefore, Sandwich, asserted its right to have murderers buried alive, while Winchester claimed that its citizens had the ancient ‘privilege’ of being castrated and blinded when convicted of felony, rather than executed. This punishment was last recorded as being

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 2-3; Kimball, ‘Commissions of the Peace’, 451.
\textsuperscript{18} Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, p. 32. This charter is no longer extant.
\textsuperscript{19} Bristol Charters, ed. Harding, pp. 124-5.
carried out in Winchester in the reign of Henry III, although the city continued to assert its rights in this matter even after the punishment had fallen into disuse.\textsuperscript{20}

The level of discretion allowed to municipal authorities in terms of sentencing is often difficult to gauge. Sometimes parliament regulated the punishments meted out in the courts. In 1390, for example, it was ordered that those who enforced the assize of bread and ale were to 'take no amercement or fine for any fault concerning the said assize, for which man or woman should suffer corporal punishment according to the law'.\textsuperscript{21} The wording of this statute, however, and fact that the legislation had to be repeated again in 1421, indicates that in reality local justices were inclined to impose financial penalties.\textsuperscript{22} This is supported by evidence from borough court records, with the amounts paid in fines and amercements depending on the nature of the transgression and the wealth of the offender.\textsuperscript{23} The leet court roll for Norwich in 1390-1, for example, included fines of 10 marks for those who had acted as forestallers on a large scale and for those who had gained notoriety in the area for being 'of ill fame', but very few of these people suffered corporal punishment.\textsuperscript{24} Civic authorities were often anxious to reiterate their autonomy in the matter of sentencing and so depicted punishments as part of local customary law. For example, in a description of the Bristol authorities' role in overseeing the assize of bread, Ricart wrote that the mayor was to supervise the weighing of loaves 'at suche seasons as he thynketh necessary and requisite 
\textit{aftir his discrecion}... and whate baker that breketh the sise to be punysshed, \textit{aftir the constitucion of the town}'.\textsuperscript{25} The method of enforcement, therefore, was regarded as customary, although the actual law was not.

How civic authorities chose to deal with those who broke the law was therefore particularly indicative of the image of themselves that they chose to project to the wider population and to higher authorities, such as the king. As Shannon McSheffrey has highlighted in the case of jurors, 'participation in the local

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{PROME}, January 1390, iii-269; May 1421, iv-146.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{PROME}, May 1421, iv-146.
\textsuperscript{23} E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZMB/1, ff. 5-7v, 35-36, 40; Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 5b/10-11; Leet Jurisdiction, ed. Hudson, pp. 62-5. For discussion of the use of fines against victualling offenders, see, Carrel, 'Food, drink and public order', 191-3.
\textsuperscript{24} 'Male fame'. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 5b/10.
\textsuperscript{25} My emphasis. Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 162v; Ricart, \textit{Kalendare}, pp. 82-3.
courts...was a political act', and this was all the more true for leading citizens who wished to advertise and consolidate their position as local leaders.26 This civic ideology of justice developed some distinctive aspects, but it was rooted in the broader framework of contemporary ideas concerning Christian 'just rule'. This religious model was complex and was developed in different ways, depending upon the nature of the offence and the status of the transgressor. Its cornerstone was that God not only had the moral right to judge offenders, but also had complete knowledge of their wrongdoing and total coercive power over them. This model was graphically illustrated in medieval 'Doomsday' depictions, which showed Christ in Judgment, dividing the righteous from the wicked and casting the latter into hell. The link between civic and divine authority was sometimes made explicit, as in the dramatic enactment found in the York Corpus Christi play cycle, where the Mercers, who were frequently prominent in civic government, enacted the final pageant of the Last Judgment, reflecting their leading role in the borough courts.27

While Divine knowledge of wrong-doing and its motivations was not attainable, town governments sought as far as possible to project an image of omniscience within their jurisdiction. Civic officials were responsible for policing and arrests and so they were anxious to project themselves as maintaining continual surveillance over the townspeople as they went about their everyday business. Some towns did this by continuing to operate the system of frankpledge, which required all adult males except nobles and clergymen to be grouped into tithings of about ten men. If member of a tithing committed an offence, the others were responsible for ensuring that he appeared at the local court when summoned. Those in the tithing who failed to ensure offenders appeared could be fined for their negligence.28 Norwich leets regularly prosecuted those who moved to the city and did not register as a member of a tithing, with just over twenty per cent of presentments between 1298 and 1391 being for this or related misdemeanours, such as harbouring those who evaded the system.29

29 E.g. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 5b/10; Leet Jurisdiction, ed. Hudson, pp. 62-3.
Whether or not they operated the frankpledge system, most towns were divided into sub-sections called wards or leets which had regular courts where offenders were presented by local officials called ‘capital pleges’ or spokespersons, usually on the grounds that offenders were ‘of ill fame’ or were ‘commonly reputed’ as an adulterer, an eavesdropper or a seller of faulty goods. Conversely, being ‘of good fame’ was important in terms of gaining favourable outcomes in the city courts, as well as avoiding arrest or presentment in the first place. As Phillipa Maddern has highlighted, the cognisance of these courts was very broad, including the presentment of a range of offences, such as the non-payment of tolls, selling sub-standard goods, overpricing ale, usury, drunkenness and sexual immorality. Wards or leets were also used as convenient units within which to gather taxes and levies, to arrange musters and to organise local policing. Wards were usually headed by one or two aldermen, who were responsible for ensuring the peace and security of the area. They were assisted in this task by wardens or constables. One of the chief methods of doing this was to organise a night watch. In 1471 in Norwich, the Assembly ruled that nightly watches should be held in each ward by one alderman, one constable and ‘eight other people, defensibly arrayed’ and the civic government made provision for appointing extra people to reduce the burden of night watching for the constables. While deputies were no doubt frequently employed by aldermen to lead these groups, it is clear that at times of particular tension leading civic officials themselves were expected to take a personal role, a task which could be fraught with danger: in 1487, a York alderman was murdered during an arrest ‘for doing and executing his office’.

The importance of civic policing was indicated by the personal role of senior officials such as mayors and sheriffs in monitoring trading offences. Food regulation particularly concerned the compilers of custumals. According to Ricart’s *Kalender*, while it was usual for victualling gilds to be responsible for day to day scrutiny of their members’ work, the mayor was required to visit personally brewers in the city at least twice a week ‘to oversee theym in seruyng of theire ale to the pouere commens

30 E.g. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 5b/10; *Leet Jurisdiction*, ed. Hudson, p. 64.
33 ‘Octo alis persones defensibles’. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 16d/1, f. 88.
of the toune, ...that they haue their trewe mesurez'.

It is plausible that on occasion such duties were delegated to deputies, but the personal involvement of the mayor was nonetheless important in terms of public relations; it demonstrated that he fulfilled the terms of his oath to 'reproue and chastice the mysrewlers and mysdoers in the...toune... and do every man ryght, as wel to the poor as to the riche'.

It was necessary that civic officers maintained a visible presence in arenas of public trading, such as the market place or, in port and riverside towns, at the quay. Town markets were usually overseen by civic officials called the 'assessors of the market' who presented fraudulent traders to senior members of the civic government for judgment. By policing these areas, the town government could ensure that sales took place according to the law and that the town received the correct tolls and customs pertaining to these transactions. In addition, these public spaces were the perfect arena in which to advertise civic power to a wide audience and so they were also used to make public proclamations and, in some cases, to punish offenders against the 'common weal' in the stocks or pillory. Needless to say, the civic authorities were keen to ensure that trading did take place within this supervised arena and town records were full of ordinances and sanctions against regrators and forestallers, who bought and sold goods illicitly elsewhere.

While civic officials expended considerable time and effort in their policing duties, the religious model of an omnipresent, omniscient authority remained unobtainable. To compensate for this, deterrents were used by town governments. This was particularly evident in ceremonial parades, which displayed symbols of legitimate, coercive power wielded by the local administration, such as the mayoral sword and mace. Civic governments were anxious to ensure that all officers involved directly in policing and arrests, such as gaolers and the sword and mace-bearers, took part in the parades. In 1470-1, for example, the Bristol authorities ordered that the

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35 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 163; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 83.
36 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 158; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 72-3.
38 E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZMB/4, f. 7; Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 118; Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 5b/10; Leet Jurisdiction, ed. Hudson, pp. 62-3; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 182-3.
39 Further discussion of the links between civic ceremonial and law enforcement is found above, pp. 43-5.
gaoler was to attend upon the Sheriff on all major feast days, on the nights of Midsummer and St. Peter’s and during gaol deliveries ‘beryng affoore hym a broode axe as hit hath be of olde tyme accustomed’ as well as walking ‘every Sunday in processions and assemblees...by foore the seid Shereff’. The spectacle of the local gaoler wielding an axe was undoubtedly designed to inspire fear and awe in onlookers, and to reiterate the civic authorities’ monopoly on legitimate, coercive power.

Although most offences tried in the borough courts were punished by amercements, occasionally imprisonment or public corporal punishment was used instead of, or in conjunction with, financial penalties. Publicising the punishment of at least some classes of offenders was intended to demonstrate both the civic government’s severity and its piety. Clearly, public punishment, particularly in the stocks or pillory, was designed to prevent further offending, by frightening potential criminals with the possibility of similar treatment. This point was made very clear in the Norwich Book of Pleas, which stated that a regrator or forestaller was, on the second offence, to be pilloried,

so that his punishment may be the terror of others and his fault may be made manifest to the people ... and the aforesaid punishment may not be redeemed nor may the Bailiffs have power to redeem such punishment, for that thing touches the whole community and the people of the whole country.41

Misdemeanours which most frequently resulted in public punishment were victualling offences, gossiping, scolding, eavesdropping, forgery, impersonation, adultery, gaming, idleness or false begging. All these crimes were associated with deceitful damage to the common weal. The idea that the offences were secret was central to the appropriateness of public punishment for them, as it broadcast the lie, allowing the truth to be known instead. This provided justice for victims of crimes such as slander and also decreased the possibility of dishonest victuallers or false beggars re-offending, as their crimes would be known within the local community and their income would be affected accordingly. It was common practice, therefore, to emphasise the nature of the crime by having it publicly proclaimed or by placing

40 GRB, III, p. 93.
41 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 118. Translation from Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, p. 182.
notices or symbols of the offence on or by the captive. In the Norwich *Book of Pleas* it was ordered that forestallers being pilloried should have the nature of their crimes publicly proclaimed, while the 1347 Bristol charter which prescribed the punishment of dishonest bakers was decorated with an image of such an offender being dragged through the streets of the town on a hurdle, with a short-weight loaf hung around his neck and a pair of uneven scales visible next to him (see fig. 2).\(^{42}\)

Public punishment of those who offended against the whole community was particularly important for the image of civic government, as it confirmed that justice was being carried out effectively. This was especially necessary in the case of fraudulent victuallers, as enforcing the assize was a duty of local administrators and was also regarded as a means of benefiting the poor, a necessary Christian duty. According to William Langland, ‘maires and maceres’ were required,

\begin{quote}
To punysshe on pillories and on pynyng stooles, Brewesters and baksters, bochiers and cokes- For these are men on this molde that most harm wercheth To the pover peple that parcelmele buggen.\(^{43}\)
\end{quote}

Popular moralising against those who defrauded the poor made the enforcement of victualling assizes a matter civic governments in general were very keen to emphasise, and while most offences were punished with fines, the occasional use of the pillory, stocks or hurdle was an important means of dealing with notorious offenders and showing that the local administration served the common good.\(^{44}\)

Severity alone, however, was not enough; it was necessary that justice should be tempered with mercy. Senior officers openly showed charity towards offenders both as a corporation and as individuals. Exhibitions of personal mercy by the mayor in particular were considered essential, to highlight that he embodied Christian virtue. A London example occurred in 1379, when Alice Godrich slandered William Walworth, former mayor of the City, and Walworth requested that she should be punished ‘that such scolds and female liars might be fearful to slander reputable men

\(^{42}\) Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 118; Bristol, BRO, 01250.
\(^{43}\) The last two lines read ‘For these are the men on this earth who most harm work / To the poor people who piecemeal buy’. Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus III, ll. 77-81, p. 26.
without cause'. She was condemned to the 'thewe' for an hour and was required to pay Walworth £40 in damages. Subsequently, however, Walworth relented, 'begging and entreating the mayor and aldermen that the punishment of the pillory might be remitted', a request which was granted and Walworth agreed not to claim the money 'during the good behaviour of the said Alice'.

It was considered particularly appropriate that leading men showed grace to those who had personally offended them, usually by striking or insulting them, as this was an uncontroversial display of Christian charity and could not be interpreted as undue lenience towards offenders against the common weal. In the fifteenth-century Cinque Ports, therefore, the customary punishment for hitting the mayor was to lose 'the lyme that he oppressed with'. The qualification in Rye that this was only 'if the mayor will', however, suggested that in practice mutilation was not used frequently in such cases, but simply threatened, to reiterate the enormity of the offence and to provide an opportunity for the mayor to show mercy publicly to someone who had personally injured him. In a comparable case from London in January 1387, William Hughlot was charged with having assaulted John Rote, an alderman, and was sentenced to lose his right hand, but this punishment was remitted at Rote's personal request. A similar trend was evident in the stipulation that those who struck someone in the presence of the king should lose their right hand, a punishment which in reality was rarely exacted in the late medieval period. Methods of punishment, then, were sometimes seen as opportunities for those in authority to exhibit the ultimate Christian virtues, mercy and charity. Indeed, the appearance of exercising power in a godly manner underlined its legitimacy. Opponents of civic government, therefore, often focused in their complaints upon the inhumane and unjust use of the judicial system by urban officials. While sometimes these complaints discussed the courts, the stocks or the pillory, it was most common for them to centre upon the town gaol.

47 *CLB – H*, p. 296.
In the modern world, medieval gaols get a bad press. Today, describing prison conditions as ‘medieval’ implies that they are inhumane. While this type of terminology is particularly evident in the popular press, it is also found in a number of scholarly publications. Both John Bellamy and Ralph Pugh, for example, described the prisons of medieval times as symptomatic of a ‘primitive society’, while Anthony Babington has claimed that prisoners were ‘habitually ill-treated by gaolers’. While some forms of incarceration in the later Middle Ages were undoubtedly horrific, the current association of the medieval gaol with cruelty stems from a number of misjudgements of the sources. In particular, it ignores the fact that owning and administering a gaol was symbolic of broader legal jurisdiction within the area. Consequently, attacking poor prison conditions was a method of criticising the political authority of local leaders. The texts describing gaols, therefore, can rarely be regarded as politically neutral. Municipal governments could rarely claim a monopoly on prison control in the area, as it was commonplace for ‘private’ prisons, belonging to a lord or ecclesiastical house, to be in use. In York, for example, the Chapter’s ‘Peter Prison’ continued to house offenders until the eighteenth century. The Archbishop also had his own gaol, which by 1385 was situated in the episcopal palace and which was used to house misbehaving clerks. Urban hostility towards alternative gaols, including those in royal castles, was frequently evident within towns, indicating some tension in relation to local and Crown jurisdictions. As early as c. 1240, therefore, Bristol custom ordained that no burgess could be imprisoned in the castle, but rather had to be held in the town gaol. Similar rules applied in Chester, according to the charters of 1300 and 1506, but the presence of the earl’s courts so close to the town occasionally led to confusion and friction over jurisdiction. This explains the emphasis placed upon the location of imprisonment in the Chester Pentice Cartulary, which showed that townsmen vehemently defended their right to gaol offenders in Northgate, the municipal prison.


50 VCH Yorkshire: City of York, p. 497; Pugh, Imprisonment, p. 102.

51 Borough Customs, ed. Bateson, I, p. 64.

52 Morris, Chester, pp. 491, 493, 529, 537.

53 Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/2, ff. 70v, 79-80.
Gaol-breaking was an established act of rebellion against power that was perceived to be unjust. It was for this reason that the insurgents of 1381 broke open gaols and stocks, freeing their inmates, most famously in the case of the Marshalsea in London. This, however, was by no means the only year in which such attacks occurred. Sometimes the authority of the civic government was questioned by prison breaking, as in 1402 in Hull, when a crowd of townsfolk shouted ‘doune with the maire, doune with hym’ as they released inmates from the gaol and stocks and attacked the mayor, William Chery and his serjeant, Richard Cotome. More commonly, however, members of the civic government were the perpetrators of these acts. During the Norwich riots of 1443, attacks on the priory focused upon breaking the prior’s stocks and gaol. Similarly, in 1410 in Chester, the abbot of St. Werburgh’s prosecuted the townsman John de Podington in his own court of St. Thomas’ for not executing a will correctly, and then incarcerated him in his own prison, in the Gateway. The mayor, however, led a band of citizens to rescue him, instead removing Podington to the municipal gaol in Northgate. As the citizens’ actions indicated, legal jurisdiction, not the alleged innocence of the convict, was the crucial issue. Abbot Henry de Sutton vigorously fought the case in the Exchequer Court at the Castle, however, and succeeded in having Podington returned to the abbey prison.

Disputes regarding the right of the urban administration to arrest and gaol offenders frequently emphasised the brutality of town officials or the inhumane form of incarceration used. These accusations were designed to imply the illegitimacy of civic authority, by depicting it as tyrannical, unreasoning and unchristian. The suit between John Newland, abbot of St. Augustine’s, and the mayor and commonalty of Bristol in 1479 described how a violent disturbance broke out, apparently centring upon civic officials’ attempts to arrest ‘sanctuary men’ in the area and bring them to the town gaol of Newgate. Witness statements for both parties displayed a self-conscious depiction of the opposing side’s inhumanity and inability to wield coercive

54 CPR, 1401-5, p. 115.
For similar London examples, see Pugh, Imprisonment, pp. 97, 101.
power justly.\textsuperscript{57} One abbey witness, William Hill, claimed that the civic officials attacked an abbey tenant as he was ‘stondyng in his dorre having a yonge childe in his armes and ...sent hym to prison within the said toun’.\textsuperscript{58} Similarly, in a case against JohnColsyll, former mayor of Exeter, heard in the Star Chamber in 1495, the widow Alice Tapton claimed that while in office, Colsyll had wrongfully withheld from her property and various valuable items belonging to her husband and had caused her to be arrested and thrown in gaol. Considerable emphasis was placed on the fact that both the arrest and the imprisonment were inhumane, injuring her so that ‘she was in dysperre of herre lyffe’.\textsuperscript{59}

As accusations of cruelty were used to imply illegitimate authority, civic officers, both as individuals and as a corporation, sought to associate themselves with prison reform. As prisoners had to pay the gaoler for their food, bedding and other costs, town ordinances frequently focused upon preventing extortion by gaolers and their staff, setting out the fees which they could charge for goods and services they provided for prisoners.\textsuperscript{60} In 1470-1 in Bristol, the mayor Thomas Kempson set out stringent regulations ‘for the goode kepyng, rule and guydyng of the gaole of Newgate of Bristow’. While some of these measures were designed to enhance security and prevent financial losses for the sheriffs, others had a distinctly humanitarian aspect. It was stipulated that,

the seid jayler schall nott in eany wysze entreate or compel his prisoners no noone of theyme with noone excessive fynes, oppressions, chohercions (sic), extorcions or sewettis, othirwise thane accordeth with right reason, lawe and goode conscience.\textsuperscript{61}

While the Bristol reforms concentrated on the financial cost to the prisoners, in other towns there was evident concern for their moral and spiritual well-being. To this end, provisions were often made for separate accommodation for male and female prisoners, either by the civic administration or by pious individuals within it. Oxford,

\textsuperscript{57} E.g. Great White Book, ed. Ralph, pp. 53-4, 64-6. The depositions for both sides have been described as ‘adroit in the manipulation of language for rhetorical effect. . . . These narratives are not free of artifice’ in P. Fleming, Conflict and urban government in later medieval England: St Augustine’s Abbey and Bristol, Urban History 27 (2000), 339. A similarly violent case is recorded in Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/2, ff. 77-77v.
\textsuperscript{58} Great White Book, ed. Ralph, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{59} London, TNA, STAC/1/1, n. 17, ff. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{60} E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, f. 11; ZCHB/2, f. 73.
\textsuperscript{61} GRB, III, pp. 92-4. The quotation is from p. 93.
for example, had a separate gaol for 'common women', perhaps implying that female offenders accused of non-sexual crimes were held elsewhere.\(^{62}\) In Norwich in 1454, the mayor announced that the alderman and former mayor Ralph Segrym 'of his good will' towards the city proposed constructing a prison for detaining women, to separate them from the society of men in order to avoid further wrongdoing.\(^{63}\) It is also likely that provision was made for some prisoners (especially those of high status) to attend Mass.\(^{64}\) There was clearly a prison chapel in the town gaol of Bury St. Edmunds, as in the fifteenth-century Margaret Odiham left a bequest in her will to pay for a priest to say Mass in the prison chapel on Sundays and Holy Days and to provide the prisoners with holy bread and water once a week.\(^{65}\)

As medieval prisoners were required to pay fees to gaolers for their upkeep, municipal or private alms were their primary means of obtaining food, drink and other necessaries. Giving charity was much emphasised in Christian doctrine and late medieval homilists, writers and artists particularly prioritised the importance of the 'corporal acts of mercy' outlined in the Bible. According to the Gospel of Matthew, at the Last Judgment, Christ would divide the righteous from the wicked on the basis of whether or not they had fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, attended the sick, clothed the naked, welcomed strangers, and visited those in prison.\(^{66}\) Individual townsmen and women appear to have often taken the Gospel's injunction to care for those in gaol very seriously, with considerable anecdotal and testamentary evidence for the incarcerated being sent food, drink, bedding and other necessities by the devout, as well as by their friends or family.\(^{67}\)

Members of civic government were understandably anxious to be seen to involve themselves in this type of piety, given that it was particularly associated with

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63 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 16d/1, f. 21.
65 *Wills and inventories*, ed. Tymms, p. 77.
66 Six of the works are found in Matthew 25: 35-40. The seventh, burying the dead (Tobias 1: 20), was much emphasised in medieval society, especially with the onset of the Black Death and other epidemics. Discussion of their impact on urban society and charitable giving is found in Cullum and Goldberg, 'Charitable provision', 28-34.
the enforcement of justice. The fifteenth-century Corpus Work of Mercy Window in All Saints Church, North Street, York, was donated by the Blackburns, a local merchant family who were prominent in civic government. This window showed a man, presumably intended to be Nicholas Blackburn, sen., carrying out these works of mercy personally, including an image of him bringing food to prisoners in the stocks. Nicholas Blackburn, sen. was twice mayor of the city, in 1412 and 1429 and his son, another Nicholas, also participated in the civic administration. The idea that those who sentenced offenders would also then publicly ease their suffering is an interesting paradox, but comparative evidence from town records suggests that this would not have been considered implausible by contemporaries. In Norwich in 1534, a case against the Guildhall gaoler, Andrew Asketill, described how one of the aldermen Edward Rede not only quarrelled with Asketill because of his ill treatment of the inmates, but also sent one of the poor women ale when he realised that she had nothing to drink, an act which neatly combined two of the corporal works of mercy, giving drink to the thirsty and providing charity for prisoners.

As Ralph Pugh highlighted in the 1960s, gaols were used for various purposes in the medieval period. They were fairly frequently used for holding suspects, but they also had a punitive and coercive role. This important argument has largely been ignored, however, and it remains widely assumed – most famously by Michel Foucault – that secular medieval gaols were usually holding areas for people prior to trial, or were used as a place of coercion, rather than an arena for punishment of the convicted. Prison as a punishment, according to this orthodoxy, was only used in religious houses, as shedding blood was forbidden to clerics by church law. The idea that the incarcerated had not yet been tried makes the supposed harsh medieval prison conditions all the more unacceptable to modern eyes. In reality, however, incarceration was routinely used in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a

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68 Pedersen, 'Piety and charity', 33.
69 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 16a/3, ff. 298-300; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, pp. 165-6.
70 Pugh, Imprisonment, pp. 1-44.
71 According to Foucault, 'at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was... a penalty of detention; and it was a new thing'. M. Foucault, Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison (3rd ed. London and New York, 1991), p. 231. For other articulations of this view, see, Gottfried, Bury St. Edmunds, p. 172; P. Spierenburg, The Prison Experience: Disciplinary Institutions and Their Inmates in Early Modern Europe (New Brunswick and London, 1991), pp. 8-9.
punishment after conviction, and this was particularly the case in towns which, as large institutions, generally had a nearby gaol to hold people in.

At a national level, imprisonment was prescribed for the punishment of particular offences. The 1351 Statute of Labourers stipulated that labourers who demanded higher wages were to be ‘punished by imprisonment of their bodies’. Those who failed to enforce the statute in the localities were also to be punished by forty days incarceration.\textsuperscript{72} It was particularly common for royal or municipal officials to be punished with imprisonment for failing in their duties. In the parliament of 1353, for example, it was forbidden that mayors or customs officials should wilfully delay foreigners exporting wool from English ports without good cause, ‘on penalty of imprisonment and of paying to the party double that they have thus taken, and also the damages of the party because of such taking or delay’.\textsuperscript{73}

At a local level, these trends were also in evidence and incarceration seems to have been regarded as a suitable punishment for high status offenders against town governments. In 1482 when Thomas Redeheid, a servant of the duke of Gloucester, offended one of the leading York citizens, Gloucester insisted that he was punished by the civic officers, who were asked ‘to correct hym and punyssh hym for his said offence and upon that commit [him] to prison’.\textsuperscript{74} Burgesses who were disobedient to the mayor or other superior officers were particularly likely to be incarcerated. In these cases imprisonment usually had both a punitive and coercive aspect; a term in gaol was seen both as a punishment and as a way of making offenders agree to terms and it was fairly commonplace for an offender to be sent to gaol until he should find surety for his good bearing in future.\textsuperscript{75} Towns also used gaoling as a form of punishment for those lower down the social scale; in 1452, the government of Coventry ordered that servants who gambled on feast days would be sent to prison for three days and fined 4d. Their masters who allowed this were also to be imprisoned for three days and would be fined 12d.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72} PROME, February 1351, ii-233-47.
\textsuperscript{73} PROME, September 1353, ii-247-5. For further examples of the punitive uses of imprisonment, see, Pugh, Imprisonment, pp. 2-42.
\textsuperscript{74} York House Books, ed. Attreed, I, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{75} E.g. Ibid, I, pp. 217, 224.
\textsuperscript{76} Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 271.
The key reason which has been put forward by scholars arguing for the rarity of punitive imprisonment in the medieval period is that there was instead a strong contemporary preference for public punishment. Again, Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* has been highly influential in this regard, claiming that in the pre-modern period there was a strong preference for public humiliation, torture and execution of criminals, which then shifted in the eighteenth century towards the private correction of offenders in gaols.\(^{77}\) Even scholars who specialise in the medieval penal system have argued that gaol avoided public shaming by removing the offender from the public gaze and ‘this was probably why a term of imprisonment ... was not the predominant penalty for law-breaking’.\(^{78}\) It is certainly true that there was often a preference for public punishment for some offences in this period, but these arguments ignore the fact that often imprisonment in town gaols was not a private punishment. There was particular emphasis among urban administrations on the importance of allowing the prisoners not only to associate with each other, but also in many cases to have some access to people outside the gaol, something their dependence upon alms made essential. In some gaols, as at Nottingham or London, certain inmates were permitted to leave custody and to beg outside on behalf of the other prisoners, often using specially marked boxes.\(^{79}\) Sometimes, the freedom given to convicts led to concerns about security, as in Coventry in 1456, where it was noted that ‘the gayler hurteth dayly the people of this Cite, be suffereryng diuers persones condemned in the courte of this Cite to goo at large, to gret disclaunder of the courte’.\(^{80}\) Schemes were therefore devised to keep prisoners secure and yet visible. An elaborate method was articulated in late fourteenth-century Colchester, where it was arranged for prisoners to be chained to poles outside the Moothall (presumably only during the day), rather than being continually incarcerated in the confines of a gaol, in order that ‘their necessaries may be begged from those who pass by through the aforesaid gate’.\(^{81}\)

The Colchester move to keep prisoners outside and within the public eye was particularly indicative of civic attitudes towards the role of public punishment. In

\(^{77}\) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 3-69, 231-2.
\(^{80}\) *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Harris, p. 293.
Colchester’s *Red Paper Book*, the move to house prisoners outside was depicted in
eulogistic terms, with the two bailiffs responsible, William Reyne and John Clark
(1373-4) being described as,

> mindful of the safety of their souls; and of the well-being of the whole
> commonalty of Colchester; and of the commands of the Lord, where he has
> commanded to visit these who are in prison; and of the injuries which happened
to the same commonalty, in times gone by, from those who escaped from the
> gaol of the aforesaid town, and fled to the churches.\(^{82}\)

Prison reform was therefore motivated by three factors: Christian duty both to the
prisoners and the common weal; a practical need to prevent inmates escaping; and
civic pride, which baulked at felons obtaining sanctuary in nearby churches. Of these
three, however, it was Christian pity for the plight of the prisoners which was
prioritised and the manuscript vividly described how the bailiffs,

> seeing also, from day to day, the captivity and unbearable suffering of the
> unhappy persons in the foul opening or pit of the gaol of the town aforesaid,
beyond measure tormented in their enclosures...have ordained, inasmuch as
> God has visited their hearts and their bodies, that for the relief of the said
> prisoners there should be, at the sides of the entrance of the said hall, two
> wooden posts...so that there, placed without the said gaol, they [the prisoners]
> may stand, sit, lie and rest.\(^{83}\)

The reference to the bailiffs seeing the plight of the inmates ‘day to day’ suggests not
only the daily sufferings of the prisoners, but also that even when the captives were
housed within the gaol they could be seen through windows or openings by passers
by. This appears to have been a relatively common occurrence in late medieval towns
and the Yarmouth ‘Tolhous’, for example, which was used as a gaol throughout the
period and which is still standing, had a grille positioned directly onto the street.

> Public punishment is something of an anathema to modern eyes and it is seen
> as an essentially negative aspect of the medieval legal system. The essentially ‘non-
> public’ nature of modern prisons is commonly regarded as an important aspect of
> their humanity and sophistication, something John Bellamy describes as ‘not a
deterrent of the primitive sort, but symptomatic of a more advanced society’.\(^{84}\)

The public nature of the punishment was clearly designed to be humiliating, although
presumably to a lesser extent than time spent in the stocks, pillory or on a hurdle. In

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\(^{82}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{83}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{84}\) *Bellamy, Crime and Public Order*, p. 166.
the medieval period, however, it was believed that those who were out of the public eye had the severest punishment, as they were generally imprisoned underground, did not have access to light or fresh air, could not beg for alms and were potentially subject to the worst abuses of gaolers. In addition, the maxim 'out of sight, out of mind' could not have been more appropriate for those unfortunate enough to be gaolled for lengthy periods in such chambers, with gruesome tales of inmates' limbs quite literally rotting away during their incarceration. Those who were able to converse with people outside the gaol were also much better placed to organise the funds or political pressure to obtain their release. While publicising the punishment of offenders is to modern eyes barbaric, for contemporaries this was often seen as a more humane method of dealing with criminals.

The public nature of town imprisonment meant that the 'common gaol' was often seen as unsuitable for the punishment of high-status men and women. In particular, burgesses were often entitled to be incarcerated separately and more privately, unless local custom specified the stocks or pillory for their offence. A ruling in Worcester in 1467 stated that,

no citizen be putt in comyn prisone, but in oon of the chambours of the hall henceforth, without he be committed to prison for felony or mans deth or an heynos trespas, or else the summe of debt of xli, alwey forseyyn that the ballies make seurte sufficiaunt for the summe of his imprisonment

In 1480-1 in Lincoln it was specified that 'no man unfranchyst schall be imprisonyd in the chambyr callyd fraunchist mans prison, withoute he be prest, gentylman, or a clerke within ordyrs'.\(^85\) The arena in which an individual was punished therefore reflected his crime, his status, or both.

One of the most common reasons that a man of high status might be imprisoned was that he used offensive language towards the mayor. In Winchester in 1417, it was ordained that 'whatsoever fre man win (sic) the libertye of the cytie of Winchester dothe blaspheme or speake slanderouslye of the Mayor of the cytye [or any of the other civic officers] ...shall be imprisoned at the will of the Mayre'.\(^86\) As this ordinance indicates, it was specifically the enfranchised who were considered

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\(^85\) Borough Customs, ed. Bateson, II, p. 66.

\(^86\) 'Win' is presumably a misreading of 'within'. Transcripts from the Municipal Archives of Winchester, ed. C. Bailey (Winchester, 1856), pp. 49-50.
likely to be guilty of such an offence. In many cases, the offenders were themselves members of civic government. Quarrels often arose in council or assembly meetings and the high status of the transgressor made him difficult to punish. On one hand, it was necessary that the mayor should be shown to have authority over the more junior members of government, but on the other it was not considered appropriate to alienate the wrongdoer so completely that there would be ongoing disunity within the ruling elite. Much emphasis was placed, therefore, on the mayor having absolute power over the offender, but also ultimately showing him mercy when he repented. One of the most detailed accounts of such a case is found within the *Coventry Leet Book*, which described the rebellion of the two chamberlains, Lawrence Saunders and William Hede, against the mayor and recorder in 1480.87 This incident was typical of many high-status political disputes in late medieval towns and reflected the Christian framework of urban justice, which combined with a strong desire to prevent re-offending.

Friction within the Coventry government began when the chamberlains refused to pay labourers working on the city walls and then the dispute escalated when they were forbidden by the mayor to distrain cattle being pastured on the town meadows by a local abbot. The first offence led to Saunders and Hede being gaol until, by the mediation of their friends, they agreed to be bound over to keep the peace with a bond of £40. They were then told that they would be released on the payment of a £10 fine. Of this £10, the council agreed that £6 should be returned to the two offenders 'in hope they wolde be the better disposed hereafter'.88 As this case showed, imprisonment was an important method of dealing with high status offenders in the urban setting, as it placed the mayor in a very strong position versus the transgressor. In subsequent complaints, the chamberlains claimed that the recorder refused to hear their case immediately after their imprisonment, but kept them waiting in gaol for two days. Although it was not explicitly stated, in this instance the use of imprisonment was clearly coercive and the implicit threat of indefinite incarceration was intended to make the offenders agree to terms and despite their initial reluctance to hand over a bond of £40, they eventually complied as 'no other remedye were fayn

87 *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Harris, pp. 431, 437, 442-3.
for to be delivered out of prison. Ordinances from other towns which ordered imprisonment for certain offences ‘at the will of the mayor’ clearly had a similar motivation.

A brief term of imprisonment (often for a matter of a few days or even hours) was a favoured remedy in such cases as it allowed a ‘cooling off period’ for all concerned in the disagreement, without seriously damaging the inmate’s health, business prospects or status in the wider community, particularly as well-to-do offenders were generally gaol in considerably more pleasant quarters than common criminals. The mediation of a defendant’s friends was also an important aspect of such cases, as it paralleled Christian ideas concerning intercessory prayers by saints for a sinner’s soul. In addition, this had the very practical benefit of putting pressure on the rebel to conform on their release from gaol, as his associates would have staked their reputations, and very possibly their finances, on his future good behaviour. Similarly the practice of ordering a heavy fine, and then remitting over half of it, was indicative of the desire of the authorities to prevent re-offending, by frightening the dissident with the possibility of harsher punishment in the future, while not totally alienating him.

In the case of Lawrence Saunders of Coventry, his two days of imprisonment and fine proved to be an inadequate means of preventing further disturbance and following his second offensive outburst to the mayor he was obliged to make a highly ritualized apology before the civic authorities and a representative of the Prince.

Therupon the seid Laurens kneled don before the seid Maire and ther openly knoleched his offence and dissobeysaunce had and made to the seid Maire in tyme past; wherof he besought hym of foryffenes and there openly and lowly submitted hym-self vnto the correccion of the seid Maire.

After this he was returned to prison as a punishment and was later released when he provided bonds for his future good behaviour. Public submission was a method which was commonly used in cases involving members of the enfranchised community. Following hostilities in 1456 between the Bristol administration and a

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89 Ibid, pp. 437-8. Further discussion of this case is provided in Phythian-Adams, Desolation, pp. 120, 183.
90 E.g. Transcripts from Winchester, ed. Bailey, p. 50.
91 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 442-3.
group of resident Irish merchants, Ricart recorded with grim satisfaction that the dissidents 'were discomenyd of theyre freedom, til they bought it ayen with the blodde of theyre purses, and with weeping ien, knelyng on their knees, besought the Maire and his brothern of their grace'.

Ritualised submissions allowed the mayor to demonstrate his Christianity, through showing mercy; however, in order to maintain his political authority, this was only possible after there was a public acknowledgement of his power. This was made particularly evident in the account of a case in the York House Books in 1483, when the citizen Thomas Watson publicly accused the alderman Thomas Wrangwish of stealing his horse. He also used insulting language to Wrangwish in the presence of the mayor and council. In reality, Wrangwish's behaviour in the matter was clearly not above reproach and the York administration ordered that he should pay Watson 16s 8d to compensate him for the horse. Watson's rudeness, however, was seen as the more pressing issue and he was sent to prison 'at the will of my said lord the Mair and hys bredyr'. He was later required to apologise to the city council and the York House Books show that the exact form of the submission was scripted by the civic authorities. It ran thus,

for asmoch as I have mysbyhad me ayanst you in sayng of unsytyng langwygh in the presens of you my lord the Mair and in the presens of odir of you my maisterz, to one of my maisterz your brodyr Maister Wrangwesh alderman of thys full worshipfull cite, for the wych languwage I am right sory, wher I besek you my lord the mair and you my maisterz all to forgeve me, and that...my lord the mair wold be my gud lord and ye me maisterz all be my gud maistyr, and that ye woll desyr my said Maister Wrangwysh at your desyr and instaunce to forguye me and be my gude maister.

A personal apology to Wrangwish then followed on similar, but briefer, lines. The terms of Watson's submission illustrate that it was considered essential that the hierarchy of authority be maintained and that Wrangwish was seen as entirely exonerated from Watson's accusations of unworshipful behaviour in public and in the civic record.

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92 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 122; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 41. The background to this example is found in P. Fleming, 'Telling tales of oligarchy in the late medieval town', in M. Hicks, ed., Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 182-5; W.R. Childs, 'Irish merchants and seamen in late medieval England', Irish Historical Studies 32 (2000), 35-43.


In the 1479 case of Thomas Norton, gentleman of Bristol, who accused the mayor, William Spencer, of treason, a public apology to the mayor was not made. Consequently, the corporation were extremely anxious to ensure that Spencer’s innocence was firmly established. The account recorded in the Bristol muniments, therefore, related how Norton, as a servant of Edward IV, brought the case before the king, but his guilt was quickly made manifest so that not only the king completely acquitted Spencer, but also God,

And Almighty God that is serchere of all hertes and knowith the previtee of all sacresies made him [Norton] Iele and understande his oune untrue demeaning in this matier, that he coude unnethe loke, speke nor kepe his countenance before the Kinge... but demenyd him self as a persone ronne into frency.  

The arena of submission reflected the offender’s high status and the nature of his crime; it was not before the wider community that he was forced to submit, but specifically before the politically powerful. Contemporaries considered it particularly appropriate to carry out punishments in the arena in which they were committed and in front of the people they had offended, so a rebellious member of the ruling elite submitted in front of the political community, while lower down the social scale, a dishonest tradesman might be pilloried in the marketplace, where he had sold faulty goods.  

It was also important that offending members of civic government were not seen to be corrected by the wider community, as to do so would advertise dissent within the governing body and also undermine the authority of the offender in future, should he later hold government office. Ritualised apology in front of a limited audience therefore provided a mechanism for restoring the hierarchical *status quo* without the permanent exclusion of the offender from political power.

Some scepticism has been voiced concerning the accuracy of the description of public submissions among citizens found within urban archives and certainly it is often difficult to reconcile descriptions of weeping and trembling penitents with their later behaviour. There was an obvious political motivation for the civic authorities to depict transgressors in this way, as it indicated the sincerity of their repentance and their fear of senior officials. In this regard, the authors of such records were undoubtedly influenced by biblical acts of submission and forgiveness, such as the

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95 *GRB*, IV, p. 73.
96 See also, Carrel, ‘Food, drink and public order’, 184-93.
tearful repentance of David after his adultery with Bathsheba and the Gospel’s representation of a female sinner (widely believed by contemporaries to be Mary Magdalene) at the house of Simeon the Pharisee, where she knelt before Christ and washed his feet with her tears. 98 Before concluding that such scenes never occurred in reality in the late medieval period, however, it must be noted that contemporaries were just as likely to be influenced by religious stereotypes in their behaviour as in their documentary accounts of it. Parallels to the type of cases described above were found when individuals sought the king’s pardon, or in gild proceedings against rebellious apprentices, who offended their masters to such an extent that the matter could not be dealt with within the domestic setting. It is notable that in some of these cases, apprentices themselves offered to make amends by publicly apologising and submitting to their masters, a strong indication that this was an established method of reconciliation at the time, which could be regarded as beneficial by both the junior and senior parties in a dispute. Masters refusing to accept such acts of submission could be regarded as unreasonable by the gild authorities and be themselves punished for lack of charity. 99

The obligation to forgive on the part of the mayor or senior government officials was not explicitly stated in the records of disputes, as to do so would undermine both mayoral authority and virtue, by implying that the concession was made under duress. It is clear, however, that senior officials’ behaviour towards their opponents was to a large extent curtailed by social disapproval of public anger or vengeance. To insult or injure the mayor might be regarded as unacceptable, but for the mayor to then punish this offence with extreme vehemence or to refuse an open apology would ultimately lead to him being censured by the wider political community. Mayoral mercy, therefore, was depicted in the records as an option, but in reality it was often a necessity. The very image of strength and power which civic governments sought to build up in fact meant that they were obliged by social norms to show charity. In town politics, this could mean allowing opponents to express dissent without taking harsh reprisals. To some extent, therefore, the power of civic leaders was curtailed by their own ideology and representations of Christian virtue. The opposition of

discontented subordinates was certainly limited by ordinances demanding obedience to senior officers, but the requirement for those in authority to forgive in fact provided greater opportunities for political opposition than the draconian terms of urban regulations initially suggest.
Chapter Four: Defining Outsiders

And they shall bring the glory and the honour of nations into it. There shall not enter into it any thing defiled or that worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they that are written in the book of life of the Lamb.¹

This image of the Holy Jerusalem, outlined so vividly in the Apocalypse, had a powerful hold on the medieval imagination. Indeed, for contemporaries there would have been an important parallel between the biblical reference to the ‘book of life’ and the contemporary practice of recording the names of new burgesses in the civic muniments, often in special books or rolls designated for that purpose, such as the York Register of Freemen.² Late medieval towns were also economically dependent upon trade for wealth and the idea of the ‘glory and honour of nations’ being brought into the city would have had particular resonance for those living in major port towns like Bristol and Southampton, which were heavily involved in overseas trade. In spite of these analogies, however, creating heaven on earth was no easy matter. Indeed, some of the main ideological and practical difficulties faced by local leaders were in fact based on the economic and demographic necessity for outsiders to be involved in town life, whether as visitors who stayed in the town temporarily or as immigrants who moved there on a long-term basis. The records of urban government therefore highlight a tension between a desire for trading co-operation with outsiders, both within England and abroad, and contemporary anxieties concerning the dangers of allowing strangers into the town.

The ability to exercise the privileges of citizen status – and to ensure that they were denied to others – was an important method of creating corporate civic identity among the enfranchised community. Although court records showed that resident non-burgesses occasionally attempted to encroach upon the economic privileges reserved for citizens, to a large extent the urban systems of policing and surveillance, especially through the wards, must have made it difficult for resident non-burgesses to

¹ Apocalypse 21: 26-7.
² This register consists of 6 volumes, listing the names of those who took up the York freedom. The first volume dates from 1272 to 1671 and is printed in Register of the Freemen of York, ed. Collins.
trade illegally. Instead, town muniments generally focused upon four main categories of outsiders: men and women from a town's surrounding countryside; citizens of other towns within England; the Irish, Welsh and Scottish; and foreigners from overseas (generally Continental Europe). The terminology used to define these different groups varied from place to place, but some broad trends can be noted. 'Uplanders' or 'men of the country' referred to rural dwellers specifically, while 'foreigns' were English non-citizens more generally, that is, those who lived in another town or in the countryside, not non-burgess inhabitants of the city in question. Those from overseas, and particularly from places not under the authority of the English Crown, were generally called 'aliens'. This definition was necessarily somewhat fluid, in order to cope with changing political circumstances, and so the status of those from disputed areas in Gascony and the Welsh, Irish and Scottish varied depending upon the political situation at the time and local attitudes towards the nationality in question. 'Stranger' was the most broadly defined term, and could mean any or all of these people.

Burgesses from other towns within England were frequent visitors, as they came to trade their goods at markets, or to ship through the ports. A potential source of friction between different urban corporations was the tolls charged to outsiders for trading goods. Coventry, for example, claimed a 'toll-free' status for their citizens in all the towns they visited within England, a point which brought them into conflict with the Bristol and Southampton authorities at various points in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Similar disagreements can be found elsewhere, although usually on a smaller scale, as in 1416, when the Lynn mayor complained to the authorities of Kingston-upon-Hull that some Lynn merchants had been charged tolls there, contrary to their ancient rights.

While such disputes indicated hostility towards non-locals on the grounds of economic protectionism, it should not be assumed that political antagonism was the norm. Instead, it is likely that such conflicts were given considerable space within the

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3 For examples of regulations regarding non-citizen traders, see, Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8e/5; GRB, I, p. 133. For examples of non-citizens being fined for illegally trading as burgesses, see, Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 5b/10; Leet Jurisdiction, ed. Hudson, pp. 62-3.
5 Kings Lynn, KLBA, KL/CL10/2, f. 99v.
urban records precisely because they were potentially economically damaging and it was important for the resolution of such disputes to be recorded for posterity, to prevent further trade disruption. For this reason, urban customals sometimes recorded the tolls and dues their citizens should pay in other towns. The Great Red Book of Bristol, therefore, listed the sums payable by Bristol merchants at Southampton on the opening folio and the prominence of this entry reflected the close economic links of the two cities, as Bristol cloth was often sent on Italian galleys from Southampton.6

More often than hostility, therefore, there seems to have been a sense of urban solidarity among town governments. This partly stemmed from the fact that merchants who were usually predominant in town governments visited other urban centres, and especially the capital, on a regular basis for business and so had many occupational and personal ties there. William Canynges, Jr., for example, the famous Bristol mayor, jointly owned two trading ships, the Mary Redcliffe and the Katherine, with Stephen Forster, a fishmonger of London.7 Forster named Canynges as an executor in his will and Canynges’ son clearly visited Forster’s home, as it is recorded that he died there.8 The links between some leading Norwich citizens and the capital were so great that they obtained dual citizenship. The grocer Thomas Catteworth, for example, was a citizen of both Norwich and London. He was mayor of London in 1443-4 and acted as Norwich’s ‘warden’ in 1446-7, when the city had its franchises removed by the king.9

Provincial burgesses also had ties with towns other than London. Some maintained dual citizenship and so Henry Rafman (alias Alcock), for example, began his urban career in Yarmouth, acting as a customs officer there in the early fifteenth century, as the town’s parliamentary representative in 1406, and as bailiff in 1406-7 and in 1409-10. By the time of his second term as Yarmouth bailiff, however, he had purchased the freedom of Norwich and he later bought property in the city, becoming its sheriff in 1414-15 and its mayor in 1416-17.10 Dual citizenship was particularly

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6 Bristol, BRO, 04719, f. 1; GRB, I, pp. 90-1.
7 CPR, 1441-6, p. 81.
urban records precisely because they were potentially economically damaging and it was important for the resolution of such disputes to be recorded for posterity, to prevent further trade disruption. For this reason, urban customals sometimes recorded the tolls and dues their citizens should pay in other towns. *The Great Red Book of Bristol*, therefore, listed the sums payable by Bristol merchants at Southampton on the opening folio and the prominence of this entry reflected the close economic links of the two cities, as Bristol cloth was often sent on Italian galleys from Southampton.\(^6\)

More often than hostility, therefore, there seems to have been a sense of urban solidarity among town governments. This partly stemmed from the fact that merchants who were usually predominant in town governments visited other urban centres, and especially the capital, on a regular basis for business and so had many occupational and personal ties there. William Canynges, jr., for example, the famous Bristol mayor, jointly owned two trading ships, the *Mary Redcliffe* and the *Katherine*, with Stephen Forster, a fishmonger of London.\(^7\) Forster named Canynges as an executor in his will and Canynges' son clearly visited Forster's home, as it is recorded that he died there.\(^8\) The links between some leading Norwich citizens and the capital were so great that they obtained dual citizenship. The grocer Thomas Catteworth, for example, was a citizen of both Norwich and London. He was mayor of London in 1443-4 and acted as Norwich's 'warden' in 1446-7, when the city had its franchises removed by the king.\(^9\)

Provincial burgesses also had ties with towns other than London. Some maintained dual citizenship and so Henry Rafman (*alias* Alcock), for example, began his urban career in Yarmouth, acting as a customs officer there in the early fifteenth century, as the town's parliamentary representative in 1406, and as bailiff in 1406-7 and in 1409-10. By the time of his second term as Yarmouth bailiff, however, he had purchased the freedom of Norwich and he later bought property in the city, becoming its sheriff in 1414-15 and its mayor in 1416-17.\(^10\) Dual citizenship was particularly

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\(^6\) Bristol, BRO, 04719, f. 1; *GRB*, I, pp. 90-1.

\(^7\) *CPR*, 1441-6, p. 81.


advantageous when two cities were linked by a river: Yarmouth acted as an outport for Norwich, and a similar situation was evident in Yorkshire, with merchants from Beverley and York shipping through Kingston-upon-Hull and so sometimes obtaining citizenship there.\textsuperscript{11} Wealthy merchants might also own property in more than one town. Henry Preston, jr., of York, for example, who was mayor of that city in 1422-3, owned property in both York and Preston.\textsuperscript{12}

Occupational, social and political associations between the leading citizens of different towns were reinforced by their participation in top-drawer urban gilds, which often attracted membership from a range of cities. Coventry’s Corpus Christi Gild, for example, included citizens from Bristol, Worcester, Evesham, Lichfield, Birmingham, Warwick, Nottingham, Manchester and Boston, with occasional representatives from Carlisle and Dublin.\textsuperscript{13} The Ludlow Palmers’ Gild was similarly cosmopolitan and by the fifteenth century the stewards were in the habit of travelling to a range of towns in both England and Wales to collect fines and instalments, apparently also using these visits to recruit new members.\textsuperscript{14} It is entirely plausible, as Charles Phythian-Adams has suggested, that such fraternities acted as ‘useful forums in which common urban problems could be discussed’\textsuperscript{15}

Urban petitions to parliament and the crown indicated that provincial town governments kept a close eye on the economic and legal rights of other towns and sought to emulate them where it was felt that this would be advantageous. While this could have the negative implications of rivalry and jealousy, instances of copy-cat requests and block petitioning also suggest that towns often regarded one urban centre obtaining privileges as a useful leverage for them to gain similar rights and boons from the central authorities. London was regarded as an especially valuable exemplar of what a city should be, in terms of its franchises and legal heritage in particular, and so was the place that was most frequently cited as a model in parliamentary and royal petitions. Fairly typical, therefore, were the Bristol petitions between 1415 and 1421,

\textsuperscript{11} VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, VI, pp. 35-6, 39; J.I. Kermode, ‘Merchants, overseas trade and urban decline; York, Beverley and Hull, c. 1380-1500’, *Northern History* 23 (1987), 52; Kermode, *Medieval Merchants*, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{13} Phythian-Adams, *Desolation*, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{14} VCH Shropshire, II, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{15} Phythian-Adams, *Desolation*, p. 140.
which requested that the burgesses should have the right to hold a market once a week for alien merchants to sell their cloths ‘as in Blackwellhall, London’.\textsuperscript{16} The position of other provincial towns could also be used to obtain royal boons, however. In 1378, for example, the mayor and community of Melcombe Regis asked that they might use murage, pavage and other customary payments to increase the town’s defences, in the same way as the citizens of Southampton did.\textsuperscript{17} The tone of the document suggests that the government of Melcombe simply regarded Southampton as a useful exemplar, which was cited to make it more likely that they would be granted their request.

Occasionally, it is possible to see evidence for town administrations actively combining together in petitions, in order to further their own position. Block petitioning occurred in the parliaments of the 1470s, when a number of towns requested permission to order all local householders to pave the street outside their property. The first petition came from Gloucester in 1472 and this successful request was then copied in 1478 by Canterbury, Taunton, Cirencester and Southampton.\textsuperscript{18} The petitions were all clearly based on the earlier Gloucester document, as the phrasing and form of the requests were largely identical. Collective urban interests, however, were not necessarily opposed to the civic pride of individual cities and Canterbury was keen to assert its individual urban identity by making a number of additions to the basic template, to emphasise its position as ‘the principall see of the spirituell estate of the...reame’.\textsuperscript{19}

The most formalised form of co-operation between provincial urban centres was the ‘Brodhull’ or ‘Brotherhood’ meetings of the Cinque Ports. The earliest evidence of the Cinque Ports combining together occurred during the reign of Edward I, in defence of their shared ‘ancient’ customary fishing and shipping rights in the River Yar. This long-running dispute with the authorities of Yarmouth was largely settled in relation to the Cinque Ports by 1357, although Yarmouth continued to quarrel with the authorities of Lowestoft on this matter for years to come, most publicly during the 1376 ‘Good Parliament’.\textsuperscript{20} As part of the 1357 settlement, the

\textsuperscript{16} A Bakwelhaus en Loundres’, London, TNA, SC 8/96/4789.
\textsuperscript{17} London, TNA, SC 8/19/922-4.
\textsuperscript{18} PROME, October 1472, vi-49-54; October 1478, vi-179-21, 22, 23, 24.
\textsuperscript{19} PROME, October 1478, vi-179-21.
Cinque Ports were to send four bailiffs to represent their interests and to administer justice in Yarmouth, in co-operation with the local bailiffs, especially during the Autumn Fair. In order to elect these bailiffs, ‘Brotherhood’ meetings were held regularly at Romney, and included representatives from the five head ports of Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich, as well as the ‘two ancient towns’ of Winchelsea and Rye. The towns grouped together into smaller subsets, such as Romney and Dover, and Sandwich and Hythe. These subsets then selected a bailiff between them, and shared his expenses. The towns also used the meetings to discuss matters of common concern and, occasionally, to collect a tax called the ‘composition’, which was levied to meet royal charges. By 1469 these payments were a regular feature of the records and by 1473 references to a ‘common purse’ were made. The crown’s demands for shipping also led to high levels of co-operation between these and nearby towns, with Dover and Folkstone, for example, having an agreement that Folkstone would pay for some of the ships demanded from Dover, in return for exemptions from certain forms of customary taxation. There were similar arrangements between Romney and Lydd, Sandwich and Fordwich, and Hastings and Pevensey.21

The most culturally sophisticated expression of shared urban heritage was found in the *primum principale* of the Bristol *Kalendar*, which provided a mythological history of Britain, loosely based upon Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum*. While Ricart placed particular emphasis upon Bristol, the Trojan foundation myths of numerous other towns were recorded and he took pains to reinforce the ancient status and splendour of English towns in general, recording that York, for example, was founded by the Trojan ‘Ebrac’,

> a noble prince and a manly [one], whiche by his prowesse and manhode and with the helpe of his Bretonnes conquerid al Fraunce and gete there grete richesse, so that when he came home he made and billed a noble citee and callid it aftir his name, Eborac.22

Ricart’s reasons for boosting the prestige and ancient heritage of not only Bristol, but of other towns were complex. In part, his motivation was patriotic fervour and it is notable that throughout the manuscript he was keen to emphasise the historical

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episodes which reinforced the English conquest of France, a politically sensitive issue for Bristol in the second half of the fifteenth-century, when the manuscript was compiled. More importantly, however, by enhancing the prestige of urban centres in general, Ricart sought to further Bristol’s own political and legal position. To this end, the work showed a particular interest in London and emphasised that,

this worshipfull toun of Bristowe hath alweis vsed comenly to execute his fraunchisez and libertees accordinge in semblable wise as the noble Citee of London hath vsed and a grete parte hath take his president of the said Citee in exerciseng the same.24

Indeed, so keen was Ricart to reinforce the ties between the two cities that he recorded at length how two royal Trojan brothers, Bremmius and Brynne, founded Bristol and London respectively and he advised ‘euery bourgeois of the towe of Bristowe [and] in especiall thos that been men of worshipe’ to read the Brut chronicles and to focus on the stories of the Trojan foundation of London.25

While Bristol sought to forge particularly close trading and cultural links with the capital, there was considerable economic friction between the provincial towns and London in the late medieval period, which provides an important caveat to the general sense of inter-town loyalty found in urban muniments. The growing economic predominance of London over the provincial fairs from the 1350s onwards was a continuing source of friction. Much of the capital’s success was based on the rise of Antwerp as the centre of the European cloth industry, a city which was well placed for trade with London.26 By the end of Richard II’s reign, around fifty per cent of English cloth exports went through London, with the capital’s share of the trade making marked increases during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, reaching eighty-five per cent by 1540.27 The greater availability of credit in the metropolis also undermined the provincial town markets, particularly during the bullion shortages of the 1370s, the early fifteenth century and the 1450s. The lack of

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23 For Bristol’s relations with France, see below, pp. 113-14, 141.
24 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 3; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 5-6.
25 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 3v-5v; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 8-10.
coin encouraged provincial merchants and chapmen to travel to London with local goods (especially wool and hides), in order to barter with them, often taking linen in exchange.  

The dominance of the London markets, and the provincial resentment of this, was heightened by ordinances instituted by a number of London gilds which took measures to prevent their members travelling to regional fairs, instead requiring provincial merchants to bring their goods for sale in the capital. The London Company of Mercers, for example, made ordinances on the matter in 1376 and 1404. In the 1470s, however, the Mercers were increasingly undercut by the Haberdashers, who continued to travel to local markets. After lengthy campaigning, the Mercers in 1487 finally succeeded in persuading the London government to ban freemen of the city from trading outside the capital. These strong protectionist measures were strongly resented in many quarters, both within London and outside it. When the matter was considered by the mayor in 1487, it was discovered that seventeen of the city’s crafts wished to maintain the principle that provincial merchants should come to the capital, but eleven crafts were strongly in favour of retaining the right to visit provincial fairs. Outside London, the ban was predictably disliked and the commons petitioned against it in the parliament of November 1487, claiming that the new ordinance damaged regional fairs, prevented the provinces obtaining necessary supplies and forced provincial merchants to come to the capital, to their importable coostes and charges, which yt the seid acte shall endure shall growe greate hurte and prejudice to the comen wele of this your realme, and shall cause meny pernysshous stryves and debates bytwen youre seid liege people and the seid maier, aldermen and citezens.

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32 *PROME*, November 1487, vi-402-25.
It has been suggested that this petition was initiated by London companies, like the Haberdashers, which were losing profit because of the new ordinance, but it is probably more likely that this interest group combined with representatives of the provincial towns on this occasion.\(^{33}\) Certainly, Salisbury, Bristol, Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Ely and Coventry were all specifically mentioned as being economically damaged by the withdrawal of London merchants from their fairs.\(^{34}\) The records of the Mercers’ Company from the following year also claimed that the 1487 parliament had a particularly antagonistic attitude toward the capital, recording that

> at the last parliament, grete grudge and displeasure was had ayens corporacions of Felisippes of this Cite for sellyng of dere stuffe excedyng price reasonable...with muche saying on the same more to grete rebuke of this Cite.

These criticisms were severe enough to lead the London mayor to instigate an overhaul of the regulation of all crafts within the capital.\(^{35}\)

Relationships between different urban centres, both on an individual and corporate level, were important to the development of each town’s identity. Such exchanges could either consolidate or challenge ideas concerning what an urban centre ought to be like, but whatever the circumstances, they were almost always formative experiences. Interaction with other burgesses was not enough to create shared characteristics among local corporations, however; in addition, it was necessary that there should be some sense of what towns were not. Contemporary views of rural life, therefore, were ideologically significant. Contemporary literature and moralising rhetoric often emphasised the dichotomy between country and town existence. A charming and informative pastiche of views regarding the differences between rural and urban life was provided by the fifteenth-century Scottish poet, Robert Henryson, who adapted Aesop’s fable of the town and the country mouse for a late medieval audience. For Henryson, the defining feature of burgess status was freedom from economic burdens, such as tolls, which resulted in the ability to trade with ease and therefore to have the comforts of good living. He wrote that,

> This rural mouse into the winter tide
>  Had hunger, cold, and also great distress;
> The other mouse, that in the town did bide,
>  Was a gild brother, and made a free burgess.

\(^{33}\) R. Horrox, ‘Introduction November 1487’, PROME.
\(^{34}\) PROME, November 1487, vi-402-25.
Toll-free also, and customs, more or less,  
And freedom she had to go wherever she wished,  
Among the cheese in the cupboard, and the meal in the chest.36

Ultimately, however, the freedom of the burgess was shown to be a sham. When the country mouse visited her sister in the town, she enjoyed the luxury foods, but was appalled by the stresses and strains of urban policing and surveillance, represented by terrifying visits from the steward and the cat.37 Henryson’s version of the tale therefore concluded with the moral that,

No estate is free,  
Without trouble, and some vexation.  
And particularly for those who would climb most high,  
And who are not content with few possessions.38

To some extent, this poem echoed a long-standing view that town life was inherently more stressful and troublesome than a rural existence: if one can forgive the word-play, the country mouse simply wanted to avoid the rat race. Henryson’s depiction of the town as a seat of corruption, brash commercialism and, above all, danger, was a trope echoed both in religious texts and popular literature of the time.

Late medieval moralising satire did not have to look far to find religious models for antipathy towards urban life. Biblical cities were frequently dens of iniquity – Sodom, Gomorrah, Babylon and Ninevah, not to mention Christ’s description of Jerusalem as the city which habitually killed the prophets of God.39 Some medieval writers developed the traditional trope that towns proved a hostile, dangerous and mercenary environment for the rural visitor, who was generally depicted as naive and poor. The fifteenth-century London Lickpenny described a poor ploughman’s visit to the city. At different stages in his journey through London he attempted to obtain justice from the courts, food, drink and clothing, but at every turn

36 ‘This rurall mous in to the winter tyde / Had hunger, cauld, and tholit grit distress; / The uther Mous, that in the Burgh can byde, / Was Gild brothe and made ane fre Burges, / Toll fre als, but custom mair or les, / And freedom had to ga quhair ever scho list, / Amang the chais in ark, and meill in kist’. Robert Henryson, The Moral Fables of Aesop: An Edition of the Middle Scots Text, ed. G.D. Gopen (Indiana, 1987), The Tail of the Uponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous, ll. 169-73, p. 48. This translation and those which follow are my adaptions of Gopen’s translation.
37 Henryson, Fables, 'The Tail of the Uponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous', ll. 268, 297-308, 328-9, pp. 55, 57.
38 ‘Na estate is free, / Without trubill and sum vexatioun: / And namelie thay quhilk clymmis us maist hie, / That ar not content with small possessioun’. Henryson, Fables, 'The Tail of the Uponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous', ll. 366-9, p. 59.
learned that in urban life ‘for lacke of money I might not spede’. Among other misfortunes, he had his hood stolen, only to find it for sale later at the Cornhill, where he was unable to afford to buy it back.

Contemporary legal records, at both a national and local level, indicate that urban crime, especially in matters of trade, was considered a very pressing problem and that it was particularly associated with the anonimity of town life. Between 1334 and 1352, commissions of the peace were issued by the Crown to Stamford, Northampton, Lincoln, York, Kingston-upon-Hull, Newcastle, Scarborough and Beverley. These documents contained a preamble claiming that judicial inquiries in the area were necessary because the town was a centre of commerce with a high population turn-over, and so was especially likely to attract criminals. Civic governments were also very aware that maintaining law and order was important for the city’s ‘worshipful’ reputation, particularly as this would encourage people to trade there. Town authorities therefore sought to project an image of themselves as those who successfully regulated the market place, ensuring that unwary town-dwellers and strangers alike were protected from unscrupulous dealers. This reflected Biblical injunctions to care for foreigners and particularly to ensure that they were not deceived in matters of trade; in the words of the Book of Leviticus, ‘if a stranger dwell in your land, and abide among you, do not upbraid him...do not use any unjust thing in judgment, in rule, in weight, or in measure’. In Norwich in 1511, the assembly echoed this rhetoric when it took measures to ensure that only good quality worsteds were produced and sold within the city, lest ‘straungers hauyng no conyng to deserne the insufficiencies of the same clothes shuld bye them’. Significantly, the sale of faulty goods took place ‘in hydde and couert corners’, rather than ‘openly in marchauntes shoppes or streets of the said citie, where eyery man may surely knowe that the worstedes [are] perfitly serged tokened and wouen marked’. In other words, dishonest trading took place outside the areas designated for sales, which were under the surveillance of civic officers.

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41 Ibid, ii. 10, 97-103, 124, pp. 222-5.
42 Kimball, 'Commissions of the Peace', 451-3.
43 Leviticus 19: 33-5. For other examples see, Exodus, 23: 9, 12; Leviticus 19: 10; Matthew 25: 35.
44 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 16d/2, ff. 74-74v.
45 For surveillance in the market place, see above, pp. 69-70.
The image of strangers put forward in these cases was one of naivety and innocence. This stereotype was particularly associated with rural dwellers, who were traditionally deemed to be virtuous because the physically hard work of agricultural labour kept them busy, so that they did not have time to sin because they were perpetually hungry and had to work for their food. This theme came under considerable attack, however, in the post-Black Death context of heightened prosperity. This was most fully explored in Piers Plowman, where idle workers who scorned Piers and the Knight in times of plenty, hurried to their work when Hunger appeared on the scene. William Langland, like many of his contemporaries, viewed the higher living standards of agricultural workers in the late fourteenth-century as morally, socially and economically disastrous, as it allowed them to be idle and to defy their social superiors.46 Such sentiments were forcibly expressed in the 1349 Ordinance and the 1351 Statute of Labourers, which criticised the many servants and labourers ‘not willing to serve after the pestilence, without taking excessive wages’.47 Although these laws targeted both rural and urban workers, it is notable that the traditional symbol of impoverished virtue and hard work, the ploughman, was among the first in the list to be restricted in his demands for higher wages. In addition, the legislation specifically ruled that agricultural pay was to be given ‘without meat or drink, or other courtesy to be demanded, given, or taken’.48

To a large extent, this last stipulation was simply a practical means of closing a legal loophole which allowed people to pay their servants a low cash wage, but to make up the difference by giving them good food. Nonetheless, contemporary vehemence against rural workers who demanded luxury provisions was widespread and they appear to have been regarded as a particular symbol of ‘the world turned upside down’. Instead, like Henryson’s country mouse, they should have fed on ‘plain soup, with beans or peas to gnaw upon’.49 Towns, by contrast, were expected to be centres of plentiful food and culinary diversity, as the ‘uponlandis maus’ and the narrator of the London Lickpenny discovered, and so these cautionary tales depicted town dwellers as gluttonous. One reason for this image was the fact that towns were

47 PROME, February 1351, ii-225-4.
48 Ibid, ii-233-47
not self-sufficient and so farmers sold their produce in municipal markets. When Langland described how ploughmen toiled long and hard to ‘wonnen that thise wastours with glotonye destroyeth’, he was perhaps thinking of urban greed in particular.\(^{50}\) Certainly, this point was made evident in another fourteenth-century poem, *Wynnere and Wastoure*. In this, the parsimonious Wynnere tells his spendthrift opponent Wastoure that he should ‘teche thy men for to tille’ rather than buying up the hard earned produce of the countryside in urban markets and taverns.\(^{51}\)

Visitors to the town from the surrounding countryside, therefore, did not only feature in civic records as buyers. Far more of the ordinances were concerned with them as sellers, usually dealing in victuals or being involved in the wool and cloth industry. Such supplies were essential for the economic vitality of cities and to ensure that townsmen and women did not go short of provisions. Civic authorities were therefore placed in the equivocal position of being dependent upon supplies from agricultural producers over whom they in fact had relatively little control. This was a particular problem as although urban sellers were often stereotyped as dishonest, in reality rural traders were themselves ideally placed to take part in regrating and forestalling. The government of Coventry in 1421 particularly suspected ‘men of the contrey’ of regrating fish and selling underweight bread.\(^{52}\) The Norwich *Book of Pleas*, compiled in c. 1454, ordered that town inhabitants were not permitted to go outside the city ‘even for one league of journey’ to buy victuals from those bringing in goods to sell in the market ‘so that nothing may be sold in the said city by a dearer sale than ought and is accustomed to be done, that the people of the city and country may not suffer loss through such buyers’.\(^{53}\)

One way for the civic authorities to encourage outsiders to sell at the correct markets was to make it more profitable for them, by lowering or removing the tolls they had to pay to sell their goods. In York in 1483, therefore, it was ordered that

all foreyn bochers, ffyshers, ffshemongers, poulters and all oder that bringen witell to sell in to thyss cite shall have free sayle ther of with ownt any thing payng for toll or ony odyr maner of charge.\(^{54}\)


\(^{52}\) Coventry *Leet Book*, ed. Harris, pp. 24, 29.

\(^{53}\) ‘Eciam per unam leuacam itineris’; ‘Quod nichil vendiciione cariori in eadem ciuitate vendatur quam fieri debet et solet ne populus ciuitatis et patrie per huiusmodi emptores dampna incurra’. Norwich, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 118.

The contribution of such tolls to civic government finances, however, meant that such concessions could not always be made and ordinances reiterating the payments to be made by outsiders were more common.\(^55\) Enforcement of such regulations was problematic, as it often proved difficult to identify exactly who should pay which tolls in a busy market place. It was doubtless for this reason that some dues were collected at the city gates, as at Newgate in Bristol and Northgate in Chester. Some attempts were made to distinguish rural traders from town inhabitants by requiring them to stand in particular areas of the market place. In early fifteenth-century Coventry, the local government was particularly keen to create this type of demarcation, with ordinances in 1421 and 1423 ordering that all country sellers of oats were to 'stand nyghz the jeilhall dore'.\(^56\) This type of regulation suggests that contemporaries could not automatically distinguish the difference between urban and rural traders from their appearance or clothing. The 'burgess mouse' may have gone 'barefoot, alone, with a pikestaff in her hand, / As a poor pilgrim' in order to visit her sister in the countryside, but she was perhaps over-scrupulous in her desire to dress down for rural living.\(^57\) In reality, the worlds of agriculture and town markets were intertwined and people intermingled freely.

It was precisely the ability of rural visitors to blend in with the crowd which made towns attractive places for those who wished to move there permanently. Some rural dwellers moved to towns specifically to escape serfdom. Many urban centres claimed that, according to ancient custom, their inhabitants were of free status once they had resided there for a year and a day.\(^58\) Even in towns without this right specifically recorded in the archives, there was much truth in the contemporary adage that 'town air maketh free'. In the second half of the fourteenth century, parliamentary petitions and labour legislation emphasised that villeins fled to the towns, in order to obtain their freedom. In 1385, legislation was passed to prevent 'villeins and neifs' who fled to towns, then taking legal cases against their lords.\(^59\)

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\(^55\) E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, ff. 10-11v; ZCHB/2, f. 72v-73v.
\(^56\) Coventry Looe Book, ed. Harris, pp. 32, 59. For the presence of stocks and pillories in the market place, see pp. 70-1.
\(^57\) 'Bairfute, alone, with pykestaf in hir hand, / As pure pylgryme'. Henryson, Fables, 'The Taill of the Uponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous', II, 180-1, p. 49.
\(^58\) E.g. C. Johnson, 'The oldest version of the customs of Newcastle-upon-Tyne', Archaeologia Aeliana 4th Series 1 (1925), 170-1.
\(^59\) SR, II, p. 38; PROME, October 1385, iii-212-27; London, TNA, SC 8/183/9131.
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55 E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, ff. 10-11v; ZCHB/2, f. 72v-73v.  
56 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 32, 59. For the presence of stocks and pillories in the market place, see pp. 70-1.  
Tension between rural and urban authorities was most strongly expressed in a 1391 petition, which claimed that villeins fled to the boroughs and remained there 'all their lives'. Their lords were unable to reclaim them because of city franchises, which were vigorously defended by the citizens.

And if the said lords or any of their ministers enter the said cities and boroughs thus enfranchised to seize or take the said villeins and to do justice to them according to the law and custom of the land, the people of the cities and boroughs will not allow it, but forcibly impede them. And if any of the said villeins are thus seized by their said lords or their ministers, the said people take them from them because of their said franchises, and do not allow them to be taken out of the said cities or boroughs, to the unbearable injury and disinheritance of the said lords.

Significantly, this petition came not from all of the commons, but only from the 'knights of the counties', indicating a breach in the commons between the knights of the shires and the burgesses. 60

Many burgesses were themselves immigrants and although most were probably not former serfs, occasionally senior men were accused of servile status, sometimes with justification. Such cases must have increased urban vehemence against the interference of lords in the lives of town inhabitants. The successful York merchant, William Burton, for example, had to be formally manumitted by the archbishop in 1397, when he was already a wealthy townsman. 61 In Bristol, William Byrde, merchant, was accused of servile birth as late as 1481, and the Great Red Book included a lengthy repudiation of this slander, which caused great problems not only for Byrde himself, but led to the 'grete myscomford of his frendes and kynnesmen' in Birmingham and the surrounding countryside. 62

Although escaping servdom could be a powerful motivation for moving to a town, many rural migrants were simply attracted to urban centres by the perception of them as places of economic and social opportunity. In reality, as Philippa Maddern has recently highlighted, many of these immigrants would have been disappointed and

60 PROME, November 1391, iii-296–51. See also, C. Given-Wilson, 'Service, servdom and English labour legislation, 1350-1500', in A. Curry and E. Matthew, eds., Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 23-4.


62 GRB, IV, pp. 93-6.
simply ended up exchanging one form of poverty for another. Nonetheless, urban centres were seen as places of opportunity for rural people seeking a higher social status, as indicated by the 1388 Statute of Cambridge, which prohibited those who had worked as ploughmen, carters and husbandmen until the age of twelve from seeking an alternative profession in the towns. Similar sentiments were in evidence in a parliamentary petition of March 1406, which stated that, contrary to the 1388 statute, servants and labourers without income from land or rents sent their children to cities and boroughs as apprentices 'out of pride in the clothing and other bad customs', causing a scarcity of agricultural labour.

The frequency of prohibitions against mobility indicated that the legislation was largely ineffective; indeed, the civic authorities were unwilling to enforce it, such was their desire to increase the urban population. Encouraging rural-urban migration became particularly important for town governments in the second half of the fourteenth century when the dramatic fall in population made good farm land much more readily available for would-be tenants and purchasers. Urban centres regularly petitioned for reductions in their fee farm on the grounds of depopulation, with a typical petition from the citizens of Lincoln in 1399 claiming that 'this city is so greatly ruined, both by pestilence and by other unbearable burdens, that the greater part of the said city is empty and uninhabited'. Towns were also concerned about their tax base. Until 1334, the lay subsidies (commonly known as 'the tenths and fifteenths') had been assessed on moveable goods, with boroughs paying the higher rate of one tenth of their collective, moveable wealth. In 1334, however, the contribution of each community became fixed and was not then re-assessed for the next two centuries. This was obviously problematic given the sharp fall in population in the second half of the fourteenth century.

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65 PROME, March 1406, iii-602.
67 PROME, October 1399, iii-438-118.
68 S. Rigby, 'Urban decline in the later Middle Ages: some problems in interpreting the statistical data', Urban History Yearbook (1979), 47-9. For examples of petitions on this matter, see, London, TNA,
It is unsurprising, then, that town governments were often at odds with the tone of parliamentary legislation prohibiting migration and occupational change. Nonetheless, civic authorities were very aware that the anonymity of the city could attract undesirables who were trying to escape their nefarious past, a point which applied not only to those from the countryside, but to strangers of all descriptions. In the Bible, after all, it was the first murderer, Cain, who was punished for fratricide by being unable to earn a living farming and so founded the world’s first city, Enoch. 69 This was particularly felt in towns which contained major sanctuaries. In the Middle Ages, those who had committed or were suspected of committing a felony could flee to a church and claim sanctuary from arrest and punishment for forty days. At the end of this period, the sanctuary-seeker had the choice of standing trial or abjuring the realm. Some major religious centres, however, most notably Beverley, Durham and Westminster, legally provided those seeking sanctuary with permanent respite from arrest and prosecution and the geographical bounds of the sanctuary area extended far beyond the church. 70 Concerns over the presence of permanent communities of those fleeing justice inevitably caused periodic civic disquiet in relation to law and order. In Beverley, for example, where the whole town constituted the sanctuary, there is evidence in the fifteenth century that urban attitudes towards sanctuary men were hardening. They were ordered to carry only blunted weapons in 1429, indicating civic fears regarding law and order, and it was reiterated in 1429 and 1460 that it was forbidden for them to become burgesses, even under royal licence. 71

Although there were some specific concerns regarding sanctuary men and women, in general, civic governments were anxious to ensure that immigrants were integrated as quickly as possible into the systems which mitigated urban anonymity – neighbourhood communities, such as the ward or leet, household workshops and gilds. Having someone to vouch for you was particularly important in a legal system which prioritised personal reputation as a method of proving innocence or guilt in the courts. 72 Above all, it was necessary that a newcomer should have someone to take

69 Genesis, 4: 3-17.
72 Above, p. 64.
responsibility for him or her. A particularly explicit articulation of this view was found in some Bristol ordinances, which probably date from the mid-fifteenth century:

Noon estraunger that is vnknowe byde in towne passing iij dayes lesse then he fynde suerte of his gode beryng vpon peyne of imprisonment and to make fine. No maner of man harbogh no suche estraunger aboue iij dayes lesse then he fynde suretee of his gode beryng vpon peyne of di marc, for ynne cace that the same estraunger do offende or hurte eny persone aftyr the seide iij dayes, the seide hoste shall satisfye the partie hurted of his damages.73

Anonymity, then, was considered a threat to good order, something that was particularly problematic in the post-Black Death period, as the dislocation of families and the labour shortage encouraged a major increase in geographic mobility. The 1381 rebellion was also seen by many moralists and political leaders as symptomatic of the idleness and impudence of the lower orders, major concerns in an age which saw a rise in wages and short-term service contracts, despite parliament’s attempts to halt these trends.

Late fourteenth-century labour legislation particularly focused upon two worrying aspects of lower class behaviour: idleness and wandering. These preoccupations increased hostility in communities towards needy outsiders, such as vagrants and beggars. Idleness had always been regarded as a vice, but this period saw an increase in the contemporary distinction between the deserving, impotent poor and the idle, undeserving beggar. The impotent were deserving of charity because they were unable to support themselves because of illness, injury, or old age, in contrast to those who were able-bodied, but who did not work.74 The method most generally advocated at both local and national level for ensuring that alms only reached deserving beggars was to give only to those who were known locally and whose personal situation was deemed to merit aid. The 1388 parliament, therefore, ordered that impotent beggars should live in their native towns and not travel from

73 GRB 1, p. 141. This is part of an undated series of ordinances, but it seems likely that they date from c. 1450.
place to place. The usefulness of this legislation was very limited, but it reflected a national preoccupation with lower-class wandering in the late fourteenth century, with parliament ordering major restrictions on mobility, most notably by forbidding servants and labourers to leave their dwelling places ‘to serve or dwell elsewhere, or by colour to go from thence in pilgrimage’ without carrying letters patent under the King’s seal.

It was not until the sixteenth century that most towns began to take a very active role in the suppression of vagrancy. The hardening of urban attitudes towards the ‘idle poor’ reflected national trends and was a response to the greatly increased numbers of vagrants and beggars, as a result of a contraction in the labour market. Some towns responded to this by providing ‘official’ begging bags, marked with the town coat-of-arms, to indicate that the recipient of alms had been designated officially as a deserving native of the town. Coventry, therefore, in 1521 emphasised civic control over those seeking alms by ordering that each alderman should,

serche hys warde and se whiche be impotent and nedy beggers and euer of them that be amyttyd to beg to haue a token on ther bagge of the signe of the olyfaunt, and all other that haue no bagge not to be suffered to dwell in the Cytte.

Similar measures were prescribed in York in 1514-15, although there a badge was to be worn on the shoulder by the genuinely needy.

The need for such emblems to indicate ‘local’ status stemmed in part from the association of vagrancy with aliens, especially the Scottish and Irish. This was made evident in the York ordinance of 1500-1 which juxtaposed legislation ordering imprisonment in the stocks for vagrants with measures against Scots entering the city. Certainly people from Scotland and Ireland often appeared in local muniments as low-paid workers, or as beggars or vagrants. In the York survey of aliens, for example, probably made c. 1484 and recorded in the House Books, the

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75 SR, II, p. 58.
76 SR, II, p. 56.
77 McIntosh, 'Responses to the poor', 210, 217-24; Beier, Masterless Men, pp. 14-18.
78 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 677.
80 Ibid, II, p. 165. For discussion of a comparable situation in the early modern period, see, Beier, Masterless Men, pp. 10-11.
only Scottish couple noted were described as labourers, while other alien nationalities, such as Doche, were more commonly artisans. This association with low-status employment and vagrancy contributed to the civic authorities’ hostility towards these national groups.

Nationals from Ireland, Wales and Scotland had a particularly equivocal status when visiting or residing in England, as although they were regarded as subjects of the king, they did not enjoy the privileges of English denizens, such as the right to inherit land in England or to sue in the English courts. One way for the well-to-do to gain these rights was to obtain letters of denizenship from the king, a process which became increasingly formalised during the reign of Richard II. It is important to note, however, that although these documents gave aliens certain equivalent legal privileges as the English-born (such as the right to inherit property), they did not make them English; this status was instead firmly tied to the birthplace and parentage of the individual. Indeed, even after obtaining such letters, many aliens had considerable difficulty in having them accepted by local officials, particularly at times of war or during diplomatic hostilities.

For obvious reasons, towns on the Welsh and Scottish borders complained most frequently to parliament and the crown about enemy raids and the loss of trade caused by periods of hostility or open warfare. The late fourteenth-century saw some Anglo-Welsh friction, which inevitably focused upon the marcher towns. Complaints to parliament concerning Welsh attacks on English towns and the unjust distrain of goods from merchants who visited Wales on business occurred in 1378, 1380, 1390. In 1380 it was prohibited for any Welsh man or woman to own property in the counties of Hereford, Gloucester, Worcester, Shropshire and Staffordshire. It was not until the rebellion of Owen Glendower in 1400, however, that anti-Welsh feeling began in earnest, with eleven petitions against the Welsh being placed before the 1401 parliament. In response, a series of discriminatory statutes were passed, including prohibitions on ‘full-blooded Welshmen’ purchasing...
lands in England or being citizens or office-holders in English boroughs. Some border towns took additional measures to ensure civic security and so in February 1401, Oswestry, which had been burned in the first raid of September 1400, obtained a charter stating that only the English could be made citizens and that Welshmen were no longer permitted to guard the city gates, but were instead obliged to pay for an English watch.

The most drastic measures, however, were taken at Chester, where it was proclaimed that all Welsh men and women should be expelled from the city and that any Welsh people found within the city walls after sundown could be executed. Presumably as a result of these ordinances, Welshmen and women made very few appearances in the court records of the city during the fifteenth century, although there is one reference in the Black Book during the reign of Henry IV to the son of a Welshman being summoned for theft, but the entry is badly damaged and therefore obscure. It is possible that the citizens of Chester had mixed feelings about the severe sanctions against the Welsh taken in 1401, which may have been imposed by royal authority rather than encouraged by the civic administration. It was Prince Henry, and not the mayor, who proclaimed the anti-Welsh ordinances and no references are made to them in any of the extant civic muniments. Certainly the Chester administration found the loss of Welsh trade costly and inconvenient, complaining to the Crown on the subject in 1445 and 1484. The silence of Chester’s records on the subject of the Welsh was echoed in other towns, further from the border, suggesting that relatively few Welsh lived permanently in English cities or that where they did, they quickly assimilated into their new communities.

Scots living in England apparently incurred considerably more hostility from town administrations, as Anglo-Scottish war flared up much more frequently. Even in times of truce, raids on northern towns and piracy in the Irish Sea were the norm. For those living on the border, raiding was a way of life and both English and Scottish kings at times had considerable difficulty in preventing truces being broken,

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86 PROME, January 1401, iii-472-77.
88 Ibid, pp. 290-1.
89 Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, f. 24v. The court records in question are the Mayors Books and the Sheriffs Books, Chester, CCALS, ZMB/1-8; ZSB/1-4.
90 Morris, Chester, pp. 512-13, 518, 520.
as Edward III found in 1368, when he had to forbid his subjects from making violent attacks in retaliation for Scottish raids. For these towns, therefore, the Scots were clearly and undisputedly the enemy and members of civic administrations were often personally involved in the violent hostilities between the two nations. By 1390, for example, John de Blenkinsop, mayor of Carlisle, had twice been captured by the Scots and held to ransom.91

Although the problem was less immediate for cities further south, anti-Scottish sentiments were often clearly in evidence, particularly in relation to piracy and naval warfare. Four Lynn shipowners, John Brandon, William Gideney, Thomas Trussebut and Robert Brunham, were in 1400 licensed by the Crown to attack Scottish shipping, an expedition they apparently regarded with enthusiasm and they successfully captured a Scottish ship and imprisoned the Scottish admiral, Sir Robert Logan, and Robert III’s secretary, David Seton.92 On other occasions patriotic fervour combined with trading rivalry ran so high that unsanctioned attacks were made. In 1395 Thomas de Conteshale, the former Lynn mayor, and William Halyate and William Leche, two former bailiffs, were reprimanded by the Crown for unlawfully capturing a Scottish ship during the truce, imprisoning the crew and seizing the ship’s goods.93 Scots living in English towns were often subject to discrimination and for would-be burgesses, being accused of Scottish birth was particularly problematic. In a fairly typical case in 1496, while England and Scotland were at war, the Norwich administration allowed the bagmaker Andrew Kenetton to purchase the freedom for 20s, but they were clearly suspicious of his birth and so added the stipulation that if he was proved to be a Scot, he should ‘hold nothing of the liberty’. He was later expelled, as it was proved that he was Scottish.94

Similarly negative associations of rebellion ensured that, in the first half of the fifteenth century, the Irish were regarded with considerable suspicion by parliament and also some by local authorities. Attempts were made to expel the Irish-born already living in England in 1413 and 1422. This was intended in part to ensure that Ireland itself was defended from the rebels there and contemporaries often made a

91 Summerson, Medieval Carlisle, I, pp. 309-16.
92 A. Goodman, Margery Kempe and her World (London, 2002), p. 27.
93 CCR, 1392-6, pp. 338-9.
94 ‘Nichil capia de libertate’, Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 16c, f. 60.
distinction between the Gaelic Irish, often referred to as 'wild Irish', and the Anglo-Irish, deemed to be loyal to the English Crown. In November 1422, the statute expelling the Irish claimed that many 'enemies of our said lord the king and of his realm, called wild Irishmen' inhabited England 'and their wickedness, misdeeds and robberies continue from day to day'. Popular resentment of the Irish apparently led from time to time to violent attacks upon them and so in the 1428 parliament there were complaints that clerks, merchants and other 'honest persons' from Ireland were regularly robbed and imprisoned when making the journey from Chester to Coventry, Oxford and London. This popular hostility, combined with financial need, ensured that in 1439 the Irish were included in the alien subsidy, despite being subjects of the English Crown, and although this decision was rescinded from 1442 on, local authorities did not always recognise this and continued to charge them, adding to ill-feeling on both sides.

In general, Irish merchants, like other high-status aliens, were excluded from the subsidy and from the various expulsions. Trade with Ireland was an important part of the economies of a number of towns, but particularly of Chester and Bristol, a point emphasised in the Libelle of Englyshe Polycye. There were a number of Irish merchants among Bristol's wealthy elite and in 1397-8 the Irish-born John Banbury (alias Toby or Tokey) became mayor of the city, although it is possible that he changed his name to avoid hostility from his fellow citizens. Certainly by the early fifteenth century, other Irish merchants did not feel secure in their position at Bristol, with at least two of them acquiring individual exemptions from the 1413 expulsion order, although this should have been unnecessary under the terms of the statute.

In 1439, Bristol's hostility towards high-status Irishmen took the unusual form of

95 PROME, November 1422, iv-90-43. See also SR, II, pp. 173, 214.
98 The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye: a Poem on the Use of Sea-Power, 1436, ed. G. Warner (Oxford, 1926), II, 656-64, 798-800, pp. 34, 41. For Irish trade with Chester, see for example, Chester, CCALS, ZSB/1, ff. 54-62, 70v-72, 75-75v, 77-78; ZSB/3, ff. 4v, 11; ZSB/4, ff. 13, 16; Chester Customs Accounts, 1301-1566, ed. K.P. Wilson, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Publications 111 (1969), pp. 10, 103-42.
99 Latimer, "Maire of Bristow is Kalender": its list of civic officers, 128-9; Roskell, Clark and Rawcliffe, History of Parliament, II, pp. 113-15.
100 SR, II, p. 173; Childs, 'Irish merchants', 35.
barring them from admission to the Common Council. This contrasted with attitudes in cities such as Southampton, where the Irishman William Overy was twice mayor and acted as the town’s parliamentary representative in 1426. The motivations for sanctions against Irish merchants taking a role in civic government in 1439 remain ambiguous, although there appeared to be considerable artisan rivalry focusing on the Irish at the same time, with complaints in the same year that local weavers took on Irish apprentices who did not serve the full seven-year term, while the city’s Craft of Hoopers banned its members from taking on Irish apprentices or servants. Evidently a group of Irish merchants, led by Harry May, bitterly resented these sanctions and in September 1454 May sued the mayor, Richard Hatter, in the Chancery when the Common Council refused to admit his apprentice (and presumably also his relative), Richard May, to the town freedom. The following year, Harry May and his compatriots were deprived of the franchise by the local administration. Both the Great Red Book and Ricart’s Kalendar provided colourful accounts of this ongoing quarrel, and May remained in ill-favour, with a post-1461 entry in the Great Red Book describing May’s alleged involvement in a Lancastrian plot.

Although Bristol’s dislike of Irish merchants was unusual in its intensity, many towns had similarly uneasy relations with communities of other aliens, particularly those from Continental Europe. Most serious were the clashes between alien and denizen craftsmen. The best documented waves of craft-based xenophobia were found in London, such as the attacks on Flemings in the summer of 1468, when a Skinner, William Shewe, later confessed that he had, with fifty-six others, intended to cross the Thames into Rotherhithe and ‘for that the Flemyngs there take away the living of English people, [they] purposely to hae (sic) cut off their thumbs or hands, so they should never have helped themselves again by means of the crafts’. The London crafts also took the lead in petitioning parliament concerning alien competition, as in 1463-5, when the ‘artificeres and craftis men and women…in [the] moste noble and famous cite of London and in other gode citees townes brughes and

102 CPR, 1391-6, p. 458; Platt, Medieval Southampton, p. 254.
104 A full account of these disputes is provided in: Childs, ‘Irish merchants’, 40-1.
105 GRB, I, pp. 136-8, II, p. 54; Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 122; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 41.
villages within this...noble reame' complained that the import of ready-made goods and the presence of alien artificers in England put them out of business.\footnote{London, TNA, SC 8/29/1412.}

Larger provincial towns such as Bristol, Southampton and Norwich at different times saw definite surges in anti-alien sentiment and legislation, which was often based in competition between artisans. In Southampton in 1406, the Tailors’ Gild complained with considerable indignation that alien tailors came to the town on foreign ships and cut gowns during the time the ships were moored for both citizens and strangers ‘to as great an extent as the freest tailor burgess of this town’.\footnote{The Black Book of Southampton, ed. A.B. Wallis-Chapman, Southampton Record Society 13-14, 17 (3 vols., 1912-15), I, pp. 98-9.} In Bristol, the upswing in xenophobia in the second half of the fifteenth-century encompassed an unusually large range of targets, including sailors, merchants and artisans, but the measures taken against the last were the most extreme. In 1450, it was decreed that alien craftsmen could not employ alien apprentices, journeymen or ‘taskers’, but must instead employ those ‘borne vnder the ligeaunce of oure saide soueraine Lorde Kyng and noon other’. Alien apprentices were particularly targeted in these ordinances, as even those under native masters were to have their apprenticeships cancelled and to be denied further work. There was obviously anxiety among the civic administration that denizen masters would refuse to comply with this ordinance, as the penalties for disobedience were extremely severe, including a 40s fine and the loss of the franchise ‘neuer to be maad birgeis after’\footnote{GRB, I, pp. 128-9.}.

Official sanctions against aliens, whether taken by national or local governments, were almost always controversial. Influxes of overseas craftsmen and women may have been strongly disliked by English artisans, but competition was clearly very often popular with consumers, as it lowered prices and increased the range of goods available. Gild associations who complained to the crown regarding such competition therefore often claimed that alien-made goods were inferior in quality, or that alien workers were not trained to the same standards as in England. In Southampton in c. 1480, therefore, the Drapers and Mercers complained to the corporation that whereas previously,
men of notabill blode as gentilmen of goode awncesty of this nobill royalm of England...put forth theire children to excersyse vse and lerne the sayde occupacyons of drapry and mercery [now] Duch men, Selanders, Flenyngis and other strawngers withowte men borne yn the yles owte of this Royalme...occupieth the sayde worshipfull occupacyon of drapery and mercery as boldly and as openly as they had be browght vpe there yn and lerned the secrete there of.110

The most dramatic example of protectionist legislation was found in Richard III’s parliament of 1484, when complaints against the trading practices of Italians led non-denizens being denied the right to trade cloth and wool in England and to an expulsion order against all aliens who practised crafts, unless they were employed by a native master craftsman.111

In addition to foreign craftsmen, some towns contained large communities of overseas merchants. In London, wealthy Italians were particularly prominent, residing in the wards of Langbourn and Broad Street and worshipping at the house of the Austin Friars.112 Not all provincial towns had such communities, but they did occasionally exist. Large colonies of Italian merchants were also found in Southampton and Sandwich, while Boston and Lynn had long-standing associations with Hanseatic merchants and Bristol had particular links with Gascony because of the lucrative wine trade.113 Generally, alien merchants did not reside in the English cities permanently, but visited only for short periods to trade. Occasionally, however, such men did take up long-term residence in England, as a number of Gascon merchants did in Bristol following the fall of their homeland into French hands, although many returned after the 1463 Anglo-French truce.114 Not all resident aliens were political exiles, with some settling in England simply out of preference or because they married into the local urban elite. In York, two German merchants were particularly successful. Henry Market, who was naturalised in 1430, gained an alderman as a son-in-law, himself serving as sheriff in 1442-3. It is clear that he

110 Letters of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries from the Archives of Southampton, ed. R.C. Anderson, Southampton Record Society 22 (1921), pp. 30-2.
111 PROME, January 1484, vi-263-27.
112 Barron, London in the Later Middle Ages, p. 113.
114 Carus-Wilson, Medieval Merchant Venturers, pp. 44-6.
retained kinship ties to Cologne, however, as he remembered his brother there in his will.\footnote{115} Henry Wyman, meanwhile, began his career in York with some difficulty, being arrested in 1385 as an alien in action taken against the Hanse merchants, but by 1407 had risen to become the city’s mayor, a post he also held in 1408 and 1409.\footnote{116} Similar success stories were found in Norwich, where the ‘merchant of Brugge’ John Asger became mayor in 1426 and in Southampton, where the Florentine, Christopher Ambrose, became a denizen in 1472, bailiff in 1483, sheriff in 1486 and mayor in 1497.\footnote{117} There were also cases, of course, of English merchants settling and marrying abroad, most famously in the case of Margery Kempe’s son, who was originally a merchant at Lynn, but who then lived abroad and married a German woman.\footnote{118}

Although certain individuals were highly successful in their adopted towns, it is clear that foreign birth could prove a serious drawback to social and political advancement in some circumstances. This was certainly the case in Lynn during the 1411 selection of parliamentary representatives. The early fifteenth century in Lynn was marked by great friction between the \textit{potenciores}, who dominated political office, and the \textit{mediocres} and the \textit{inferiores non burgenses}, who were increasingly challenging this monopoly on power.\footnote{119} By August 1411, the \textit{mediocres} appear to have been in the ascendancy, as their one of their leading men, Roger Galyon, was elected mayor, but matters remained very far from settled and so in October, when John Bilney and James Nicholasson, both \textit{mediocres}, were chosen to represent the borough in parliament, the selections were quickly disputed, using the pretext that both men were ‘outsiders’. In the case of Bilney, the criticism focused on the fact that he was from South Lynn, hardly an insuperable barrier to legitimately representing the town, and although he did not in the end serve in the 1411 parliament, he was returned to the Commons in 1414.\footnote{120} The allegations against Nicholasson, however, centred on his alien parentage, something he himself clearly regarded as a serious and

concerning slight. In September 1412, he obtained testimonial letters from the mayor, stating that he was of good character and reputation and had been born and baptised in Lynn, had an English mother, and had always been resident there. In June 1413, he took the additional safeguard of obtaining a grant of denization from the king. It is likely that foreigners were regarded as particularly unsuitable as members of parliament, because of their loyalties to their native lands, especially given the frequency of foreign war and international hostilities during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Nicholasson was never again selected as a parliamentary representative, even when the power of the mediocres was at its height in the mid-1410s.

Objections to aliens holding office were perhaps inevitable given the ambiguity of many town ordinances concerning the right of those from overseas to enter the civic franchise. At various times during the fifteenth century, towns had targeted aliens, often restricting their right to enter the freedom. In York between 1480 and 1484 there was a campaign to restrict aliens and to ensure they paid a 40s entry fine. It was doubtless these measures which led to the queries over John Morgan’s status in 1484, when the mayor Thomas Wranglish was obliged to confirm that this prominent Dutchman was indeed a ‘ffreeman and denzyn of the said citie and so hath continued by the space of xx yere and more’. Bristol took a more pragmatic approach in their new measures against aliens in 1454-5, by declaring that those born outside England and Wales had to pay the higher entry fee of £5 (rather than the usual 40s), unless they were ‘y knowe to the Maire shrive and Comyn Councell for the tyme beyng, beyeng of goode gouernaunce name and fame’. The Bristol ordinance neatly highlighted the disadvantage of alien status; one was even more dependent upon personal reputation and the good will of the civic government than an Englishman. Resident aliens often sought to mitigate these disadvantages by the purchase of letters of protection, proof of loyalty or denization from the crown, but these did not completely remove the stigma attached to foreign birth, even for

121 King’s Lynn, KLBA, KL/C10/2, ff. 1v, 5; CPR, 1413-16, p. 138.
123 Ibid, I, p. 322.
members of the urban political elite. Slanders and insults were a recurring aspect of urban politics and resident aliens were by no means the only victims of such smear campaigns. English local politicians could be accused of servile birth, immorality or dishonesty in exchanges that usually took a very similar form.

The parliamentary records of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries highlighted frequent hostility towards aliens who lived in England or who visited the country to trade, antagonism which peaked during the 1370s and 1380s and again in the 1430s and 1440s. Late fourteenth-century friction was caused by the widespread fear of French invasion, fuelled by enemy raids on the South Coast, with Southampton, Melcombe Regis, Winchelsea, Rye and Sandwich being particularly badly affected. Fifteenth-century hostility was largely based on trading rivalry, culminating in the Hosting Act of 1439 and the alien subsidies from 1440. Hosting was prescribed by statute in order to avoid 'the great damages and losses' to the king and the people which arose from alien merchants trading solely with each other. The terms of the legislation clearly reflected popular paranoia that aliens conspired together with 'agreements and compacts' to form cartels 'whereby the same alien merchants are greatly enriched, and your subject denizen merchants of your same realm are grievously impoverished'. Hosting was a practice whereby an alien merchant was obliged to reside with a denizen of the same status, who was responsible for supervising the visitor and, in theory at least, ensuring that he did not deprive the town authorities or the king of their rightful customs. In reality, however, hosting could provide an excellent opportunity for the host merchant to buy the alien's goods secretly and illegally, avoiding tolls and dues and thereby getting them at a cheaper price. Despite the possibilities of illicit gain, however, urban administrations were generally in favour of hosting and some towns, like Lynn, had long had this type of regulation.

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125 E.g. London, TNA, SC 8/26/1253; SC 8/26/1254; CPR, 1413-16, p. 138; Ruddock, Italian Merchants, p. 37.
126 See, for example, discussion of the Norton-Spencer dispute in Bristol in 1479, chapter 2, p. 55.
127 London, TNA, SC 8/19/917, SC 8/19/922, SC 8/215/10712, SC 8/125/6206. PROME, 'Appendix April 1379', item 9; 'Appendix January 1380', item 7; November 1384, iii-201-24.
128 PROME, November 1439, v-24-38b.
129 The RED Register of King’s Lynn, ed. H. Ingleby (2 vols. King's Lynn, 1919-22), I, p. 216. Southampton seems to have been an exception, see, A.A. Ruddock, 'Alien hosting in Southampton in the fifteenth century,' EconHR 16 (1946), 31, 34-6.
Although hosting sometimes gave rise to both licit and illicit co-operation between natives and alien merchants, hostility between these groups was evident in clashes over shipping and piracy. During periods of war or diplomatic hostilities, it was common for trading vessels to be boarded and seized by enemy nations, or to be held at their ports indefinitely. This was not only economically devastating for the merchant owners, but also exposed their crews and sometimes the merchants themselves to at best much inconvenience and at worst, considerable personal risk. Such captures also spurred English merchants and mariners on to make similar attacks on Continental ships and some of these were officially sanctioned by the Crown, particularly against France and Spain.130 ‘Letters of marque’ could be granted by the king, to allow merchants who had had their ships seized by aliens to retaliate by taking by force a ship owned by foreign nationals from the same country in recompense. In 1400, therefore, the Crown supported John Brandon of Lynn when he seized a Hanseatic ship moored in Boston, in retaliation for the seizing of English ships by Hanse towns.131 Such measures, however, met with retaliation of a similar nature on the Continent. Unsurprisingly, English merchants engaged in overseas trade felt particularly strongly on the issue of piracy and lobbied parliament or the crown when their own ships were seized or attacked. According to Ricart’s Kalendar, in 1459, Philip Mede, mayor of Bristol, ‘sewed byfore the kyng and his counselle al the Lumbars Janueys at that time in Engelande, because of the taking of Robert Sturny and of his shippes’. It appears that Sturmy’s ships were attacked at sea by the Genoese, and in response all the Lombards were arrested and incarcerated in London’s Fleet prison until they paid surety and a fine ‘for the harmys which theyr nacion had done to the sayde Sturmyn and to this realme’. This account is borne out by The Great Chronicle of London.132

As a major port town, the Bristol administration was understandably particularly interested in matters concerning shipping and piracy, as well as the treatment of aliens while they visited the town itself. Prior to 1450, however, the local ordinances do not show particular signs of xenophobia, but the loss of Gascony and Normandy badly affected the town’s economy and this led the local government

131 Lloyd, England and the German Hanse, p. 111.
to take a number of measures against visiting aliens which mirrored those taken in France. During the mayoralty of Philip Mede (1461-2), it was ordained that crews and merchants in strangers’ ships coming under safe-conduct could no longer enter the town, but were instead to send four or five people to the mayor to show their documentation. This group were then held within the town while the ship was searched and a list of all the names of those aboard was made. Once this was done, hosts were assigned for merchants and mariners were also billeted, and ‘euyr Frenscheman have and weare a whyte crosse opyn vpoon their schulders’. The main purpose of this type of legislation was doubtless to intimidate and make uncomfortable traders from enemy nations, but while attacks at sea sometimes occurred, actual violence on land between merchants appears to have been rare.

Urban government attitudes towards outsiders, then, were a mixture of cooperation and suspicion, with foreigners from overseas being treated with particular hostility in times of trading tension or war. Wealth, however, often could bring a sense of respectability and acceptance in the higher social and political echelons of town life. Indeed, the high mortality rates of the late medieval period meant that the turnover of civic officers was fairly rapid. Most burgesses were themselves immigrants which meant that a good personal reputation had to be hastily acquired to prove successful in civic life. Fast networking and group bonding was doubtless facilitated greatly by the annual cycle of government festivities, such as feasts, ‘drinkings’ and parades, as well as collective church-going and charitable works. Sanctions against strangers and ‘foreyns’, therefore, usually focused either on those visiting the city on a short term basis or on those much lower down the social scale, such as wandering labourers or vagabonds. While civic authorities may have frequently lamented the potentially criminal tendencies of these ‘strangers’, they nonetheless served an ideologically very useful purpose, by providing an ever-present example of what a good citizen was not. In reality, however, most newcomers were not vagabonds or ne’er-do-wells, but rather came to urban centres because they were seen as an arena for fulfilling ambitions. While town administrations were concerned about the threat to law and order posed by urban anonymity and illicit wandering, it


\[134\] GRB, II, p. 62.
was to their advantage to encourage immigration, to ensure a plentiful supply of burgesses and a thriving urban economy. It also made law enforcement considerably simpler: when people had a reputation and position to lose, it was much easier to persuade them to conform.
Chapter Five: Relations with the Crown

Recent urban scholarship has mainly focused upon town-crown relations, with a particular emphasis on the royal boroughs.1 Most works have concentrated on the monetary demands of the crown from urban elites, in the form of taxation, loans and gifts, and the charters which towns received in return. In the words of Caroline Barron, ‘at the simplest level the king needed money and the Londoners wanted self-government which largely (albeit not completely) contributed to their ability to make money’.2 While recent studies of town-crown fiscal relations have undoubtedly proved fruitful, they give only a partial view of the complexities of this relationship and the ideologies which informed it. Christian Liddy has recently added a new dimension to this debate by arguing that,

viewing urban relations with the crown in terms of a patron-client nexus reduces the subject to a story of favours bought and gifts given and neglects the public dimension to this interaction. ... Above all, the king was expected to uphold the common good, a duty which underpinned the rhetoric used by the crown to articulate and to justify its demands on its subjects and from which towns were not immune.3

As this highlights, late medieval political culture merged the personal and public dimensions of a leader’s role, a point which was evident in the relationship between urban authorities and the king. The following discussion explores how town governments sought to build up a largely fictional but, in theory, personal relationship with the monarch and his immediate family and how this relationship was consolidated through the rhetoric of public service, financial generosity, hospitality and the role of intercessors. Town-crown interaction was given important cultural expression in written civic records, in the dramatic enactments provided by towns for royal visits, and in artwork commissioned by the local administrations. Above all, the interaction between the king and provincial urban authorities operated within the broader framework of contemporary ideas concerning legitimate power, a topic which was under continual discussion and review during the political conflicts of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

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1 E.g. Liddy, War, Politics and Finance; Barron, London in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 9-42; C. Liddy, ‘The rhetoric of the royal chamber in late medieval London, York and Coventry’, Urban History 29 (2002); Attrée, The King’s Towns.
2 Barron, London in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 9-10.
3 Liddy, War, Politics and Finance, p. 3.
Royal boroughs had the king as their direct overlord, usually paying an annual fee farm, rather than having royal officials assess what the town owed in taxes, customs and tolls. Seigneurial boroughs, by contrast, had their own lord, who had legal jurisdiction over the town, as well as being entitled to the profits from its trade. Some lords allowed the townsmen simply to pay an annual fee farm in return for autonomy. In 1375, for example, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, granted the mayor, burgesses and community of Leicester the profits and government of the town for ten years in return for an annual fee farm of £80. Other seigneurial lords, however, such as the abbots of St. Albans and the earls of Warwick, were more insistent that they personally exercised control.

Although royal boroughs usually had greater autonomy than their seigneurial counterparts, the king did retain important powers over their urban administrators. In particular, the potential for a king to seize a city’s liberties and franchises ‘into his own hand’ informed much of a town’s relationship with its monarch. In 1354, following complaints concerning the enforcement of victualling and labour legislation in London, parliament ruled on how this process should take place, stipulating that, as errors of civic administration could not be enquired into by the people of the urban centre concerned, the inquests were to be made by ‘foreign people’ from a town’s surrounding county. If civic officials were indicted, they were to be brought before the king’s justices and each plaintiff was to receive treble damages. On the first two offences, fines were to be made to the crown, but on the third the liberties and franchises were to be seized by the king.

Susan Reynolds has argued that urban liberties were seized by the Crown less frequently in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than earlier in the medieval period. She attributes this to the growing acceptance of urban self-government at both a local and national level. In the case of London, this appears to have been true. In the thirteenth century, the capital’s liberties were seized repeatedly by Henry III for short

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4 For a useful overview of seigneurial boroughs, lordship and urbanization see, R. Goddard, Lordship and Medieval Urbanization: Coventry, 1043-1355 (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 1-6.
6 The differences between royal boroughs and towns with other overlords are discussed more fully in chapter 6.
7 PROME, April 1354, ii-258-26.
periods between 1243 and 1271, while Edward I withheld these privileges for thirteen years from 1285. By the fourteenth century, however, London had become so firmly established as a self-governing unit that increasingly it was considered inappropriate for the king to take it ‘into his own hand’. This point was made evident in the contemporary hostility towards Richard II’s use of this sanction against the city in 1392. This seizure was allegedly made entirely on the grounds of civic misgovernment, but in reality royal anger was greatly enhanced by the Londoners’ failure to lend money to the Crown, both as a corporation and as individuals. This disapproval was increased by the punitive removal of the courts, chancery, exchequer and inmates of Fleet Prison from London to York, a process which was extremely disruptive to the operation of the country’s judicial and administrative systems. The Westminster Chronicle, in particular, gave an unsurprisingly unflattering account of the motivations for this seizure, attributing it to the malice of the king’s councillors (describing them as ‘children of wickedness’) and Richard’s financial greed.

Provincial towns occasionally had their liberties seized in the thirteenth century. At some time before 1208 the citizens of Winchester had lost their franchises, as in that year they were re-granted their liberties on condition that they paid the king all the debts they owed to him. York had its franchises seized in 1280 and 1292, on the first occasion for tampering with a royal charter and on the second for debts owed to the Crown. In 1285, the government of Oxford lost the right to enforce the assize of bread after complaints from the University to the king that they failed to punish offenders adequately. In the parliamentary legislation of 1354, therefore, regional urban centres were explicitly included as places which could have

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9 Barron, London in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 32-3.
13 VCH Hampshire, V, p. 23.
14 CPR, 1281-92, pp. 41, 70; VCH Yorkshire: City of York, pp. 33-4, 35.
their liberties seized, although London remained the main focus of the statute.\textsuperscript{16} This measure was used by the Crown against provincial towns on a number of occasions in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although increasingly it was employed only in cases of serious civic disorder or treason. Cambridge lost its liberties in 1382, as a result of its role in the Peasants’ Revolt, and Norwich in 1437-8 and 1443-7 on the grounds of misgovernment.\textsuperscript{17} In 1471, Coventry, Canterbury and the Cinque Ports were all punished in this way for disloyalty to Edward IV. Southampton also lost its liberties following the townspeople’s involvement in the 1483 rebellion against Richard III.\textsuperscript{18} These towns could have comforted themselves the knowledge that, like God, the king corrected those whom he loved: ‘for whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth’.\textsuperscript{19} While having the franchises seized was to some extent a sign of urban government weakness, it did at least indicate that the larger provincial towns were on the royal radar as institutions worthy of interest and, therefore, occasional punishment.

Understandably, towns were generally anxious to avoid having their liberties seized, but it is worth making the point that, usually, monarchs also would have preferred to avoid this situation. Ultimately, it was in the best interests of all to ensure that good town-crown relations prevailed. Certainly a king could use the measure to gain temporary financial ascendency and political submission over local government, as Richard II had against London in 1392, but it was a sign of his weakness that such a measure had to be taken at all. Even when a city was implicated in treason, therefore, it did not mean a long-term loss of its franchises. Canterbury and the Cinque Ports, for example, were taken into the king’s hand in June 1471 following their support for Fauconberg and the Lancastrian cause, but this was, as Edward IV emphasised to the mayor of Sandwich, only for the ‘meane season’ and self-government was restored in all these towns by July.\textsuperscript{20} A break down in good governance must also have adversely affected the town’s economy, ultimately reducing its ability to provide the king with taxes, gifts and loans. Very occasionally, therefore, towns threatened to give up their liberties ‘into the king’s hand’ voluntarily, unless greater financial clemency was granted to the citizens, particularly in relation

\textsuperscript{16} PROME. April 1354, ii-258-26-x; SR, I, 346-7.
\textsuperscript{17} Maitland, ‘Introduction’, p. xxii.
\textsuperscript{19} Proverbs, 3: 2.
to the payment of the annual fee farm. In 1402, the burgesses of Dunwich, who paid their fee farm directly to the Crown, petitioned the king, asking him to take the city into his own hand, as they could not afford the fee farm and the lay subsidy.\textsuperscript{21} It is not clear what action the Crown took on this occasion. The mayor, bailiffs and burgesses of Grimsby also agreed to this tactic in 1487, 1489 and 1490. The fee farm was paid to the Exchequer, but then passed directly to the earls of Westmorland. Following the town’s pleas of poverty, the king negotiated with the earl that the amount would be reduced from £50 to £30, without the liberties being taken ‘into the king’s hand’.\textsuperscript{22}

Kings also threatened to seize urban liberties more frequently than actually happened. When there were rebellious stirrings at York against Tudor rule in 1488, Henry VII reminded the mayor and his brethren that it was their duty to punish such offenders and if they failed ‘we shall so sharpelie lay it to your blame and charge with punysshement...as shalbe to the feirfull president and grevuse example of all other [of] our subgettes and officers’.\textsuperscript{23} In January 1494, following ‘gret riots and mysgovernmentes’ in the city, his threat to seize the liberties was even more explicit and he told a delegation from York that,

I may not see the Citie go in utter ruyne and dekaye in defaulte of you that shuld rewle... of necessite I most and woll put in other rewlers that woll rewle and govern the Citie according to my lawez.\textsuperscript{24}

This threat, however, does not seem to have been carried out on either occasion, although in 1494 the town council was ordered to ask for assistance from Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey, who was Henry VII’s commander in the North, if they had difficulty in keeping law and order.\textsuperscript{25}

Loss of civic liberties had manifold and serious economic consequences for the town. The land and tenements of the local officials could be distrained or attached to ensure compliance and the payment of fines, so from a personal point of view town officers were anxious to avoid such proceedings. The corporation usually lost control

\textsuperscript{22} S. Rigby, Medieval Grimsby, Monographs in Regional and Local History 3 (1993), pp. 116-17.
\textsuperscript{24} York Civic Records, ed. Raine, II, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, II, p. 116.
of its collective finances. When Richard II seized the liberties of London in 1392, therefore, he placed all the income of the corporation under royal control and the sheriffs were obliged to account for it at the exchequer. While this case was especially thorough and severe, for provincial urban centres the loss of the franchises usually meant that the town could no longer claim customary payments, such as court profits or certain tolls, which were instead taken by the crown. Following royal anger at the so-called ‘Gladman Insurrection’ in Norwich in January 1442, the citizens complained that they had lost all the profits from their courts of the market and from the customs paid by strangers coming to the city to trade, arguing that therefore they could not pay the annual fee farm of £113 8s. This petition did not initially succeed, so the city fell heavily into debt. In 1452, however, the king agreed that the town should not be charged the fee farm during the period when its liberties had been removed.

The process of regaining the franchises was costly, as the king usually levied fines on the town as a whole as well as on individuals who were particularly implicated in disorder or treachery. When Canterbury lost its liberties in 1471, the author of the Great Chronicle of London succinctly noted that,

such as were rych were hangid by the purs, and the othir that were nedy were hangid by the nekxis, by meane whereof that cunte was grety enpoverysshid and the kynys coffyrs somdele encreasyd.

In the same year, Coventry found itself in trouble after it supported Warwick against Edward IV and the city regained the franchise only on payment of a £200 fine. There was also considerable outlay involved in petitioning the king for a restoration of the liberties, with the Norwich accounts of 1443-4 recording that £8 6s 8d was paid to Thomas Ingham, Gregory Drapere and Richard Brasyer for suing to the king and council for the restoration of the liberties, and 20 marks were paid to John Clifton for similar expenses which he had already met on the city’s behalf.

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27 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), ff. 43-4; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, pp. 342-3.
28 For references in the Norwich accounts for fine payments by the corporation in 1443-4, see, Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 18a/1, f. 225v.
29 Great Chronicle, eds. Thomas and Thornley, p. 221.
30 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 370, 381.
31 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 18a/1, f. 225v.
Politically speaking, the removal of the franchise was usually a serious blow to civic pride and independence, as the king appointed a warden of the city instead of a representative chosen by the citizens. In order to avert this indignity, towns particularly emphasised their ancient right and liberties, implying that these had an irrefutable legal status, which even royalty could not overrule. The London Liber Albus, for example, compiled in 1417, responded to friction with the Crown concerning governance of the Thames by highlighting the City’s ancient rights over the river:

The city that is now called ‘London,’ founded in imitation of Great Troy, was constructed and built by King Brut, the first monarch of Britain, being at first called] ‘New Troy,’ and afterwards ‘Trinovant’: of which foundation, building, and construction, the River Thames was the cause. And of this city and river, both dukes, mayors, wardens, sheriffs, aldermen and nobles, of the before-mentioned city, have heretofore had and held the governance.32

The most famous example of this tactic was found in York in 1485 and 1486. Although Henry VII did not attempt to seize the city’s liberties at this time, he was clearly concerned about the loyalty of some members of the civic administration, most notably the recorder, Miles Metcalf. The urban administration government resented attempts on the part of the king and the earl of Northumberland to influence their choice of recorder, twice refusing to appoint Henry’s chosen candidates to this post. In the first case, they diplomatically appointed the preferred royal candidate, Richard Grene, to the town council instead, but Henry’s later recommendation of Thomas Middleton was unceremoniously ignored, with the York government choosing an alternative, John Vavasour.33 Finally, in June 1486, when the king requested that they appointed Robert Langston as the new sword-bearer, the York administration put forward their case for refusal, claiming that royal interference in this matter was contrary to their ancient rights:

Wherupon the said maier, aldermen and counsellours calling to remembrance how hertofore it pleased the king to shew unto theyme how his mynde, wol and pleaser was and shulde be that shold enjoy ther auncheant liberties and costomes with free eleccion of allmaner ther officers... notwithstanding any writing to be maide fro his grace in favour of eny persone herafter; and also how

of old tyme it haith be accustomed and ordigned...that such as sewed unto the kinge or othre lord for writing to obtigned [sic] any office apperteignyng unto the disposicion of the saide maier, aldermen and counsellours, shal never have ne enjoy the said office'.

Henry was clearly angered by York’s refusal to obey him, but it is interesting to note he did not feel able to overrule the city government on a point backed by claims of ancient tradition. He did not seize the civic franchises, therefore, or take other punitive measures against the local administration. The claim of ancient franchises was very strong, a point that Henry himself acknowledged in 1494, when there were accusations of misgovernment in York, and he commented to a delegation from the city that ‘ye be loth, I wot well, that other shuld rewle within your fraunchese, whiche hath beyn granted you of old tyme’. While Henry may have been irritated by York’s references to their ancient status as a reason for civic autonomy, he could not ignore or deny the legal and cultural value of the claim.

While the potential for the crown to seize urban liberties was an important aspect of civic relations with the king, it was generally only used when the established methods of political communication between the monarch and local officials had seriously broken down. There was, of course, an underlying tension between the crown and civic governments which made friction more likely: ultimately, a civic government’s responsibilities were divided, as a town officer had both a duty to the king and to the people who selected him. In idealised terms, this was not a problem: the ‘common good’ should have been served by the king’s will being enacted. In reality, matters were much less simple and civic leaders often had to walk on a precarious tightrope of diplomacy in order to balance the views of their two powerful sponsors. In normal circumstances, however, such exchanges were broadly covered by the accepted need for intermediaries to go between the king and the commons, in order to ensure that, on one hand, the king was kept informed of his subjects’ needs and desires and, on the other, that the commons understood the king’s will. This was nicely illustrated in the decorated initial of Henry VII’s 1499 charter to Bristol, which showed the king being petitioned by the figure of the mayor, who was shown in full civic regalia kneeling on a tiny green island, which was perhaps intended to represent

the county of Bristol (fig. 3).\textsuperscript{36} This document depicted the charter being obtained by the mayor, who petitioned for it on behalf of the wider community. It was then given to the civic government by the king, and the local administration could use it to bolster their power in the area.

After 1399, most charter decoration was carried out in London, probably near the Chancery, but the work was commissioned and paid for by the recipient of the grant.\textsuperscript{37} Illustrated borough charters, therefore, provide an important insight into how local administrations wished to depict the king, who was normally pictured enthroned and crowned in the main initial of the charter. Unusually, however, the 1499 Bristol document also included an image of the urban corporation. Here the mayor was pictured alone, to cultivate the impression that he represented the views of the whole community and to suggest a fictional intimacy with the king. In reality, the mayor for that year, Nicholas Brown, had no links with the royal household and was very unlikely to have petitioned – or even met – the king in person.\textsuperscript{38}

The decision to enhance the position of the mayor in this image, though unusual in this type of artwork, conformed to the widespread urban rhetoric which prioritised the role of the mayor as a representative of the whole community. As Caroline Barron has noted in the case of London, civic governments were at a disadvantage in their negotiations with the King, as they did not speak with a single voice.\textsuperscript{39} Attempts were therefore made to counteract this by emphasising firstly, the unity of the ruling collective and secondly, the pre-eminence of the mayor. In a series of fairly typical regulations in Leicester in 1477, for example, it was ordered that no member of civic government should ‘secretly ne openly in no cause ne mater repreve, rebuke ne dishonoure by worde ne dede’ any of their brother officers, but should instead strive ‘in ther moste uttermoste and effectuall devoire to saue and incree the honoure of the maialte’.\textsuperscript{40} The preoccupation with this matter was particularly extreme among urban corporations and so a comparable charter to a gild, the 1444

\textsuperscript{36} Bristol, BRO, 01230.
\textsuperscript{38} Latimer, “Maire of Bristow is Kalendar”: its list of civic officers’, 134.
\textsuperscript{39} Barron, London in the Later Middle Ages, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{40} Records of Leicester, ed. Bateson, II, pp. 298-9.
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Letters Patent of Henry VI to the London Leathersellers' Company, had a very similar illumination to the 1499 Bristol charter, but instead showed a group of people petitioning the monarch.41

Significantly, the Bristol illumination also depicted the mayor having access to the king and petitioning him in person concerning the needs of the local community. In reality, provincial mayors were probably rarely granted an audience with the monarch except during royal visits.42 Instead, petitioning for charters was carried out through a chain of intercession: the local administration petitioned people who were nearer the royal ear and who also could be expected to take an interest in the town's affairs, such as prominent local noblemen or royal servants with regional connections. Such men were courted with gifts and hospitality by borough corporations to obtain their good will and to reinforce this relationship of 'good lordship'.43 The role of the leading civic officials in intercession and petitioning the crown was therefore important, but it was not always as an immediate or personal process as local leaders would have liked. In the 1499 charter, the Bristol administration sought to provide a summarised version of the chain of intercession, which emphasised the importance of the mayor by suggesting a fictional intimacy with the king.

One method used to emphasise the monarch's personal links with the town was to claim to be the 'chamber' of either the king or a member of his immediate family. The terminology implied a special relationship with a royal personage, by inferring that the city was a place where they could depend upon particular loyalty. London was traditionally referred to as the 'king's chamber', although York also claimed this status from 1393 onwards.44 Coventry, meanwhile, described itself as the 'prince's chamber' in 1456, 1474 and 1498.45 The term sometimes reflected the fact that the town's fee farm was paid to the royal personage in question.46 Bristol's fee farm was granted to successive queens from 1275 as part of their dower and the

43 Gifts to intercessors are more fully discussed in chapter 2.
44 Liddy, 'Royal chamber', 335; Liddy, War, Politics and Finance, p. 64.
45 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 289, 391, 392, 590, 591.
46 For the following discussion of the rhetoric of the 'chamber' see especially, Liddy, 'Royal chamber'.
city was known as the ‘queen’s chamber’.\(^{47}\) This type of rhetoric was particularly used at moments of tension and so when the Bristol administration wrote to the king in 1479 to vindicate the mayor William Spencer following the accusations of treason made by Thomas Norton, the city was described as ‘the kinges oune toune and the chambre of our most dradde souerigne lady the quene’.\(^{48}\) This claim clearly had some tangible value for the Bristol administration; Spencer was cleared of all charges, despite the fact that in 1471 he had been among those imprisoned on the orders of Edward IV for failing to support the Yorkist cause.\(^{49}\)

Appeals to members of the king’s immediate family, as well as to leading figures within the royal household, were established methods for towns to obtain royal support in disputes. The Norton-Spencer case was an excellent example. Norton’s position as the king’s servant made the Bristol administration unwilling to appeal to figures within the king’s household. Certainly, they did not apply to Sir Thomas Montgomery, the King’s Carver and constable of Bristol Castle, who would have easily outranked Norton, but who was presumably not felt to have sufficient local sympathy, as he had no other association with Bristol and may well have been an absentee constable.\(^{50}\) Alternatively, therefore, the local administration sent letters to five of their ‘redoubtib and special good lords’ requesting assistance: Thomas Grey, the Marquis of Dorset; Anthony Woodville, the Earl Rivers; Sir Richard Grey; John Alcock, the Bishop of Worcester; and Richard Fiennes, Lord Dacre.\(^{51}\) All these men had close connections with either the Queen or Prince Edward (the future Edward V). Dacre was Elizabeth Woodville’s chamberlain; Thomas and Richard Grey were her sons by her previous marriage; Anthony Woodville was her brother and mentor to the Prince; and John Alcock was the Prince’s tutor and in 1473 was appointed as president of his council which was established at Ludlow to oversee the marches and the principality of Wales.\(^{52}\) The Bristol administration particularly

highlighted these useful connections in their correspondence with these men, referring to Richard Grey, for example, as ‘sonne unto the queen our most drede souveraigne lady’ and Earl Rivers as ‘lorde maistir unto my lorde prince’.53

Appealing vicariously to Elizabeth Woodville would have fitted in with the tradition of queenly intercession, which was a commonplace in medieval political rhetoric, particularly given the idea that Bristol was the ‘queen’s chamber’. There were plenty of precedents for this. London had famously used Anne of Bohemia to plead with the king in order to have the city’s liberties restored in 1392. The reconciliation pageants cast Anne in a role markedly similar to that of the biblical figure Esther, and it was organised that the re-grant of London’s liberties should be made after she had prostrated herself at the king’s feet, urging his mercy for the city.54 London was not the only city to typecast Anne in this way. Three years earlier, the citizens of Shrewsbury had depicted her on her knees to Richard II in their decorated charter of 1389, presumably reflecting the fact that she was believed to have interceded on their behalf to obtain the grant.55 Certainly, she had travelled with Richard into Shrewsbury and the surrounding area in 1387 and she may have been petitioned during this visit.56 A local man, John Ranes, also received pardon from the king ‘at the supplication of the queen’ at around this time.57

As the Shrewsbury illumination suggests, towns often sought to make personal contact with the monarch or their families. Royal visits to the provinces were, therefore, massively important exercises in town-crown relations and both the king and local administrations were keen to display a united image to the wider population. Visits by monarchs and/or their immediate family have usually been divided into two main categories within the historiography, those accompanied by pageantry and those

53 GRB, IV, p. 84.
54 For discussion of the sexual imagery of intercession in the London pageants, see, P. Strohm, 
55 Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury Museums, MS. 1.24.
57 CPR, 1388-92, p. 16.
which were not, with the former receiving by far the most scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{58} Often this is in itself a questionable dichotomy, as it can be difficult to judge from surviving records which visits were accompanied by pageantry and which were more low-key. It appears that only royal boroughs provided civic pageantry, as royal visits to seigneurial boroughs instead tended to focus on the hospitality of the local lord. Even within royal boroughs, however, a reference to the king being ‘worshipfully received’ can prove ambiguous. Often it seems to indicate that a formal royal ‘entry’ took place, but it is not possible to be certain unless hard evidence for pageantry is found in the town records or contemporary chronicles. Robert Ricart, for example, referred to Edward IV being received in a ‘worshipfull wise’ in Bristol in 1461, but it is only from other sources that we know this welcome included pageantry.\textsuperscript{59}

Although royal entries and ceremonial displays definitely occurred in London throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, sources for such lavish provincial celebrations are only available for the second half of the fifteenth century. It is likely that some pageantry took place during the provincial tour of Henry V and Katherine of France in 1421, but clear evidence for dramatic enactments is not found until 1456, when Margaret of Anjou visited Coventry with Prince Edward.\textsuperscript{60} Under Edward IV and Henry VII the larger provincial towns were increasingly expected to provide this form of hospitality, reflecting both changes in royal expectations of display and the increased self-importance and civic pride of the leading regional centres. Edward IV was received with pageantry in Bristol in 1461, Norwich in 1468 and York in 1478, while Queen Elizabeth Woodville was similarly entertained in 1469 in Norwich and Prince Edward in Coventry in 1474.\textsuperscript{61}


Richard III's brief reign and a lack of source material make evidence for pageantry during his kingship more difficult to find, although the king and queen were entertained with various pageants and a performance of the 'Creed Play' at York in 1483 and Richard also visited Coventry in 1485 to see the Corpus Christi Plays. A letter from the King's secretary, John Kendal, to the government of York also emphasised that on Richard III's first progress many towns received him with pageants and displays. Henry VII's provincial tour in 1486 included lavish entries at York, Hereford and Bristol, with planned pageants at Worcester, although these did not in the end take place. In 1487 he again visited York and was entertained with Corpus Christi plays, which were delayed until Lammas Day (1 August) for this purpose. Similar celebrations were made for the king and queen in Salisbury in 1496 and Prince Arthur in 1498 at Coventry. Prince Arthur was also apparently entertained with pageants at Chester in the same year, but only seventeenth-century copies of original sources for this visit survive.

The most important factor in deciding whether a visit should be accompanied by pageantry was the will of the royal personage involved, as towns were uniformly anxious to please such august personages. The guests, however, did not usually express their preference directly to the civic government and the local administration was instead obliged to use go-betweens and hearsay to gauge the required response. In 1469, therefore, John Aubry, the mayor of Norwich, wrote to Sir Henry Spelman, the recorder, that,

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Elizabeth Woodville's visit to Norwich in 1469, from the chamberlains' accounts for the ninth and tenth years of King Edward IV, *Norfolk Archaeology* 5 (1859); *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Harris, pp. 390-4.


67 London, BL Harleian 2125, f. 32; London, BL Harleian 2057, f. 26v. These manuscripts are the work of the antiquarian Randle Holme II, active from c. 1630-1660. For details of his life and work, see, *REED: Chester*, ed. L.M. Clopper (Toronto, 1979), pp. xxiv-xxv.
this same day com to me the Shirreve of Norfolk himself, and tolde me that the Quene shall be at Norwich up on Tuiysday cometh sevennyght suyrly. ... He lete me to wete that she woll desire to ben resseyved and attendid as wurshipfully as evir was a quene a forn hir. 68

Accordingly, the town arranged ceremonial processions and pageantry, although in the event some items on the programme had to be cancelled because of bad weather. 69

There seems to have been reluctance on the part of the royal visitors themselves openly to order pageantry for their arrival, as this undermined the sense of spontaneous rejoicing which such celebrations were supposed to involve. In addition, leaving town governments in a position of uncertainty regarding the monarch’s will, forcing them to take the initiative in discovering his plans and desires, was an effective way of reinforcing royal power and maintaining a sense of awe and even unease among local administrations. It appears that urban leaders would have liked clearer information concerning royal plans and wishes; towns were often obliged to fund special riders to ascertain by which road the royal visitor would approach and they were clearly anxious to obtain advice from those closer to the royal ear to ensure that their displays were impressive, fashionable and pleasing. 70 In 1469, therefore, in the run up to the Queen’s visit, the Norwich mayor wrote that he had tried to obtain advice from Roger Ree, the sheliff of Norfolk, concerning ‘how we shuld be rulyd, as well in hir resseyvyng, as in hir abidyng here’ but that Ree was unable to help, instead suggesting that they applied to London ‘to know of hem that ben of counsel of that cite... that ben knowing in that behalfe’. 71 A similarly indirect chain of command can be noted in the York preparations for Henry VII’s visit in March 1486, when the city turned to their ‘good lord’ the Archbishop of York for advice, asking that they might, send ...unto you at this tyme somme discrete personne to understande your good adviace and pleaser howe we shuld demean us ayenst this supposed commyng of the king our souverain lord unto this your citie. 72

Richard III’s close relations with York and his special favour to the city were therefore demonstrated in 1483 by the unusually direct approach taken by the king

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69 For an account of Norwich Council’s preparations for the 1469 royal visit, see: Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 18a/2, ff. 10-14.
70 For the sending out of riders, see, Harrod, 'Elizabeth Woodville's visit to Norwich', 34; York House Books, ed. Attreed, I, p. 168; Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 369.
regarding arrangements for this visit. John Kendal, the king’s secretary, wrote to York that pageants and speeches should be prepared for the visit of the king and queen ‘under suche forme as Master Lancastre of the kynges counsel, this bringer, shall sumwhat advertise you of my mynd in that behalve’. 

Although the decision concerning whether to celebrate a royal visit with pageantry rested with the guest, there were accepted, if unwritten, guidelines concerning the acceptable levels of pageantry a monarch could expect from a provincial town. Such displays were expensive and it was doubtless for this reason that most towns, other than London, were only required to provide this form of hospitality once during a reign. The amount of time needed by towns to prepare for such entries was also a practical factor which monarchs seemed willing to take into consideration. Edward IV, therefore, entered Coventry and York virtually immediately after his victory at Towton in 1461, and Henry VII did the same in Coventry in 1485 after the Battle of Bosworth, but these occasions do not appear to have been accompanied by full-scale pageantry, owing both to lack of preparation time and perhaps civic qualms concerning the admittance of such a recently established usurper. Even when a new king could be guaranteed a genuinely warm welcome, as Richard III could at York in 1483, there was some concern for the feasibility of preparing pageants in such a short time and so his secretary wrote that the city should ‘dispose you to doe as well pageants with soch good speches as can goodly, thys short warnyng considered, be devised’.

Often an important factor in choosing to have a visit accompanied by pageantry was if there was a particular need to have a public affirmation of town-crown unity, because it was the first visit of a reign or because there had been a disagreement between the monarch and the local administration. When Prince Edward entered Coventry in 1474, he was the first member of the immediate royal family to come to the city since it lost its liberties three years earlier for disloyalty to his father. During this entry the town therefore sought to emphasise its obedience to

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73 Ibid, II, p. 713.
74 Kipling, Enter the King, p. 11; Attreed, The King’s Towns, p. 144.
the Crown by repeatedly describing itself as the prince’s ‘chamber’, highlighting the legitimacy of the Yorkist claim and by ensuring that all the civic government swore an oath of loyalty to the Prince as the ‘verray and vndoubted heire of oure seid soueraign lorde’. This oath mirrored that which was taken by all the lords to the infant prince in the parliament chamber on 3 July 1471. The town’s preparations for the visit indicated that they were aware of their earlier disloyalty and sought to make amends, although presumably the age of the Prince (he was three) ensured that an outright public apology was considered inappropriate.

Sometimes, however, an open confession of wrong-doing was incorporated into pageants for kings, a point that is somewhat surprising given the frequent anxiety of town administrations to put forward the best possible image of their city in written records. Civic humility was a key theme during Henry VII’s provincial progress in 1486. Both York and Worcester were in a weak position at this time. In York’s case, the city was known for its support of Richard III and had also recently shown hostility towards Tudor interference in the selection of civic officers. The city sought to placate Henry with the reassurance that ‘for your blod this citie made non digression’ and arranging for a model of the city’s founder ‘Ebrauke’ to ‘pray for compassion’ for the citizens. Worcester, however, was more deeply implicated in treachery, as it had been at the centre of the Stafford rebellion and was consequently particularly fearful of Henry’s anger during his visit. According to Sir Thomas Betanson, writing about the proposed progress to the North in February of that year, it was Henry’s intention ‘to doe execution quickly ther on such as hath offended agaynst him’. Worcester therefore planned pageants which included Henry VI, represented as a saintly figure, to plead for the city. He was to present a ‘poore bille’ to Henry VII, confessing Worcester’s part in the insurrection and claiming that the inhabitants had offended ‘by

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77 _Coventry Leet Book_, ed. Harris, pp. 370, 391-4. The quotation is from p. 393.
78 _ODNB_, sub ‘Edward V (1470-83)’.
ignorance’ rather than malice. He then was to ask that the king should ‘graciously pardon theym this trespasse...seing they haue a warnyng perpetuall’.

Urban willingness to admit wrong-doing publicly was partly dependent upon the gravity of the offence. In the case of Worcester, the citizens were thoroughly implicated in the rebellion, as Henry VI’s speeches in the pageants highlighted. This flagrant breach of loyalty to the Tudors could not be ignored by Henry VII and so town officials sought to lessen their guilt by an open plea for mercy, which reflected their understandable anxiety given that the punishment for treason could be execution. In 1471, for example, Edward IV had the Canterbury mayor Nicholas Faunt hung, drawn and quartered opposite the Cathedral gates for treason. While Faunt was depicted as a maverick within the civic administration, his fate must nonetheless have made other urban leaders nervous.

For the citizens of Worcester, an acknowledgment of wrong-doing was the safest option, as it allowed the town to project the king as a quasi-Divine figure, forgiving the repentant. A public plea for mercy would have made it more difficult for Henry to take harsh sanctions against the town either at the time or at a later date, unless he wished to show openly that he ignored the Christian duty to forgive, and therefore show that he did not behave as a ‘true’ king. Significantly, one of the key charges against Richard II in the parliament of October 1399 had been that he had refused to show mercy or to hear the pleas of intercessors:

Notwithstanding that the said king swore at his coronation that he would cause impartial and honest justice and discretion, with mercy and truth, to be done in all his judgments, according to his power, the said king, however, without any mercy, decided and ordained among other things, with great rigour, that, on pain of grave penalties, no-one should entreat or intercede with the same king for the banished Henry duke of Lancaster, in order for clemency to be shown to him. In which deed the same king acted against the bond of charity, rashly violating the aforesaid oath.

84 Ibid., f. 14v.
85 Richmond, ‘Kentish Rising’, 677, 681, 684.
Worcester therefore planned particularly submissive pageants in order to try to oblige Henry to forgive the citizens, in much the same way that ceremonial apologies were used in disputes between senior members of civic government. The reason for the non-performance of these speeches remains unknown. The herald’s account provided in British Library Cotton Julius B XII simply states that the author had to depart from the king’s retinue at this stage in the royal progress but ‘as I vnderstande [in Worcester there] were ordeynede certeyn paiantes and speeches...whiche his grace at that tyme hards (sic) not’. It is possible that in refusing to accept their displays and proffered apologies Henry sought to leave the civic administration in a state of uncertainty and concern regarding his future attitude towards them.

The public nature of the pageants was, therefore, of central importance; these displays were not simply for the king, but for a wider audience. Both contemporary chronicle accounts and local archives placed emphasis upon three groups of spectators: the royal retinue, which included prominent nobles and royal servants; the town citizens; and the members of local religious orders. In order to impress those ‘worshipful’ visitors in the royal train, town administrations sought to ensure that their accommodation would be of a high standard and that they could easily obtain high quality provisions for themselves, their servants and their animals. Ordinances periodically appeared in the civic records ordering that local victuallers should ‘lak no stuffe...at suche tymes as many straungers resortith to the towne’ and often these orders were made specifically to coincide with a royal visit. It was not only the civic administration, however, that was anxious to please such illustrious guests. This was also a key preoccupation of the king, as it displayed to his entourage that he was a popular monarch and therefore discouraged rebellion against him. This helps to explain why visits with pageantry were usually arranged for the first visit in a king’s reign and why they were considered particularly important when the right of succession was in any way doubtful. Such displays not only brought ‘worship’ to the city, but also to the king. It is significant, therefore, that prior to Richard III’s visit to York in 1483, John Kendal expressed concern that the decorations along the parade

87 Above, pp. 79-83.
89 The quotation is taken from Bristol, BRO, 04270, f. 162v; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 82. For food provision for the king’s retinue, see for example, York House Books, ed. Attreed, II, p. 585.
route should be suitably impressive ‘for ther commen many sothern lorde and men of worship with them’. The king’s powerbase was mainly centred in the North and so a display of power and popularity to the southern lords would have been considered important, although in this case it was an unsuccessful tactic, as the southern counties rose in rebellion while the tour was in progress.

Monarchs often used town displays as a method of highlighting the wealth of the realm and their popularity to important visitors from other countries. The best-known example of this was the hospitality provided by London for the visit of Emperor Sigismund in 1416, when he was being entertained by Henry V, but provincial instances also occurred. In 1479, Edward IV wrote to the government of York that Margaret, sister to James III, King of Scotland, was travelling towards Nottingham for her planned marriage to Anthony, Earl Rivers and requested that,

you with the worshipful persones of our said cite arredie to mete and receyve hir...and that for the time of hir being there ye wol make hir and alle other in hir company such loving and herty chier, as we therfore may have cause to yeve unto you our right especial thank.

By helping the monarch to show hospitality to important visitors, towns earned themselves goodwill from the monarch, which could be useful when they needed royal grants or charters, financial assistance or a display of kingly mercy.

For town administrations, impressing local citizens was obviously important, as it publicly reinforced the idea that they were the king’s chosen representatives and that therefore their power was legitimate. This message was emphasised by the fact that during progresses kings often meted out justice, sometimes witnessing executions, an exercise that was designed to set an example to the local population and to inspire fear in potential offenders. Town citizens usually participated in the celebrations by lining the route of the royal procession, often wearing gild liveries,

91 Horrox, Richard III, pp. 149-60.
94 For examples of this practice, see, York House Books, ed. Attreed, II, p. 713; Attreed, The King’s Towns, p. 79.
thus providing an appropriate sense of mass celebration. Sometimes they were primed to shout the king’s name, while on other occasions children (who were probably themselves the offspring of citizens) were used for this part of the welcome.95 This also ensured that members of the burgess class had a prime view as the king and his retinue rode past alongside senior members of civic government who always met him on horseback outside the city gates, usually at the boundary of their jurisdiction. Members of local religious orders also often appeared in their robes on such occasions, usually lining the route or welcoming the monarch into their house, as kings frequently stayed in local abbeys.96 The appearance of clergy reinforced the impression of the city as a place of holiness, sanctuary and purity to both the visitors and those locals who came to watch the parades. It also presented an image of unity between the ecclesiastical and secular local authorities, an image that was often not based in reality, as the frequent disputes over jurisdictional rights attest.97

While these are the groups that the extant sources mainly describe, it seems reasonable to assume that royal entries had a wider audience and it is very likely that the displays would have drawn large crowds, both from the town itself and from the surrounding countryside. The ‘entries’ therefore provided an opportunity for the urban government and the monarch to publicise their unity and to overawe the local population with a display of judicial power, wealth and elaborate spectacle. In addition, it is clear that the success of the parades and the amount of gifts and entertainment provided was reported much further abroad than the city itself, by word of mouth, by letters and in chronicle accounts. When John Kendal wrote to York concerning the king’s visit in 1483, he reminded the civic administration that in other towns the king and queen ‘in all their progresse have beyn worshipfully ressayved with pageants’. Further details would no doubt have been supplied by the carrier, ‘Master Lancastre’.98 The similarities in the pageants in Bristol and York during Henry VII’s 1486 progress indicate a high level of communication and interaction between the two towns. The memories of such occasions are likely to have had a long life, with future town leaders probably being very aware of the preparations made by their predecessors either because they witnessed them or because they had heard

96 E.g. Bristol, BRO, 04270, f. 127; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 45; Attreeed, The King's Towns, p. 78.
97 Jurisdictional disputes are discussed in chapter 6.
about them. When Ricart claimed that Bristol in 1461 had received Edward IV ‘in as worshipfull wise as evir he was in eny towne or citee’ it was not simply an uninformed boast: he would have known what preparations were made for the king as they would have been recorded and remembered by posterity, both within Bristol and, at least to some extent, outside it. A bad show, then, did not simply damage the town’s ‘worship’ in the short term, but also had a lasting impact upon its reputation for years to come.99

Royal visits could also occur without pageantry. The medieval royal court was, after all, very mobile and towns were an obvious place to visit.100 Civic officials were usually very keen to make the most of opportunities offered by the king’s proximity. In 1478, therefore, when Edward IV was known to be approaching the area, the York administration sent a rider to ascertain if he intended to visit the city and if he did not, made provision for the recorder, the sheriff, three aldermen and two members of the inner council, all with attendants, to ride out to him ‘with all dewe honour ande reverence desiring his gude grace unto the same [city]’.101 Such visits, regardless of pageantry, were an opportunity for towns to demonstrate their loyalty to the king and in return to obtain royal favour and ‘good lordship’. In particular they were an ideal opportunity to petition the monarch to confirm old legal privileges and to grant new ones. It was fairly common for towns to obtain charters in the year following a visit. The charters granted to York in 1393 and 1396 were both obtained after Richard II had visited the city and the 1461 visit of Edward IV to Bristol was quickly followed by the confirmation of their 1446 grant of admiralty jurisdiction. In addition, the city obtained two further charters in December 1461 and February 1462, giving increased jurisdictional rights and various financial boons, including the right to hold an annual fair and the profits from various courts.102 The first progress of Richard III in 1483 was also marked by grants to towns, at Woodstock, Gloucester, York and Lincoln.103

99 Bristol, BRO, 04270, f. 124; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 43.
100 For Richard III’s itinerary, for example, see, R. Edwards, The Itinerary of King Richard III, 1483-1485 (London, 1983).
Sometimes royal visitors were called upon to exercise their 'good lordship' by acting as arbiters in local disputes. When Prince Arthur visited Coventry in 1498, he was presented with a bill by the mayor and Council, 'desiryng be the same that he wold please to desire the priour of Coventre to pay at his desire the murage money which he had with-drawne the space of xx yeres'. In addition, they requested that he would urge the authorities in Bristol, Gloucester and Worcester to lift the tolls on merchandise from Coventry. Both requests were granted by the Prince. While total royal compliance was not always obtained, royal visitors rarely refused to discuss the matters of business that the townspeople considered crucial and they often made at least some show of willingness to assist. When Henry VII, therefore, was urged by the Bristol authorities to alleviate their economic problems because of a slump in the cloth industry and in shipping, he provided no financial assistance but did discuss the matter with them, the mayor later declaring that 'they hade not this hundred yeres of noo king so goode a comfort'.

The Bristol administration’s desire to discuss their economic circumstances with Henry VII indicated the important but complex financial relationship between the town authorities and the king. Towns provided a number of sources of revenue for the monarch. The most impersonal of these was direct taxation. This usually took the form of the lay subsidies (the tenths and fifteenths), which were periodically levied by parliament on the king’s subjects. Although there were occasional complaints about the methods of collection in individual towns, overwhelmingly there seems to have been little hostility towards this form of taxation per se, which was well-established and accordingly perceived as legitimate; criticism simply focused on the particular amount that had to be paid. This contrasted to the widespread anger caused by the collection of the poll tax in 1377, 1379 and 1380, which ultimately culminated in the so-called 'Peasants' Revolt', a rebellion which in fact had considerable urban involvement.

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104 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 592-8.
107 Details of the poll taxes and their collection in general are provided in Jurkowski, Smith and Crook, Lay Taxes, pp. xxxiv-xxxvii. For collection of the poll tax in urban centres specifically, see, P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Urban identity and the poll taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381', EconHR, 2nd Series 43 (1990).
Royal boroughs also paid an annual fee farm directly to the crown or to another individual if the king had granted it away. Grimsby, for example, paid their farm via the Exchequer to the earls of Westmorland.\textsuperscript{108} Although the farm payments were fixed and automatically expected by the crown, in the late medieval period widespread claims of urban poverty created an increased dialogue between the king and local administrations concerning the ability of local areas to meet their payments. One way rulers could help corporations was to include outlying areas in the town's tax-collection area. Edward IV extended the city and county of Lincoln in 1466 to include the local townships of Branston, Waddington, Bracebridge and Canwick, following complaints from the townsmen concerning their poverty following a decline in overseas trade.\textsuperscript{109} This grant was later confirmed by Richard III in 1484.\textsuperscript{110} The king could, if he chose, also reduce or pardon the amount owed by towns, usually on the grounds that the town was now depopulated, that a natural disaster had occurred or that it had been impoverished by defence costs.\textsuperscript{111} From the crown's point of view, however, this type of financial boon was fraught with difficulties, as fee farms were often already assigned to pay royal pensioners, ecclesiastical foundations or to repay Crown lenders and so their reduction antagonised these people. In addition, as Lorraine Attreed has highlighted in the case of late fifteenth-century York, royal largesse to a town was not always recognised and acted upon by the bureaucracy of the Exchequer, leading to confusion, delays and further costs.\textsuperscript{112}

More important for towns in terms of building a personal relationship with the king were payments by gift or loans. It was customary for kings during town visits to be presented with money or costly jewels, although the king could decline gifts of


\textsuperscript{109} F. Hill, \textit{Medieval Lincoln} (2\textsuperscript{nd} edn. Stamford, 1990), p. 281.

\textsuperscript{10} The \textit{Royal Charters of the City of Lincoln}, ed. W. De Gray Birch (Cambridge, 1911), pp. 131-2.

\textsuperscript{11} For examples of urban petitions on these grounds, see, London, TNA, SC 8/22/1086; SC 8/23/1119; SC 8/23/1121; SC 8/26/1272. For an example of a charter granting fee farm reductions, see Morris, \textit{Chester}, pp. 511-14.

\textsuperscript{111} L. Attreed, 'Medieval bureaucracy and York's fee farm during the fifteenth century', \textit{York Historian} 6 (1985); Attreed, \textit{The King's Towns}, pp. 146-9; L. Attreed, 'The king's interest: York's fee farm and the central government, 1482-92', \textit{Northern History} 17 (1981), 30-43. For an example of this type of wrangling from Coventry, see, \textit{Coventry Leet Book}, ed. Harris, p. 62.
cash as a mark of favour to the town, in order to obtain good will.\textsuperscript{113} The York administration, for example, spent £200 on silver dishes for Richard II in 1396, and nearly a century later in 1483 made provision for Richard III to be presented with 500 marks in a ‘pare of baysyns of sylwyrgylt or in a cop of gold’, while Queen Anne was to be presented with £100 worth of gold.\textsuperscript{114} Coventry also showed a preference for combined gifts of plate and cash when Henry V visited in 1421 and the citizens gave both the king and queen £100 with a gold cup worth £10.\textsuperscript{115} The items of plate were presumably intended for personal use by the monarch, perhaps particularly when dining in the city, but they could also be used as sureties for loans. They also perhaps helped to lessen the social awkwardness of giving the monarch cash. While the king doubtlessly welcomed such payments, purely monetary gifts were usually reserved for social inferiors and so would have been considered inappropriate for members of the royal family.

Cash gifts could be spent by the monarch as he pleased, but there appears to have been some expectation that the money would be used for the ‘common good’ of the realm, often for defence. In some cases, this suited the king’s own aims very well and provincial tours sometimes had the air of fundraising exercises. According to the Picard chronicler, Enguerrand de Monstrelet, the 1421 tour of Henry V and Katherine of France focused heavily on the collection of money for the king’s wars. Monstrelet described how Henry personally addressed his subjects during his visits, describing his own valour against the French and explaining what still needed to be done. Town records and accounts indicate that civic authorities responded to these speeches appropriately, with gifts of money and men for military service.\textsuperscript{116}

In providing the king with financial gifts during visits, town governments were not simply choosing to flatter the monarch; the money often was intended for a very

\textsuperscript{113} The most famous example is Richard III waiving monetary gifts during his first progress. See, Horrox, Richard III, pp. 148-9.

\textsuperscript{114} Chamberlains’ accounts, ed. Dobson, p. 5; York House Books, ed. Attreed, I, p. 291. For gifts of money during royal visits, see for example, Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 127, 131v; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 45, 48. For Henry VII declining financial gifts on the grounds of civic poverty and the amount of pageantry provided, see, York House Books, ed. Attreed, II, p. 478.

\textsuperscript{115} Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 34.

specific and mutually beneficial purpose. When Edward IV visited Bristol in 1475, just prior to embarking for battle in France, according to Ricart the people of the town and the surrounding area gave him sizeable sums ‘a grete benivolence of money…to the sustentation of his werres’.117 In general, the benevolences levied by Edward IV were very unpopular, to the extent that Richard III’s first act as king was to promise never to levy these ‘newe and unlawfull invencions’ again.118 Ricart’s very neutral comment on Bristol’s contribution, therefore, reflected the fact that the local civic elite were anxious for England to regain control of Gascony and Normandy, lost under Henry VI. The loss of these French regions in the 1450s had been economically devastating for the important wine-trade in Bristol and the high levels of piracy in the Channel made the lives of those dependent upon overseas trade much more difficult and dangerous.119 On a previous visit to the city in 1461, when Edward had been received ‘with very great rejoicing and honour’ by the citizens, the local government had greeted the king with a welcoming pageant of William the Conqueror.120 This was designed to compliment Edward’s right to rule by conquest, but also to emphasise royal connections with France, implying that Edward, as King of England as well as France, had a duty to protect English interests abroad by military conquest.121 The Bristol-born writer, William Worcestre, may also have had similar motivations when he presented his Boke of Noblesse to the King in 1475, in which he urged Edward to embark upon the re-conquest of France.122

Ensuring the safety of the realm, both from internal strife and external threats, was the key duty of the king. Towns with a heavy economic dependence on overseas trade and shipping, like Bristol, were understandably particularly concerned with the Crown’s foreign policy as it affected the treatment of merchants abroad, the safety of the seas and the trading opportunities available to English merchants. In addition,

117 Bristol, BRO, 04270, f. 127; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 45.
118 PROME, January 1484, vi-261-18.
border and coastal towns were particularly vulnerable to enemy attacks. Carlisle, for example, was at the frontline of Anglo-Scottish warfare and border hostilities during the period and was used regularly as a military base by English kings in their attacks on Scotland. The townspeople were regularly required to be involved in armed action and were subject to frequent raids, as illustrated in the decorated initial of the charter of 12 May 1316, which depicted the city being besieged by the Scots and being defended by English troops led by the sheriff of Cumberland. The charter illumination, emphasising English heroism, indicated an element of wishful thinking as it was only two years after the disastrous defeat at the Battle of Bannockburn. Southampton and Dover, meanwhile, both suffered heavily from French raids at various stages in the fourteenth century, while Sandwich and Plymouth were attacked in 1457 and 1461 respectively. As coastal towns also had considerable experience in ship-building and sailing, their contributions to the crown coffers could take the form of providing, manning and provisioning ships. In contrast, the inland town of Coventry stated in 1377-8 that they could not make the balinger of forty to fifty oars, as requested by the king, as they had no experience of ship-building, and instead they requested that they be permitted to pay for the ship to be made elsewhere, a plea which was granted, provided that they gave £80.

Urban payments to the crown for defence, therefore, was not necessarily reluctant; if the king succeeded in quelling piracy or opening up new trading routes, it could be regarded by the urban authorities as money very well spent. When a king requested a loan or gift from town corporations or wealthy individuals, however, it was always couched in terms of 'urgent necessity', usually citing defence of the realm as the main reason for the appeal. The royal claim to serve the common good was essential in such cases, as Gerald Harriss emphasised; compelling people to give up their money or property was the act of a tyrant, but when financial generosity was

requested by the monarch on the grounds of the common weal, it could not be refused by any loyal subject.127

The king always maintained the upper hand in town-crown relations, but he was obliged to listen to the views of urban leaders and at least make some efforts to reassure his subjects that their money would be spent on the common good. This leads us to question where the money came from and who the audience of this type of rhetoric was. Loans and gifts of cash or plate to the king rarely came from the coffers of the corporation, but instead were paid for by special contributions. The Coventry Leet Book, a manuscript which acted both as a town custumal and a place to record the wardens’, chamberlains’ and mayors’ accounts, is particularly informative concerning the method of such collections. Once a royal visit was announced or a request for a loan was made, the mayor and assembly appointed three or four collectors for each ward, who were chosen from among the leading citizens. For gifts, usually only the total sum collected was recorded, but for loans more detailed records were provided, as in future the contributors could expect their money to be returned.128 In these cases the amount of money obtained from each ward was written down in the Leet Book, along with the names of every donor. In March 1424, a loan of 100 marks to the king for the defence of the realm listed 564 contributors, from ten different wards. The contributors were predominantly male, although twenty female names were recorded, with Johanna Northwode of Erle Street and Johanna Dudley of Spoon Street providing some of the highest contributions in their wards.129

There was often considerable overlap between the donors for different collections. Many of those who gave money in March 1424 again contributed in June to lend 100 marks to the duke of Gloucester to help him gain his ‘land and lordships’ in France.130 In the ward of Gosford Street, for example, in March forty-nine people contributed to the loan and in June fifty-four were listed, with an overlap of thirty-nine individuals in the two collections.131 Coventry’s anxiety to list the names of those who made loans to the king or to local nobles was understandable, as when this

129 Ibid, pp. 78-82.
130 Ibid, p. 84
131 Ibid, pp. 78, 87.
generosity was repaid (often years later), the civic administration passed back the money to the original donors. The 100 marks lent by various citizens to assist in the siege of Harfleur in 1415, for example, was not repaid until January 1429 when the money was given back to the mayor via the Prior of Coventry. The Leet Book was keen to highlight that the tardiness in repayment was not due to the mayor’s slowness: ‘the cause why hit was so long vnpayd was for the seyd meyre cowd not gete hit payd of the priour but at iij payments, and the last payment was a litell afore...Crystmas’.

Loans to the king or to prominent noblemen were therefore given by a group of individual citizens, who clubbed together for this purpose. While the collection and repayment arrangements were made by the town council, the actual money did not come from the corporate funds and although particular detail is provided in the Coventry records, this seems to have been a pattern followed in other urban centres. Using the corporation to handle the administration of the loan was therefore very useful, as it made a much more effective lobbying group when trying to have the money repaid. This was evident in Coventry in 1423, when the assembly agreed to fund two men, Adam Hiton and John Leeder, to ride to London to negotiate the repayment of a loan given to Henry IV of £163 and loans of £200, £100 and 200 marks which had been granted to Henry V on different occasions. The town received jewels in return, which they then sold to the local prior for 550 marks, which was paid to the urban government in instalments.

The advantages of collective loans were just one example of the advantages of urban rule by a group. A town corporation had a much longer life-span than individuals or even family dynasties. This considerably strengthened a town’s negotiating position with the king, as the corporation’s collective memory (which was increasingly enshrined in written documents) was long-term, preventing past agreements with, loans to or concessions from the crown being forgotten. This advantage was limited, however, by the fact that a new king was not obliged to honour the undertakings of his predecessor, especially when it was claimed that this predecessor was not a legitimate monarch. This point was made very clear by

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132 Ibid., p. 121.
134 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 60, 69-70.
Edward IV in his first parliament in 1461, which sought to determine the legality of statutes and grants made by the Lancastrian kings. The Commons petitioned that the grants made by charter to towns might be confirmed automatically, but the King rejected this proposal, insisting that,

he wull not auctorise their said ffraunchises no more then his progenitors have don but that they shall have it of the kings liberalitie and free disposicion as farforthe as it may accorde with reason and the Kings consideracion.135

Edward chose to prioritise the importance of personal royal grace in his relations with town corporations because this was how town-crown relations were traditionally depicted and a dependence on the royal will was a cornerstone of monarchical power.

Medieval politics put a great deal of emphasis upon the personal nature of power, a point recognised by both monarchs and town leaders. In the context of civic-crown relations, personal qualities, such as grace, mercy, kindliness and generosity were frequently emphasised by contemporaries commenting on the king’s attitude towards local inhabitants. Monarchs were often particularly keen to reiterate their positive characteristics as an individual and sought to gain urban support by displays of financial generosity or mercy, deeds of good will which were publicly enacted during royal visits. Leaders, however, could be prone to imperfection and the political system required methods of dealing with this problem. As the Duke of Gloucester and the Bishop of Ely reminded Richard II in 1386, even kings could be removed according to the ‘ancient law’ of the land, if their injustice and vices alienated their subjects sufficiently.136 Contemporaries therefore discussed insubordination against unpopular leaders both in terms of sin and ancient tradition. Provincial town governments did not have sufficient confidence to challenge kings on the grounds of personal virtue. As will be shown in the next chapter, they were well aware of the importance of the appearance of Christian leadership in their dealings with their own subordinates, but during clashes with the crown they wisely couched their disagreements in the language of ‘ancient custom’.

136 G. Martin, ‘Introduction October 1386’, PROME.
Chapter Six: Alternative jurisdictions

In all late medieval towns, civic power was to some extent curtailed by the presence of rival jurisdictions within or near the town boundaries. Friction was frequently evident between local overlords and townsmen in seigneurial boroughs, but urban power could also be challenged by the franchises of institutions such as the estates of local nobles, religious houses, cathedral chapters, bishops’ palaces and the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. People who lived in places not subject to the town’s authority usually claimed the right not to contribute to the fee farm; exemption from tallage and certain tolls; and immunity from arrest and imprisonment by town officials or prosecution in the city courts. Alternative authorities often had the right to use their own weights and measures and to administer the assize of bread and ale themselves within their jurisdiction. It was also common for them to be able to hold their own courts and to maintain their own prisons.

Three methods were particularly used by urban groups to publicise their legal claims: initiating a legal case, ceremonial display and an assertion of an ancient urban heritage. These were often interlinked, so a group of townsmen would spark a legal challenge to a jurisdictional rival by an act of ceremonial defiance, which would then cause a legal case to be brought, requiring ancient rights to be recorded and new documentation to be created concerning different liberties. Enforcing the assize of bread and ale and rights of arrest were some of the most common methods of challenging rival authorities. The Great White Book of Bristol recorded a lengthy description of a ferocious quarrel between the Bristol town officials and the tenants of St. Augustine’s Abbey which broke out when the mayor attempted to weigh bread on the abbey green in 1479. The civic government had all proceeded together in full regalia to the green for the weighing, in what was clearly a premeditated challenge to the abbot’s authority. In addition, it was alleged that one of the town sergeants, John Bruer, arrested a sanctuary man, Dominick, within the precincts. An abbey witness, William Hill, claimed that Bruer arrested Dominick ‘settyng his mace upon his brest’, an action which was both physically threatening and symbolic of civic power. A similar event occurred in Exeter in 1445 when a civic official entered the bishop’s palace during Ascension Day mass to arrest John Vousleigh, servant of John

1 Great White Book, ed. Ralph, pp. 53-4, 64-5.
Snetesham, chancellor of the church of Exeter, who was taking part in the service by holding his master’s golden cope. An arrest during an important Mass was not an inadvertent act of insensitivity; it was a premeditated assertion of the City’s rights of arrest within the bishop’s palace.

Unsurprisingly, the boundaries of different jurisdictions were frequently the subject of dispute, as this determined where town officials could lawfully make arrests. Town walls did not usually mark the boundaries of urban jurisdiction and so conflicts frequently centred upon areas used for common pasture, such as local meadows, which were usually extra-mural. Town governments often sought to reinforce their legal claims to these areas by a process called ‘beating the bounds’ or ‘riding the bounds’, when the officials and other citizens rode in procession around the borders of their jurisdiction. In 1469 in Coventry, it was ordered that the mayor was to ride the bounds of the city once every three years ‘for euer hereafter in eshewyng of varyaunce that for ignoraunce myght fall herafter for default off knowlege in that be-half’.

Sometimes these ridings were the direct result of a legal dispute. In 1338 in Chester, therefore, an inquisition heard by Henry de Ferraris, the Justice of Chester, and a jury concerning the boundaries of Hoole Heath was settled following a riding around the limits of the area, the exact route of which was then recorded carefully in the Black Book and later copied into the Pentice Cartulary. A similar technique was employed to establish the boundaries of the county of Bristol, created in 1373, with Edward III granting a charter stating that this perambulation was designed to mark the legal limits of the city’s jurisdiction. Rival authorities who attempted to build walls or dig ditches to indicate the boundaries of their power could therefore meet with fierce resistance from townspeople. In 1389 in Hereford, the citizens tore down a wall built by the dean and chapter enclosing the cathedral grounds, while in 1451 the burgesses of Ipswich rode in procession around the boundaries of the town and demolished a hedge and ditch made by the Prior of Ely in his attempt to enclose a

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2 Shillingford, Letters and Papers, p. xiv.
3 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 348.
4 Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, ff. 6r-7; ZCHB/2, 69v-70.
5 Bristol Charters, ed. Harding, pp. 168-9.
common pasture which, the townspeople claimed, had belonged to them ‘time out of minde’.  

In the rural setting, as Nigel Saul and Rosamund Faith have highlighted, hunting and poaching were methods which were commonly used to challenge a rival authority in the area. Townsmen also showed an interest in hunting, and the citizens’ right to hunt within the liberty was often considered an important aspect of urban collective identity. One of the main demands of the St. Albans’ rebels, therefore, was that they should possess hunting rights in certain places. The London Letter Books indicate that the capital went so far as to appoint a specific officer of the Common Hunt of the City, who was responsible for hunting and fishing in the customary areas and who received a salary of £10 from the chamberlain, as well as ‘a livery like a Serjeant of the Chamber’. While such an office does not appear in the records of provincial towns, it is clear that urban hunting rights in the outlying portions of the city were often the cause of dispute with other local lords or ecclesiastical houses. Fierce protectionism over hunting privileges was to be expected, as this matter combined questions of food supply with jurisdictional rights, the two great preoccupations of most urban administrations. In 1411 in Colchester, for example, the townsmen objected to the enclosure of a rabbit warren by the Prior of St. Botolph’s, which they claimed obstructed their common hunting rights at Clingo Hill in Greenstead. Rivalry was usually more intense in towns with nearby parks belonging to local lords. Sometimes, the urban corporation took measures to prevent townspeople poaching. In 1421, it was specified by the Coventry administration that those who ‘go in-to the contrey to brek ... lordys parkes for to sley hur dere’ would be fined 100s and sent to prison. In other areas, however, the urban elite seem to have

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7 Saul argues that acts of trespass committed while hunting ‘were acts that raised, and were sometimes intended to raise, questions of right or title’. N. Saul, Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280-1400 (Oxford, 1986), p. 84. See also, R.J. Faith, ‘The “Great Rumour” of 1377 and peasant ideology’, in Hilton and Aston, eds., English Rising of 1381, pp. 67-8.


9 The first reference to this post is found in March 1378-9, see, CLB – II, pp. 121-2. It should be noted that the exact amount of the salary altered at various times during the period. For further discussion of hunting among the London officials see, Lindenbaum, ‘Ceremony and oligarchy’, pp. 175-6.

10 VCH Essex, IX, p. 256.

11 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 27.
condoned and sometimes even taken part in poaching, in order to challenge the authority of local power rivals. In Beverley in the late medieval period, friction between the archbishop and the townsmen frequently focused on poaching in the episcopal park, to which the archbishop usually responded by excommunicating the offenders.\(^\text{12}\)

Rivers, lakes, ponds and quays, which were usually outside the city walls, were also areas which were often the subject of clashes. These disputes were heightened because access to water was essential to the daily lives of everyone for drinking, washing, milling, fishing and shipping. Exeter, for example, became embroiled in a long dispute with the nearby Courtenay family concerning weirs erected at the Courtenay manors along the River Exe.\(^\text{13}\) In order to assert their rights over local waterways, town dwellers sometimes prioritised fishing rights, in an interesting parallel to the emphasis on hunting and poaching.\(^\text{14}\) In 1417, the prior of Norwich described in court how the mayor and officials had challenged his monopoly on fishing rights in Trowse Water by going there together, armed and with nets, fishing and then carrying back their catch to the City shouting ‘we are in possession by right and by our liberties of this City of Norwich: we have taken them and kept them’.\(^\text{15}\) They then distributed the fish to the citizens and in the subsequent legal case the prior emphasised that this action was designed to enter ‘the perpetual memory’ of the assembled onlookers.\(^\text{16}\) This incident was invested with religious symbolism as the civic officials distributed the fish to the town inhabitants, an act presumably intended to echo Christ’s actions during the feeding of the five thousand, as well as to ensure the event attracted a large audience.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^\text{12}\) VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, VI, p. 16.
\(^\text{14}\) Further discussion in the London context is provided in Martin (now Carrel), ‘Carpenter’s “Liber Albus”’, pp. 41-50.
\(^\text{15}\) ‘Nos sumus in possessione de jure et libertatibus nostris huius civitatis Norwici cepimus et continuavimus’, Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 36v; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, p. 321.
\(^\text{16}\) ‘Perpetuam memoriam’. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 36v.
\(^\text{17}\) The stories of Jesus feeding large crowds on bread and fish in a miraculous manner can be found in Matthew 14: 13-21; 15: 32-39; Mark 6: 30-44; Mark 8: 1-10. Phillipa Maddern highlights the deliberate nature of such a parallel on the part of the Norwich government in Maddern, Violence, p. 182.
Religious overtones in urban jurisdictional challenges were commonplace. To some extent, this simply reflected the pervasiveness of Christian ideology in daily life. When ecclesiastical authorities were challenged by the townspeople, as in the case of the Norwich fishing expedition, biblical and religious references tended to be more marked. The abbot of St. Mary’s in York claimed that during a dispute in 1350 with the burgesses concerning jurisdiction over Bootham, the citizens made threats not only to burn down the abbey, but also to crucify the abbot, the monks, and their household servants. This claim cast the abbot in the role of Christ, and the citizens as the angry mob, thirsting for the Lord’s death. Usually, however, townspeople were careful to employ religious imagery which placed them in a flattering role. When the St. Albans’ rebels attacked the abbey in 1381, they carried out a form of quasi-religious service to reinforce their local milling rights. In 1331, Abbot Richard Wallingford, had confiscated millstones from illegal hand-mills and cemented them into the abbey floor to emphasise his rights over milling in the lordship. In 1381, therefore, the insurgents broke into the abbey, tore up these stones and brought them to the commons. There they smashed them into small pieces, giving a part of them to each man, as the bread that has been blessed is distributed and bestowed upon the Lord’s people in the parochial churches. This was done so that when the people saw those fragments they would recall that they had once prevailed over the monastery in this cause.

This conscious use of religious imagery was clearly designed to challenge the legal power of the Church by appropriating its spiritual authority through an imitation of its ceremonial activities. In addition, it highlighted the collective aims of the insurgents; the parallel with the breaking of holy bread highlighted that they were ‘one body’ and the emphasis on unity in the St. Albans’ rebellion was also evident in the oaths of fealty and ceremonies of hand-holding which took place in the early stages of the revolt.

Once authority had been challenged by acts of ceremonial defiance, it was

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considered important to record the outcome in writing. Civic governments usually did this in urban custumals, which were often explicitly commissioned to provide a permanent record of important documents or test cases. This was prioritised when the outcome was in the town’s favour. Particularly explicit was the case of a Chester brawl in 1484 between Marion Hoghton, wife of a servant of the abbot of St. Werburgh’s, and the wife of Henry Wermynchat, goldsmith, during the Midsummer Fair. Both women were removed to the municipal prison in Northgate by the city sheriffs, despite the fact that the abbot had the right to imprison all offenders except thieves during the Fair, a break with tradition which apparently went unchallenged by the abbey. The city clerk triumphantly wrote in the margin of the Mayors’ Book, ‘Note well, note well, note well! For our liberty against the abbot at market-time’. Perhaps it was in part a result of this legal precedent that the next year the abbot’s jurisdiction over the fair was substantially curtailed.

In general, however, rival authorities were very careful to defend their liberties both in public and in the written record. Indeed, local ecclesiastical institutions were often particularly threatening to town governments because they too were a corporate body, with a strong emphasis upon collective memory and the importance of written records to support legal claims. An example of this documentary rivalry can be seen in late fifteenth-century Bristol, where in c. 1489 John Newland, the abbot of St. Augustine’s Abbey, compiled a chronicle of the history of the abbey. The creation of this roll was a response to the dispute between the town and the abbey and perhaps also reflected concern regarding the development of a city chronicle, Ricart’s Kalendar, in the last decade. After the creation of Abbot Newland’s manuscript, the town in turn responded to the written threat by creating their own version of events in the Great White Book, which was begun in 1491. The civic authorities began their case by stating that ‘the said towne of Bristowe is an auncien burgh and town and hath been of tyme wherof no mynde is’, subsequently detailing all other legal evidence in

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22 ‘Nota, nota, nota bene pro libertate nostra contra abbatem tempore Nundinarum’. Chester, CCALS, ZMB/6, f. 101.
23 VCH Cheshire: City of Chester, V.i., p. 81.
25 For the date of commencement, see, Great White Book, ed. Ralph, p. 2.
the town’s favour.\textsuperscript{26} As Peter Fleming has shown, this account placed a careful ‘spin’ on the events in question, in order to emphasise the city’s victory over the abbey.\textsuperscript{27}

The compilation of cartularies or customals by religious houses was influential in terms of the creation of urban manuscripts by the secular authorities; it gave them a very literate rival, requiring them to form their own documentary culture which would survive legal scrutiny. It is also noticeable that the form such manuscripts took, both in the religious and secular setting, was often very similar, a point made evident in the \textit{Liber memorandorum ecclesie de Bernewelle}, compiled between 1295 and 1296, which was intended to help Barnwell Abbey in its disputes with the townspeople of Cambridge, their own tenants and other neighbouring lords. The \textit{Prologue} showed marked similarities to urban customals, claiming that the manuscript was created,

\begin{quote}
so that the servants of God may escape from the hands of impious men more freely, through the aid of Almighty God, as it is certain that human memory is fallible, [and therefore] it is worthwhile reducing to writing some things, which may be useful to our church and assist our brethren, both present and future, in their difficulties and when persecuted by a cruel world.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

While there were great similarities in the themes emphasised in both religious and urban customals, the Church did have an important rhetorical advantage in their charges against secular opponents – that of impiety. Rivalry between town and ecclesiastical authorities concerning who appeared to govern most virtuously was therefore intense. Urban governments were keen to highlight their Christian respectability and in some towns they seem to have wanted to prove themselves to be more righteous, charitable and upright than members of religious communities. Aside from simply acting in an ostentatiously pious manner, both individually and as a collective, two main methods were used by urban elites to further these claims. The first was to reinforce lay jurisdiction over moral offences, like adultery, which were usually considered as the responsibility of the ecclesiastical courts but in towns could be governed by borough customary law. The second was to shift authority over charitable giving away from the Church to the lay authorities.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Great White Book}, ed. Ralph, pp. 2, 18.
\textsuperscript{27} P. Fleming, ‘Conflict and urban government in later medieval England: St. Augustine’s Abbey and Bristol’, \textit{Urban History} 27 (2000), 339-42.
Marjorie McIntosh’s study of provincial law courts has emphasised that jurors regularly interpreted their jurisdictional rights creatively, presenting people for offences over which they had no strict legal authority. She has particularly highlighted how moral offences, like adultery, prostitution and fornication, were described as breaches of the peace rather than as sins, in order to ensure they were tried in the lay rather than the ecclesiastical courts.29 Shannon McSheffrey has contrasted this to the attitude of the London civic authorities, who were happy to use religious language in relation to sexual immorality, as they were sufficiently confident to challenge ecclesiastical jurisdiction without apology or preamble.30 Certainly, the London administration was particularly inclined to use moralising language in by-laws and there is evidence for them deliberately challenging the jurisdiction of the church. Thomas Walsingham claimed that in 1382 the civic authorities began a campaign against adultery in the capital, usurping episcopal rights, measures which became ‘extraordinarily impertinent and created a dangerous precedent for other cities’.31 In addition, the early fifteenth-century London government was particularly stringent in its regulation of clerics. Letter Book I contains a (possibly incomplete) list of those convicted of immorality before the mayor between January 1400 and July 1439, with forty-six of the seventy-one cases involving clerics, most of whom were gild chaplains.32 From 1414 onwards, references to fornicating chaplains regularly noted that ‘according to the custom of the city...no one should thenceforth hire him...under penalty of paying to the chamber twice the amount paid for his salary’.33

While London was particularly forthright in its challenges to ecclesiastical authority, a concern to regulate the behaviour of gild and chantry priests paid by town citizens was evident in some provincial towns. Coventry, for example, was particularly anxious about chantry priests wandering in the city and in 1492 ordered that chaplains appointed by the gilds should ‘kepe the quer dayly as-well vppon the werk daies as vppon holy daies, in encreasyng of dyuyn seruice dayly to be songon in the parish chirches of this Cite’. As this ordinance was recorded among numerous regulations concerning sexual morality, there was perhaps the implication that priests

29 McIntosh, Controlling Misbehaviour, pp. 25-6, 31-3.
were suspected of leaving their chapels for the purposes of fornication. Certainly wandering priests 'under the burgiesis or enhabitantes wages' were associated with sexual immorality in Gloucester, where in 1500 measures were taken against those 'prestes and religious' who 'dayly haunte qwenys within any ward of the towne, or walk by nyght suspicously'. Perhaps to avert such affronts to civic pride, Bristol took pains to record the 'compositions' (that is, the agreements of terms of service) of civic chantry priests in 'the rede book' and obliged them to take oaths of good service before the mayor. These priests were therefore treated like other civic officials and details were given immediately afterwards in the manuscript for similar 'swearing in' ceremonies for the masters of the victualling crafts.

Civic surveillance of chantry priests was clearly a popular concept within the governing elites of some provincial towns. This was particularly evident in the charitable bequests made by former members of town governments. Pious giving was a major concern for most testators. It was a matter of considerable concern that the money left to charitable causes in wills was correctly spent. There was a widespread belief that posthumous gifts to the needy were efficacious in reducing the amount of time a soul spent in purgatory, but that these alms only had the desired effect if the good works were actually carried out, not simply promised. Most testators simply gave their relatives and friends the responsibility of overseeing their charitable giving. Executors, however, could not always be relied upon to carry out their duties correctly, either because of malice or negligence, or because they themselves became infirm or died. The last was a particular problem in the case of the more elaborate forms of giving, such as the creation of chantries and alms houses, as it was usually intended that these institutions would exist for a considerable period of time and, in some cases, in perpetuity.

Religious institutions and parish churches, therefore, were obvious candidates for charity and sometimes they were empowered by testators to oversee large scale giving. In many towns, it was common for former members of government and their widows to grant oversight of their wills to a church with very definite 'civic'

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34 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 544-5.
35 Stevenson, 'Records of Gloucester', 437.
36 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 159-159v; Ricart, Kalendar, pp. 76-7.
37 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 159v; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 77.
associations, usually being the place of worship for the corporation. In Hull, twelve ‘priests of the table’ at the church of the Holy Trinity acted as a collective, from 1409 electing two of their members to have control of their common possessions and to divide all profits among them equally. A number of leading citizens requested in their wills that these priests administered their bequests and ensured that their chantries were correctly managed. This church was used as the chapel of the elite, merchant guild of St. George, an organisation which paid for masses to be said daily at two of the altars. It is likely that these men favoured Holy Trinity as the other church in Hull, St. Mary’s, served the Aton Fee, an independent jurisdiction. Holy Trinity would therefore have been the place they had worshipped in. Testators knew that the priests would find it difficult to avoid their obligations to say regular masses, because members of the corporation were there so frequently.

In York, this form of civic government surveillance over chantry priests was given a more formal basis by donors. The civic archives contain forty indentures and other documents relating to the foundation of chantries and obits by burgesses between 1321 and 1528 and all give the mayor and council a supervisory role. These chantries were founded by members of the mercantile elite and many were based in St. William’s Chapel, the main arena of civic government worship, where they were subject to regular aldermanic visitations. Even those chantries based in local parish churches were very carefully supervised and Barrie Dobson has noted that they were ‘subject to meticulous and at times almost obsessive lay control’.

Bequests of this nature were not only seen as pious, but also indicated loyalty to the corporation after death, by providing the government with an opportunity to publicly display its Christian giving and by enhancing its opportunities for church patronage within the local area. The chantries of William Canynges in Bristol, for example, were clearly viewed by the local administration as an opportunity to

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38 VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, I, p. 287.
42 Ibid, p. 278.
demonstrate both their power and their moral rectitude. On All Souls Day (2 November) each year, as part of the annual round of civic ceremonies,

the Maire is visid to walk to Redclyff, and the toune clerk with him; there to sytte in audite vpon William Canynges ij chauntryes... And aftir the seide audeye is fynesshid, the towe clerk to entre thacompte of the same in a boke there, called Canynges Liger, and there the Maire to receive j noble, the toune clerk xxd, the swerdberer viijd and the four sergeauntez of the Maire xvjd.\textsuperscript{43}

This procession and the ostentatious auditing of these chantries were clearly designed to attract public attention. This guaranteed Canynges long-standing remembrance within the community and for his political successors provided an opportunity to highlight the permanence of civic government as an institution and their own accountability, financial probity and respectability.

In addition to earning civic gratitude, then, testators served their own purposes when they left their property or money in such a way that civic supervision could be guaranteed. In some cases they particularly relied upon the rivalry between civic and ecclesiastical authorities to ensure that their gifts were carefully administered. This was evident in fifteenth-century Southampton, where a number of wills left property to the town to be used for charitable purposes, but made provision that if the civic government failed in their duties the ownership of their estate was to move to a nearby ecclesiastical house. William Soper, for example, in 1458 made a will which left his home to his wife for her lifetime and then entailed it upon the corporation. The Southampton government was to distribute the profits for masses for the good of his soul, the souls of his parents and of his two wives. If, however, they failed in this duty, ownership of the property passed to the Abbot and Convent of Beaulieu, in the county of Southampton. If in turn they failed, the property was to be held by the Prior and Convent of St. Denys, near the town. If the Convent of St. Denys proved irresponsible, the executors were ordered to sell the property and distribute the proceeds in masses, alms and other charitable works.\textsuperscript{44} Soper’s will was not particularly unusual in this respect, although most wills listed in the \textit{Black Book of Southampton} simply left property to their heirs, then the corporation and then to the Prior and Convent of St. Denys.\textsuperscript{45} On occasion, therefore, wealthy townsfolk and

\textsuperscript{43} Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 160r; Ricart, \textit{Kalendar}, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Black Book of Southampton}, ed. Wallis-Chapman, II, pp. 98-114.
women could use the tensions between civic and religious authorities in the area to their advantage, in order to ensure their bequests were correctly managed.

It would seem, then, that jurisdictional rivalries could have their uses. In some cases, citizens could manipulate these hostilities to ensure their wills were correctly administered, thus ensuring that their charitable bequests were spent as they intended, providing the local population with practical and religious succour and themselves with posthumous recognition by the urban government and a spiritual insurance policy against lengthy periods in purgatory. In broader terms, jurisdictional friction could consolidate urban unity in the face of a common enemy and encourage townspeople to create, discuss and write down a collective history which backed their claim for increased political and economic freedoms. More importantly for those living in the town, however, the continual presence of jurisdictional competitors in the town also increased pressure on urban governments to maintain a clean-cut image and to ensure that they were seen to rule fairly and effectively. While the frequent outbreaks of hostility between rival jurisdictions may have sometimes undermined law and order, they could also spur the urban authorities on to more populist policies.
Chapter Seven: Urban topography and civic image

And I, John, saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: “Behold the tabernacle of God with men: and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people: and God himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more. Nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away”....

...“But the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”.

And there came one of the seven angels, who had the vials full of the seven last plagues, and spoke with me, saying: “Come and I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb”. And he took me up in spirit to a great and high mountain: and he shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, and the light thereof was like to a precious stone, as to the jasper stone even as crystal. And it had a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and in the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel...

...And the gates thereof shall not be shut by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and the honour of nations into it. There shall not enter into it any thing defiled or that worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they that are written in the book of life of the Lamb.¹

In terms of the creation of civic ideals, this passage from Apocalypse was perhaps the most significant text in late medieval Europe. Illustrations of the scene were found across a wide range of artistic media and clerics, theologians and other writers were heavily influenced by both the biblical account itself and later interpretations of it in patristic texts, most notably St. Augustine’s City of God.²

Above all, this account presents the city as the perfect structure for human interaction: heaven was not a rural utopia, but a Divinely-wrought, civic masterpiece. Its sanctity was reflected in its physical magnificence – the gleaming stones, high walls and perfect symmetry – and in the holiness of those living within it. Unsurprisingly, the

¹ Apocalypse 21: 2-4, 8-12, 25-27.
governments of English provincial towns were influenced by this very positive image of urban life and sought to model their towns on this biblical ideal. In the previous chapter, it was shown that civic governments attempted to assert their identity as legitimate, Christian rulers by reiterating their authority as moral guardians of the town. In particular, officials closely supervised chantry priests in the pay of burgesses. This desire to enforce high moral standards was not confined to the clergy, however, as urban governments frequently placed a strong emphasis upon lay behaviour. In many towns, ordinances and cases of this kind were targeted at members of the civic government. Accusations of personal immorality were an important weapon, sometimes being used by political opponents to destroy an officer’s ‘worshipful’ status, and thereby his right to hold civic office. When the York administration wished to remove their troublesome sword-bearer John Eglisfeld, they justified it not only on grounds of treason and the misappropriation of civic funds, but also as he was ‘evidently convicte of incontinencye of his bodie with many wifes, servauntes and othre women of the said citie’. During the Spencer-Norton case in Bristol in 1479, the civic government began a general campaign of character assassination against Norton, claiming in letters to the king that he,

lieth in his bedde tyll it be ix or x at the bell daily as well the holidays as the werkyngdaies not attending to Devine Service...spendinge the afternones when sermons and evensongs been seing at the Tenyse and othir suche fryvulous disportes.

Accusations of personal immorality, such as those levelled against Norton and Eglisfeld, were usually only used as part of a more general campaign against an unpopular individual. William Soper’s political career in Southampton, therefore, did not seem to have been hindered by the fact that he had a long-standing mistress, Joan Chamberlain, whom he eventually married in c. 1438, after the death of his first wife, Isabel. He was returned as a Member of Parliament for the city thirteen times between May 1413 and February 1449, and acted as mayor on two occasions. Soper’s royal connections (he was appointed keeper of the king’s ships in 1420), together with

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3 For links between York and the imagery of Jerusalem in the Corpus Christi plays, see, Tudor-Craig, ‘Richard III’s triumphant entry’, p. 111.
5 GRB, IV, p. 69.
his local popularity doubtless encouraged the local administration to turn a blind eye to his affair.⁵

An aura of piety and respectability was nonetheless considered important for most leading officials, particularly given that they were required to sit in judgement on moral offences in the borough courts. In 1429 and 1454, the Coventry government ordered that all civic officers caught in adultery should lose their positions.⁷ Even more stringent measures were taken in 1492 when the city government ordained that,

{quote}yf hereafter eny man of worship within this Citie that hath be Maire or eny person that be sclandred in the synnes of avowtre, ffornicacion or vsure which haue be warned to amend them of such vices and woll not, ...then...yf he haue be Maire to be deprived of his cloke, and of the Counciejl of this Cite, neuer to procede ferther to other office of worship as Maister of the Gilde or other; and to be eloyned from all worship and goode company till he fynde sufficient and suer caucion or suertie of amendement.{quote}

Similar rules were to apply to all other officers and commoners. The idea that offenders were to be ostracised was intended to underline the enormity of the offence, but also to save other members of civic government from guilt by association in the public eye.⁸

Setting a good example to the wider citizenry was clearly important, particularly as civic officers’ private lives were doubtless liable to greater scrutiny than less well-known townspeople. To some extent, however, such legislation simply reflected the broader emphasis upon respectability evident in the rules of other urban institutions. Gilds frequently regulated the behaviour of their members, ordering them to take part in pious activities, such as regular Mass-attendance and assisting needy brethren.⁹ In addition, many issued sanctions against various forms of immorality. In 1448 in Shrewsbury, the Gild of Weavers ordered that anyone rumoured to live in an adulterous state should be shunned by all the fellow members, provided the accusation was proved to be correct by the wardens of the craft.¹⁰ The emphasis upon

⁵ ODNB, sub ‘Soper, William (d. 1459)’; Platt, Medieval Southampton, pp. 257-8.
⁶ Coventry Lee Book, ed. Harris, pp. 118, 219-20.
⁷ ODNB, pp. 544.
⁸ E.g. English Gilds, ed. Toulmin Smith, p. 104.
the reputation of the gild and the sanction of social ostracism closely mirrored the 1492 Coventry legislation. As Gervase Rosser has shown in relation to gild ordinances, such regulations were designed to give members, particularly new immigrants to the area, an instant respectability and ‘worshipful’ standing in the community, so that they would be regarded as trustworthy. An emphasis upon the moral uprightness of civic officers was important for similar reasons.

Moralising urban ordinances also sought to regulate the behaviour of the rest of the urban community. The best-known examples occurred in 1492 and 1495 in Coventry. These forbade any households to receive ‘eny tapster, or woman of evell name...haunting the synne of lechery’, and also stipulated that ‘no senglewoman...take nor kepe frohensfurth housez nor chambers be them­self...but...they go to servise till they be maried’. Jeremy Goldberg has claimed that these reforms were instituted by a Lollard clique within urban government, led by William Rowley, mayor in 1492 and husband of Alice, the well-known heretic. Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner have shown, however, that William Rowley was not a supporter of Lollardy. Although his wife was a well-known Lollard it appears both William and the couple’s son Thomas actively opposed her heretical views.

In fact, the Coventry ordinances were fairly typical examples of orthodox civic government preoccupations. Rowley’s successor, for example, Thomas Chircheman, a man who had no known Wycliffite associations, clearly shared his predecessor’s moral views and ordered that ‘yf eny persone speke or intrete for the fauoryng of eny myslyffying woman to the Maire for the tyme being, which is knowen for a harlet, he is to lose xxs’. Prohibitions against those who entertained ‘bawds’ and ‘common women’ were also made by the civic government in 1445. Similar legislation was

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11 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 544.
13 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 544-5, 568. The quotations are taken from p. 545.
16 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 552.
17 Ibid, pp. 118, 219-20, 278.
found in other towns. In Kings Lynn, a series of ordinances were passed in 1465, which were very similar in their stipulations to the Coventry legislation of 1492, ordering that the men of the town should not 'kepe nor favour nor maynteyne' any 'which is known for a misgoverned woman'. This prohibition included renting her property.18

Urban administrations were often preoccupied with regulating the behaviour of 'common women', that is, women who had illicit sexual relations including, but not limited to, various forms of prostitution. A town's reputation was associated with the sexual behaviour of its female inhabitants. In particular, it was considered damaging to the 'worship' of the city for 'common women' to live (and presumably sometimes to solicit) openly in the streets of the town, particularly if they operated outside designated 'red light' areas like Cock Lane in London and Grope Lane in York. In 1500 in Gloucester, therefore, the town council complained that the town,

is to abomynable spokyn of in alle England and Walys [because] of the vicyous lyvyng of dyvers personez, ... with to excidyng nowmbre of commyn strompettes and bawds dwelling in ever[y] ward.19

To some extent, such concerns were a matter of public order, as prostitution and fornication were often associated with other crimes and disturbances, such as excessive drinking, illegal food sales and fencing stolen goods.20 Such regulations, however, were not simply a matter of utilitarian crime-prevention. Female sexual immorality, and particularly those who openly acted as prostitutes or as 'loose' women in the streets, was considered symbolic of the broader moral condition of the inhabitants.

Biblical scenes particularly associated female sexuality with images of the good and bad city. The heavenly Jerusalem in Apocalypse, therefore, was 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband', while the wicked city of Babylon (often regarded as symbolising ancient Rome) was represented as a famous prostitute, who led kings and

18 Kings Lynn, KLBA, KL/C7/4, f. 228.  
merchants into wrong-doing.\textsuperscript{21} In Isaias, the sexual behaviour of townswomen and the fate of the city as a whole were explicitly linked. The prophet emphasised the sinfulness of the earthly Jerusalem by describing the flamboyant dress and loose living of its female residents. In punishment, he claimed, God would ensure that the women would be stripped of their finery and, like a punished woman, the city itself ‘shall lament and mourn, and she shall sit desolate on the ground’.\textsuperscript{22} These representations of cities as either virtuous or immoral women were well-known to contemporaries. Images of the ‘whore of Babylon’, for example, were a regular feature of contemporary, artistic depictions of the Last Days. During the 1392 reconciliation pageants of Richard II with London, therefore, the City was depicted as a bride accused of adultery, who begged Richard, her forgiving spouse, to return to their bridal chamber. He was particularly urged to return, not as a rapist, but as a loving husband: ‘let not the most beautiful walls in the kingdom be rent nor torn, for they are the king’s own and whatever is within them’.\textsuperscript{23}

Just as women were particularly vulnerable to accusation and rumour, civic governments were concerned to ensure their towns were not reputed to be centres of vice. This is not to suggest that urban leaders were not genuinely concerned about the real state of crime or morality in their jurisdictions, but above all it was important that their city was seen to be a place of virtue. There was biblical precedent for this. Even God, it seemed, was particularly concerned with towns which were generally reputed to be immoral. In Genesis, the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah came to the Lord’s attention because of rumour and He told Abraham that ‘I will go down and see whether they have done according to the cry that is come to me; or whether it be not so’\textsuperscript{24} There was the sense that it was especially offensive to any authority – whether Divine or earthly – that its prohibitions should be publicly and notoriously flouted. Town governments were therefore concerned to ensure that their cities were not generally reputed to be ill-governed, lest such reports should prompt the king to take their liberties ‘into his own hands’. Rumour could also be damaging for the city

\textsuperscript{21} Apocalypse, 17-18; 21: 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Isaias 3: 16-26. The quotation is taken from 3: 26.
\textsuperscript{23} Quoted in Strohm, Hocbon’s Arrow, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{24} Genesis, 18: 20-1.
economically, as a reputation as a crime-spot would discourage immigrants from moving there or people from visiting to trade.

There was a strong association between the physical and moral condition of the city. As a number of studies of pre-modern attitudes towards disease have shown, moral and physical cleanliness were regarded as important methods for people to emphasise their separateness from dirt and sin, and thus assuage Divine wrath. This was an especially important consideration in the second half of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; while the Church taught that the plague was sent by a loving Father, who wished to frighten mankind into repentance, so that they could be saved, there can be little doubt that many saw epidemic illnesses as a punishment from God. Bubonic plague broke out with devastating effect across Europe in 1347, with scholars suggesting a death rate of between one third and one half of the population. For contemporaries, this disaster, in the words of Carole Rawcliffe, ‘must have seemed little short of apocalyptic’. Plague outbreaks continued throughout the second half of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at both a local and national level. The high density of urban housing also made townspeople particularly prone to other forms of contagious disease, such as dysentery, typhus and sweating sickness. Dirt, stench and disorderly streets were therefore associated with sin, which reflected poor local law enforcement and could result in mass contagion. For town governments, keeping the inhabitants well-behaved and the physical environment clean were the best methods of improving the inhabitants’ chances in both this world and the next. Cleaning campaigns therefore had both symbolic and practical aspects, a point nicely illustrated in Norwich in 1549, when in the aftermath of Kett’s Rebellion the

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26 For contemporary discussions of these varying viewpoints, see, The Black Death, ed. R. Horrox (Manchester, 1994), pp. 113-14, 116-18, 126-35.


29 Useful discussions of mortality and epidemic disease, with particular reference to urban centres, are found in Bolton, “The world turned upside down”, pp. 23-33; Platt, King Death, pp. 19-31.
corporation ordered extensive street cleaning, not only to remove the debris but also to cleanse the city from associations with disobedience.30

Accordingly, late medieval town officials, like the Victorians, regarded cleanliness as next to godliness. Records of urban governments show a frequent preoccupation with the appearance of the city. Cleaning and building campaigns allowed towns to obtain the all important appearance of virtue, as dirty streets and shabby architecture were regarded as symbols of economic and moral decay. In Coventry in the 1493 Michaelmas Leet, two ordinances were passed, one making better provision for street cleaning and the other taking harsher measures against harlots.31 The link between moral and physical cleansing was made even more explicit in 1517 by the stipulation that the aldermen should arrange for,

the punishment of mighty beggars, of vacaboundes,...suspect alhowses and blynde yynes, cleansing of the streets and swepyng of the streets in-to the guter...Also that ther be no swynsteyes occupied within the walles of the Citee,... also to suffer no onlawful games to be vsid; ...and to see the comon ryuer be well kept accordyng to the auncientes ordynaunces.32

Moral and physical cleansing initiatives by local governments often focused upon increased public scrutiny of personal behaviour and an insistence upon overt, collective commitment to civic image.33 In a fairly typical ruling in Norwich in 1422, it was specified that cleansing of the river was to be carried out by every person in the wards and those who did not wish to labour themselves on the work were obliged to pay 4d a day for a labourer to be hired in their place.34 Similarly in York in 1482 it was ordered that

every warden in hys warde shall send for the constabyl and caus tham to caus the parishioners of every parish to powl up the bumbylles, netyleys and all odyr wedys that ar growyng abowt the walles of thys cite.35

32 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 652-3.
33 This point is also discussed in Rawcliffe, 'Sickness and health', p. 310; Rosser, 'Urban culture', 1, pp. 340-1.
34 'Potens in corpore ad laborandi aut potens in bonis ad soluendi'. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 8d, Assembly held on 24 July 1422 (No membrane numbers are given on these rolls); Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, I, p. 277. Similar legislation is found in Coventry, Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, p. 227.
Sometimes, this type of ordinance focused on householders, who were required to maintain the pavement outside their property. By obliing most people in the area to become involved in the cleaning project, these ordinances ensured that it was quickly obvious who had not done their share of the work. This was clearly intended to make offenders unpopular with their neighbours and accordingly more likely to be reported, making the policing of the wards easier for local officials and more effective. While it is impossible to measure the willingness of people to report on their neighbours, as there is no record of cases of nuisance which were not brought to the attention of the authorities, it is interesting that there was an assumption that people would assist civic governments in this way. Conviction of moral offences, such as gossiping, scolding, adultery or eavesdropping, similarly relied upon an individual’s reputation and the willingness of their neighbours to testify against them. This suggests that the local officials could usually rely on support from the wider population when their power was seen to be exercised in a manner that served the common good.

One way for town governments to show that their cleaning and building work served the common weal was to prioritise the upkeep of urban fortifications and to highlight their defensive purposes. Earlier in the fourteenth century, some wall-building and ditch digging had been sparked by a genuine physical threat. Hostilities with France were also a threat to the security of towns on the south coast. When Southampton was badly attacked in 1338, a massive building campaign was initiated to build up the defences. Fears of attack ran particularly high in the north of England in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, as by 1322 Scottish raiders had come unusually far south into Yorkshire, as far as Byland. It was probably later in the same year that the burgesses there petitioned the king for confirmation of earlier charters, wrongfully (and perhaps deliberately) claiming that these allowed them to enclose the town with a wall and ditch, although they did not ultimately carry out this work. The Scottish threat was also behind Edward II’s 1321 grant to the authorities at Kingston-upon-Hull, which gave them licence to enclose the town with fortifications and the chamberlains’ account roll of 1321-4 highlighted high levels of expenditure

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37 Further discussion of policing and the wards is found pp. 63-5.
on defensive building in the town.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, the local authorities borrowed over £100 from the de la Poles, who were to be repaid in full at the rate of 20 marks \textit{per annum}.\textsuperscript{40}

In the second half of the century, some border and coastal areas remained particularly vulnerable to attack. The Anglo-Scottish war meant that for those living in towns on the northern border, such as Carlisle, raiding was viewed a way of life, as was reflected in the building of heavy urban fortifications. Between 1391 and 1394, for example, £126 was spent on Carlisle’s defences, resulting in a decline in Scottish attacks on the city.\textsuperscript{41} Anglo-Welsh friction, which inevitably focused upon the marcher towns, also flared up periodically in the late fourteenth century, with matters considerably worsening following the rebellion of Owen Glendower in 1400.\textsuperscript{42} Throughout the Hundred Years War there were spasmodic attacks upon English ports, particularly those facing the French coast. Most of these assaults took place in the fourteenth century, but the fifteenth century also had its share of conflict, most notably in 1457, when Sandwich was attacked by the Normans and Bretons, who burnt and pillaged the town, killing the mayor and other civic officials and carrying off many of the town’s ships along with some of its wealthiest inhabitants, who were subsequently held for ransom. Such incursions, together with the very real fear of invasion during periods of escalated hostilities, meant that port towns were particularly anxious to invest in seaward defences.\textsuperscript{43}

In general, however, urban fortifications were losing their practical usefulness, particularly in inland towns. Their main purposes, therefore, were symbolic, rather than practical. Coventry, for example, spent £77 13s 4d on the walls in 1430 alone, despite the fact that the city was never completely enclosed during the medieval period, suggesting that the defensive purpose of the walls must have been very

\textsuperscript{39} CPR, 1321-4, p. 7; VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, I, p. 21; Selected Rentals and Accounts, ed. Horrox, pp. 23-4, 53-60.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, pp. 23-4.
\textsuperscript{41} Summerson, Medieval Carlisle, II, pp. 391-3.
\textsuperscript{42} English relations with Scotland and Wales are also discussed pp. 103-5.
limited. Some towns felt able to do without walls, such as Salisbury and Beverley, which both had gates but virtually no other fortifications. It is plausible that some towns regarded fortifications as an important sign of prestige, because they conformed to contemporary ideas concerning what an urban centre should look like, an image heavily influenced by biblical descriptions. Walls and ditches symbolised more than physical defence; they also represented wealth and moral security, as well as demarcating the city from the surrounding area. This was not simply a statement of jurisdictional division, as towns often had authority over areas outside the city walls. Rather, it represented the centre of the town as a secure citadel, which could protect the inhabitants from ‘the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars’, the archetypal ‘sinners’ so colourfully described in the Apocalypse. In reality, of course, this was very far from the case, as towns were often a magnet for criminals. Nonetheless, many urban ordinances and building campaigns showed the underlying influence of this religious ideology on local leaders.

This was nicely demonstrated on civic seals, which often featured scenes from the urban landscape. The late medieval Norwich seal featured the keep of a castle within the town walls, an image which was closely replicated in one of the Cathedral misericords, highlighting the interaction between secular and religious artwork in the period. Colchester also used the image of a walled city, surrounded by a motto highlighting the hospitality of St. Martha to Jesus, which was presumably intended to suggest that the town, like Bethany, was a holy place where Christ would find welcome and succour. The religious overtones of the seal were also reiterated by the depiction of the town’s patron saint, Helena, on the obverse. Port towns highlighted their naval defences, often representing them with the motif of a ship, which also had associations with prosperity and trade. Lydd in Kent used the motif of a church with a ship, demonstrating civic sanctity, security and prosperity.

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46 Apocalypse 21: 8. Walls are also discussed above, p. 148.
48 Gothic, eds. Marks and Williamson, p. 266.
town seal of Dunwich showed a ship sailing in waters full of fish. This image was presumably intended to emphasise not only the city’s fertile waters, but also to incorporate biblical allusions to Jesus calling his first fishermen disciples, Simon Peter, James and John, when they obtained a miraculously large catch of fish by following the Lord’s instructions.  

Seals were, of course, used to symbolise the will of the civic government. In typical vein, an inscription on the Colchester seal stated that it was ‘the seal of the community of the bailiffs and community of the king’s town of Colchester’. The fact that distinctive features of the town’s defences were used as part of the design was indicative of the fact that, by the second half of the fourteenth century, fortifications had become not simply a form of practical defence, but also a symbol of civic government power. This point was illustrated in Coventry, which built all its walls and gates in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, mainly using grants of murage to fund the work. The first grant was made in 1329 to the ‘prior and convent of Coventry and to the good men of that town’, but the work did not apparently begin until 1355 and subsequent licences from the crown and grants of murage were given to ‘the mayor, bailiffs, citizens and good men of Coventre’ indicating that by this time the fortifications had become an exclusively ‘civic’ matter. In York, the upkeep of the walls was so associated with urban government that the mason employed to oversee the fortifications was provided with an annual civic livery and a house belonging to the community to live in rent free.  

Although town walls did not usually mark the boundaries of an urban government’s jurisdiction, town fortifications were symbolic of government power for a number of other reasons. Gates were often used as civic gaols, as at Northgate in Chester, and were also used by town officials to collect customs and tolls. Sections of the civic fortifications could be rented out by the urban administration to augment the

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52 Gothic, ed. Marks and Williamson, p. 266.
common funds, and so the Norwich town accounts, for example, list income from renting out the towers. The strong association between fortifications and government power meant that paying for new building projects was potentially a hot political question and various avenues of funding were explored. Repair costs were usually paid directly out of the town’s common funds. The sums involved could vary considerably from year to year, as can be seen in Norwich, where in 1385-6 the civic government spent over £80 on repairing the city gates and digging ditches as part of the fortifications, while in the following year, only 12d was spent on an inspection of the city walls by two masons. Some towns specified which forms of revenue were to be spent on the upkeep of defences. In Chester, the surviving fifteenth-century murengers’ accounts highlighted that such costs were routinely paid directly out of the customary tolls collected at the city gates, which were set out in great detail in the Black Book and later copied into the sixteenth-century Pentice Cartulary.

Major repairs or building completely new fortifications was more problematic, as the required sums could not be found from the common funds. The duty of the king to defend the realm from external threats meant that when towns were attacked, often some financial clemency was offered by the crown both as a tacit form of compensation and to ensure that the town’s defences were increased in case of further assault. The best-known example of this was Southampton, where there were massive building campaigns following the raids in 1338 and 1377. The fee farm was remitted at various points in the fourteenth century to assist in paying for the new fortifications. The crown could also assist local governments by giving a grant of murage to assist with paying for wall-building and repairs. This was a special tax on the sale of certain goods or on property within the city, which was usually collected by town officials. This could only be levied with royal permission and so was the subject of frequent petitions to parliament, which often emphasised recent damage caused to the town fortifications by enemy attacks (particularly in the 1370s) or the

55 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7a/2; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, ii, pp. 43-5.
56 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7a (Treasurers’ account roll, 1385-6); NCR Case 7a (Treasurers’ account roll, 1386-7).
57 Chester, CCALS, ZMUB/1, ff. 1-15; ZMUR/1, m. 1-2; Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, ff. 10-11v; ZCHB/2, ff. 72-73v.
potential risk to national defence caused by broken walls.\textsuperscript{60} This rhetoric of necessity was important and mirrored the king's claims of 'urgent necessity' for the defence of the realm when he requested taxes and loans from his subjects in parliament.\textsuperscript{61} Money which was granted by the crown in remissions was not always spent on fortifications by the local authorities, however. There was suspicion that this was the case in Southampton in the 1370s, as in 1380 the Crown ordered that the money remitted from the fee farm was to be spent under the supervision of royal appointees.\textsuperscript{62} This was not an unlikely supposition given the amount of physical and financial damage sustained by the city in the period, with royal enquiries into the misappropriation of customs and grants being ordered in 1341 and 1389.\textsuperscript{63}

The same was true of money collected in murage payments and this was probably one cause of the local opposition to its collection in Coventry, where it was levied repeatedly by the mayor and bailiffs in the 1360s. In other towns, like York and Chester, murage collections were not spent exclusively on the fortifications by urban governments, but the majority of the money was put towards the general funds of the city, and suspicions of a similar practice in Coventry would have added to popular hostility to the building project.\textsuperscript{64} Indeed, opinion was so against the building work that by 1370, the king had revoked letters patent granted to the town for the collection of murage because of complaints from local victuallers that as a result of the tax they were so impoverished 'that they must withdraw from the town unless a remedy be quickly applied'.\textsuperscript{65}

In the face of this opposition, the administration of Coventry resorted to various other methods of funding their ambitious building project. In 1385 the farm of sealing woollen cloth, valued at £24, was granted to the building of walls and in 1417 the mayor and commonalty obtained a licence to acquire lands, rents and services to the value of £40 within the town and precincts, to help defray expenses.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{60} E.g. London, TNA, SC 8/19/906, SC 8/126/6256; PROME, 'Appendix: October 1378', item 15.
\textsuperscript{61} Above, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{62} London, TNA, SC 8/141/7046.
\textsuperscript{63} Platt, Medieval Southampton, pp. 89, 91.
\textsuperscript{65} CPR, 1367-70, p. 369.
\textsuperscript{66} CPR 1381-5, p. 557; CPR 1416-22, p. 105.
In 1432, fines levied by the city courts for a range of misdemeanors were granted 'to the town wall'. These decisions reflected not only the high financial burden of the city’s building plans, but also an attempt on the part of the town authorities to enforce the idea among the wider population that it was right to take pride in the appearance of the city; in particular, those who had ‘caste muke or othur fylthe’ into the town ditch had to clean it or pay 40s towards the costs of the wall.67 Such methods of funding were problematic, however. The use of fines could increase suspicion that civic officials would falsely convict defendants because of financial greed. It is likely that the building of fortifications caused considerable resentment from those living in houses which were demolished or who owned gardens which were diminished in order to build the walls and quite a number of properties were affected in this way during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.68 In 1456, therefore, the Coventry mayor’s oath had to include a stipulation that he would prevent people from removing earth from the city wall and a fine of 40d was imposed upon those who tried to recreate their gardens across it.69

Less controversial was private giving by town citizens, and in many places this was the major source of funding for various civic building campaigns. Town halls were particularly likely to be funded in this way. These buildings, like urban fortifications, had a particular association with the power of local government, as they were usually used as court houses, the forum for civic elections, administrative centres and prisons. During the fifteenth century, a large number of town halls were built or substantially renovated, as in Norwich, York, Exeter and Bury St. Edmunds.70 While a town’s common funds could often stretch to paying for repairs to existing halls, it was not usually possible to fund entirely new constructions in this way. It was conventional for the burgesses, or at least the wealthiest citizens, to contribute to a levy. The Norwich hall, for example, was funded by a special levy on the fifteen wealthiest citizens, collected between 1411 and 1413, with the biggest donor being Simon Cook, an alderman, who paid £28 towards the building work.71 Prominent

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67 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 140-2. The quotation is taken from p. 140.
68 VCH Warwickshire, VIII, p. 22.
69 Coventry Leet Book, ed. Harris, pp. 284-5.
71 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7c (Chamberlains’ Roll, 1411-13), m. 3.
burgesses, who were involved in civic government, were often willing to pay for civic construction out of their own pockets. In part, this was a social and political obligation; there was a sense that burgesses were expected to pay to meet town costs personally, because they were the chief beneficiaries of this expenditure.

Giving was sometimes posthumous, and so the Norwich alderman John Jowell, who died in 1499, bequeathed £20 to repair of walls and river, while the former Bristol mayor, John Clyve, left money to the corporation 'to thentent of the amending of the walles...and other fortefiengis'. The living could also prove generous benefactors, however. The walls in Norwich were begun in the 1280s, but were not completed until 1345, largely thanks to the generosity of Robert Spink, who in return had his good work recorded for posterity in the city muniments. In Beverley in 1437, the draper, Robert Jackson converted four shops and two chambers into a town hall at his own expense and it was not until 1501 that the town government acquired property in the Cross Garths for a purpose-built hall.

Constructing a new guildhall was an overtly political act, as was highlighted in a number of disputes on the matter in various towns. In some cases, building a guildhall indicated a shift towards increasingly oligarchic rule, as it enclosed elections and other government ceremonies, making them less accessible to the wider population. This was evident in the disputes in 1489 in Northampton between the 'discrete, sadde and well disposed' citizens and the inhabitants of 'lytil substaunce'. After this dispute was settled by an act of parliament in favour of an oligarchic government, the arena for elections was moved from the easily accessible venue of the churchyard of St. Giles to the more enclosed arena of the guildhall, which had previously only been used for court sessions.

Friction was also evident in Norwich in 1407, when construction began on the new town hall. This building was created as a direct response to the new privileges

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72 GRB, I, p. 130.
73 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17c (Old Free Book), ff. 3-4; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tinge, II, pp. 216-22; B. Ayers, 'The urban landscape', in Rawcliffe and Wilson, eds., Medieval Norwich, p. 23.
74 VCH Yorkshire: East Riding, VI, pp. 19-20.
75 E.T. Jones, J. Laughton and P. Clark, Northampton in the Late Middle Ages (Leicester, 2000), pp. 88-9.
granted to the City in the 1404 charter of reconstitution, which specified that the Sheriffs should take their oaths before the mayor ‘in the hall called “le Gildhalle”’. The same charter also enlarged the town council and increased the number of courts. These changes made the use of the Tollhouse, the former seat of civic administration, impractical and so the new hall was built to replace it. Practical need was not the only motivation, however: the scale of the building was massive, being outranked in size only by London, indicating that at least some citizens of Norwich regarded their new-found privileges with enthusiasm and wished to make the new building a tangible expression of the power and affluence of civic government.

The size and ostentation of the new guildhall reflected the general drive among the Norwich administration in the early fifteenth century to bolster civic government power through heavy expenditure on symbolic and ceremonial features of the elite urban identity. The unusually full accounts of the building work indicate the numerous expenses involved, with long lists of payments to masons and labourers and for materials. These attempts at aggrandisement were repeatedly resisted by rival political factions within the citizen body, who often appropriated terms such as the ‘commonalty’ or the ‘whole community’ to describe themselves. Rivalry concerning the Norwich Guildhall came particularly to the fore in the 1420s and 1430s, following the troublesome conduct of Thomas Wetherby, mayor in 1427. In the enquiry into the conduct of Wetherby’s administration, it was claimed that there was a popular ditty at the time circulating in Norwich, which named the leading civic officials who were supposed to administer justice and stated that, ‘qho so haue any quarell or plee in the Gildhall att Norwich, be it fals or trew ...sore schall hym rewe, for they will rewle all the court with theyr lawis newe’. As the last line highlighted, two factors particularly exacerbated local tensions: the novelty of the recently enlarged civic administration and the fact that the government was seen to be unduly exclusive and not governing in the interests of the whole community. This failure to administer justice was made worse because it took place in a new hall, which had

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78 See above, pp. 44-5.
79 Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 7c (Chamberlains’ Roll, 1411-13), mm. 1-2.
80 My emphasis. Norwich, NRO, NCR Case 17b (Book of Pleas), f. 73v.
been built to reinforce the legitimacy of the administration, but in fact had for some quickly come to symbolise unjust authority.

For contemporaries, the charge of novelty was indeed a serious one. When the fifteenth-century mayor of Bristol took his oath, he promised 'the franchises and free customs whiche beth gode in the saide toune I shall meynene, and all euell custumes and wronges I shall put awey and anyntese, be my power'. The power to alter custom was a very great one and civic officials were liable to be challenged if they were perceived to misuse this authority by altering precedent arbitrarily and without due consultation of the wider community. Indeed, virtually all challenges to late medieval civic government from those living within the town claimed that officials had altered ancient custom. This reflected the fact that, throughout the medieval period, 'ancient' rights were considered especially likely to serve the common good. Long-held tradition, then, was associated with the shared identity and history of the collective and consequently was imbued with particular moral and legal authority. This is not to say that custom was unchanging, but it did ensure that contentious jurisdictional claims were usually challenged on the basis that they were novel, and therefore injuring the rights of the commons. For urban dwellers, therefore, appeals to the ancient past were highly politicised and often subversive challenges to the status quo.

New buildings were outstandingly visual representations of change and accordingly they were liable to be heavily criticised during periods when the administration was unpopular, as in Norwich in the early fifteenth century. In general, however, town governments were very aware of the danger of being accused of altering tradition without good cause and so it is no coincidence that, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, towns were much more likely to build and maintain their fortifications if there were earlier foundations already in existence. In part, this was a practical consideration; the presence of earlier building work made the task of creating late medieval fortifications easier and less expensive. In addition, late medieval urban governments often took particular care to develop and augment

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81 Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 157; Ricart, Kalendar, p. 72.
82 For discussion of the importance of consultation in medieval political thought, see also, Reynolds, 'Law and communities', 210-13.
buildings which were associated with the town’s early history. The walls and gates at Colchester, Chester and Winchester, for example, were originally Roman and this evidence of urban antiquity was doubtless a source of local pride. Ancient monuments were regarded as particularly useful because they reinforced the idea that the civic authorities maintained rather than destroyed the ancient traditions of the community. In Winchester, the account rolls for 1455-6 describe part of the city wall as Colebrondis Hede, a reference to the legend that Guy of Warwick had fought the giant Colbrand just outside the North Gate of the City, in the presence of King Athelstan. Until the eighteenth century there was a carving of the combat on the city wall at a place called ‘Colbrand’s Chair’ which may well have dated from the late medieval period. In Bristol, Ricart’s Kalendar twice emphasised the ancient status of the fortifications, claiming that,

this saide worshipfull Toune of Bristowe, ...was here forst sette and billed vpon a litil hille by twene iij yatis, scilicet, Seinte Nicholas yate, Seinte Johnes yate, Seint Leonardis yate, and the newe yate, bi that noble prince Bryneus, brother vnto Kyng Bellynus, ...by recorde of Brutes cronicles.

The figure of Brynne was based on the stories in the Brut, but the references to him building the gates was an addition to the legend as it is found in other extant manuscripts. It is likely, however, that these details were popularly circulated in Bristol, illustrating how the local topography could shape the collective imagination and identity of the urban community.

In visual terms, castles were often particularly striking features of the urban landscape and they could be regarded as enhancing urban worship, a point emphasised by William Worcestre in his Survey, when he claimed that, ‘it is a credit and honour to the district of Bristol and the county of Gloucestershire to have, or to hear of, the origins of impressive fortresses and castles’. Accordingly some towns,
like Bristol, Norwich and Rochester, incorporated them into their common seals and coats-of-arms. Most castles had originally been built by the Norman invaders in the eleventh century, when they were used to subdue the local population. They therefore had a somewhat equivocal status in terms of urban identity, as they could be regarded as symbols of royal or seigneurial, rather than civic, authority.

For obvious reasons, William I and the Normans were particularly associated with conquest in the late medieval period. Verses attributed to John Lydgate described him as,

The migti William of Normandy,
As bokis old makith mension,
Bi juste titill and bi his chivalri,
Was king be conquest of brutes Albion.

William’s ‘juste titill’ was therefore proved by his prowess in battle. A late medieval audience would have been very familiar with this process, following the use of military force in the usurpations in 1399, 1461 and 1485, although hereditary right was usually emphasised in official justifications of these take-overs. The land remained, however, ‘Brutes Albion’, a reference to the alleged Trojan heritage of Britain. While this poem was not subversive in intention, urban administrations sometimes used pre-Conquest history to challenge interference in their local affairs.

In the London Liber Albus, therefore, the compiler John Carpenter incorporated considerable discussion of the city’s Trojan foundations myths, as well as the Saxon etymology and history of civic government. This was intended to undermine the king’s right to take the city ‘into his own hands’, given civic memories of Richard II’s seizure of the liberties in 1392. In a similar vein, Ricart’s Kalendar, reiterated that Bristol was ‘founded and grounded upon franchises, libertees, and free auncient customes, and not vpon comen lawe’ and went on to trace the origins of these urban

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89 Bristol, BRO, 01208; Records of Norwich, eds. Hudson and Tingey, II, p. 278; Harvey and McGuinness, British Medieval Seals, p. 109. A specimen of the Bristol seal has survived on Bristol, BRO, 5139/29. I am grateful to William Smith, Archivist at the BRO, for his assistance with this point.
91 London, BL, Cotton Julius E IV, f. 2.
93 Martin (now Carrel), 'Carpenter's "Liber Albus"', pp. 27-50.
liberties as far back as the ancient Trojans. He also claimed that 'there hath been alwayes Maires in this worshipfull toune seth the Conquest, and before'.

Occasionally, therefore, urban administrations sought to emphasise their ancient rights and liberties by claiming that the local castle had pre-Conquest origins. This was evident in late fourteenth-century Colchester, where the urban administration ran a campaign to use the local legends of King Cole and St. Helena to legitimise their local leadership. According to myth, the town had been founded by King Cole, who was the father of St. Helena. Helena reputedly discovered the 'True Cross' and was the mother of the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine. Town officials used this legend when compiling their civic annals, claiming that the (actually Roman) foundations of the Castle were laid by King Cole.

In Bristol, the civic administration took a somewhat different tactic. Ricart's *Kalendar* instead highlighted that the town was built before the Conquest, by the Trojan prince 'Bryne', while alternative sources of jurisdictional authority in the area – the Castle and Abbey of St. Augustine's – were founded afterwards. Bristol did not, however, seem to be unduly concerned by the presence of the castle in its midst by the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the urban administration incorporated it into their civic identity by including it on the seal and, from 1373 on, as part of the city's coat-of-arms. For other town governments, however, the castle posed more a jurisdictional threat. In Chester, the castle was the administrative and judicial seat of the earl of Chester, who was also either the king or the Prince of Wales throughout the period and the urban records highlight jurisdictional friction between the courts of the earl and of the city. In some seigneurial boroughs, the local castle was the centre of the lord's administration and could act as a major hindrance to the development of urban identity. The borough of Warwick, for example, was an

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94 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 1, 3v-5v, 153v; Ricart, *Kalendar*, pp. 2, 8-10, 69.
97 Rosser, 'Myth', 8.
98 Bristol, BRO, 04720, ff. 4v-5v; Ricart, *Kalendar*, pp. 3-4.
99 Bristol, BRO, 01208.
100 E.g. Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/1, ff. 27v-28; Chester, CCALS, ZCHB/2, ff. 66v-67.
appurtenance of the castle from at least 1263 and was held by the earls of Warwick. The town of Warwick was largely treated as a manor, with the stewardship of the town usually being joined with the office of the constable of the castle. Warwick did not receive its first charter until 1545, by which time the castle and borough had come into the hands of the crown.101

The popularity of myths about a city’s ancient heritage was the key to their potency and was the reason that urban governments were so keen to appropriate and develop them.102 It is difficult, of course, to find evidence for popular oral traditions, but both William Worcestré’s Survey of Bristol and his Itineraries, written c. 1480, referred to a number of popular myths about England’s ancient heritage, which were often linked to the physical features of towns.103 According to him, in Bristol, Ghyston Cliff ‘as it is called by the common people, was founded there before the time of William the Conqueror by the Saracens or Jews, by a certain Ghyst, a giant portrayed on the ground’.104 The reference to ‘a giant portrayed on the ground’ probably refers to an Iron Age figure cut into the earth. Worcester was not a member of the civic administration, but a native of Bristol who had entered the service of Sir John Fastolf as a young man and had lived most of his life in East Anglia. He returned to Bristol in 1480 for a visit and used the time to write his Survey.105 He therefore commented as a relatively well-to-do visitor with an interest in local antiquarianism and topography and he seems to have questioned local people about the features of the towns that he visited.

The association between the urban landscape and its history was two-fold: firstly, monuments or other topographical features were likely to spark the popular imagination and cause tales to be created or embellished in order to explain the shape of the urban environment. Secondly, town governments were particularly likely to

104 My emphasis. Worcestré, Topography of Medieval Bristol, p. 35.
encourage legends which focused on buildings that they were associated with or on geographical features in areas which they were anxious to assert their jurisdictional rights over. In 1340, an inquisition was held before John de Whelnetham and John de la Rokele at Westminster regarding the ownership of the port of Orwell in Suffolk.\(^{106}\) Witnesses from the borough of Ipswich claimed that the port,

> takes its original and name from a certaine fountaine called Erewell, which is in the town of Rattlesden in the said county...and floweth by a river through the middest of the Burrough [of Ipswich]... at the first was seated there by reason of the port as the cheife towne of the whole County of Suffolk, by a certain pagan king named Ypsus, who named the said town by his name Ypswich.

They went on to claim that King John had later granted the burgesses the borough, including the port, ‘without that any other ought to have any dominion or jurisdiction whatsoever’.\(^{107}\) In reality, John’s 1200 charter did grant them the borough with its appurtenances and liberties, but the port was not specifically mentioned.\(^{108}\)

While to modern eyes the claim of ‘Ypsus’ appears far-fetched, it must be remembered that the medieval legal system often equated the truth with what was commonly believed to be the case; an individual might be successfully prosecuted on the grounds that they were generally reputed to be a liar, a scold or a whore for example. The fact that legends were popularly circulated and believed, therefore, gave them an important status as legal evidence. Indeed, there was a long-held legal tradition of asking the oldest members of the community about local customs and liberties, in order to verify that they were true, a point strengthened by the 1290 Statute of Quo Warranto, which granted that written documents were not necessary to

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108 King John’s charter of 1200 is no longer extant, but is printed and translated in The Principal Charters which have been Granted to the Corporation of Ipswich in Suffolk, Translated, ed. Anon. (London, 1754), pp. 1-4. The full terms of the charter are also recorded in Edward I’s charter of 1291, Ipswich, Ipswich Borough Archives, C1/112 and in most subsequent charters. I am grateful to Angela Plumb, Searchroom Assistant at the IBA for her assistance with this point.
prove cases of franchise; evidence could instead be based on ancient claims which had existed in the collective memory 'time out of mind'.

Town legends needed to be popularly known if they were to prove politically useful and therefore urban administrations particularly highlighted legends which were known outside the local area, such as the story of Guy of Warwick's battle with the giant Colbrand outside the walls of Winchester. To a large extent, then, town legends were part of a broader national identity and history, which emphasised Britain's antiquity and in particular its Trojan and Norman heritage. Yet the topography of towns gave their historical preoccupations a distinctively urban emphasis; there was a belief that the nation's ancient founders had focused particularly on the building of civic landmarks like walls and gates. Urban administrations sought to associate their towns with these events and to use their popularity for political ends to further their own jurisdictional claims, to enhance civic 'worship' and to provide a shared identity for the governors and the governed. Like the White Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, they thought that it 'was a poor sort of memory that only works backwards' and instead sought to appropriate and manipulate popular traditions to bolster civic government power. This allowed them to justify their judicial and policing role and in particular to enforce periodic cleansing campaigns which allowed them to project themselves as public-spirited guardians of the inhabitants' spiritual and physical health and well-being.

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Conclusion

Proverbially, 'corporations have neither bodies to be kicked, nor souls to be damned'.¹ This statement has been generally attributed to the eighteenth-century Lord Chancellor, Edward, first baron Thurlow, but it is worth pondering how those living in the 'great age of incorporation' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would have viewed it. Jurists in the late medieval period were much preoccupied with the question of corporate responsibility. Academic debate centred on whether a corporation was simply made up of the mortal men within it, or whether it had an abstract legal personality of its own, called a _persona ficta_, which existed in perpetuity. The thirteenth-century legal scholar Franciscus Accursius argued that 'the corporation is nothing other than the men who are there', a view shared by the early fourteenth-century Oxford theologian and philosopher, William Ockham, who expressly rejected the idea of a _persona ficta_.² By the late fourteenth century, debate on the matter was intense, particularly among the Italian jurists based at Bologna, with Baldus de Ubaldis of Perugia arguing that a corporation in the form of either a city or a kingdom was not simply constituted of its citizen members; in addition, it also had an abstract quality, called _universitas_, which was an immortal, legal identity.³ This theory was then developed to apply to kings, who were perceived to have 'two bodies'; one was the mortal body of the individual king and the other was the immortal, fictive personality of the royal office itself, a subject which has been analysed in detail in Ernst Kantorowicz's well-known study, _The King's Two Bodies_.⁴

It is important to recognise that these are very different arguments from modern debates concerning the responsibility of corporations. Today, particularly with the advent of the 'limited' company, having corporate status is a method by which individual members cannot be held legally responsible for the actions of the group. This view had little credence in the medieval period, at least in terms of

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⁴ E.H. Kantorowicz, _The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Medieval Political Theology_ (2nd ed. Princeton, 1997).
municipal government. The mortal members of a corporation could always be held responsible for their actions and rewarded or punished appropriately. In both theory and practice, then, contemporaries recognised a considerable blurring of the personal and public spheres of politics, at both a national and local level, a point that is in sharp contrast to the frequent modern insistence that the two arenas are different and should, often as a point of principle, be kept separate. Instead, medieval power was intrinsically personal: it was recognised that corporations were made up of people, and so individuals could be held to account. Late medieval scholarly debate instead focused on whether the abstract universitas, as a legal fiction, also had a body and soul which could be held responsible by authorities both in this world and in the afterlife. In fourteenth-century Bologna, most jurists argued that because the corporation as universitas did not have a soul, body or intellect, it could not be punished by either hell or beheading. Dissenters, however, like Oldradus de Ponte, claimed that since corporations had a fictional body, they 'could by the same fiction have a soul'.

Juristic ideas concerning corporate responsibility could hardly fail to be influential in such a litigious period as the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England. It is important to recognise, however, that a collective decision did not, in legal or moral terms, assuage individual guilt. The reiteration in civic records that decisions were taken unanimously and without dissent, therefore, is potentially misleading and it must be remembered that, for contemporaries, this was not a method of avoiding individual responsibility, but was instead intended to ensure that an image of harmonious good governance was maintained, as in-fighting was seen as a sign of sin. In the words of St. Paul, 'agree in what you say, so that there will be no divisions among you. Be completely united, with only one thought and one purpose'. Quarrelling would therefore reduce the authority of officers in the eyes of both the Crown and those they governed.

The universitas of a corporation could, however, be held to account alongside its mortal members by the king or another overlord, who could remove urban liberties

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6 Quoted in Kantorowicz, King's Two Bodies, p. 476.
7 1 Corinthians 1: 10.
from the community permanently or order perpetual acts of restitution. This was rare, but it did occur, most notably in Oxford following the 1355 riot by the townsmen against the University. From 1357 on, the burgesses were required to hold an annual Mass in the University Church on St. Scholastica’s Day and the town officials had to offer 1d each to the saint. This ritual was designed to remind the citizens of the outcome of the legal case, which found heavily in the university’s favour. The abbots of St. Albans were also inclined to emphasise the perpetual nature of their victories over their tenants, most famously by cementing the illegal handmills into the abbey floor in 1331. The purpose of these penalties was to emphasise that they would continue beyond the lifetime of the individual rebels or rioters; it was in fact the immortal *persona ficta* of the corporation that was being punished, as well as its members, although most townsmen would not have framed it in such terms.

In general, however, it was the individual members of a corporation that were held responsible for their actions. Punishments, often in the form of fines or loss of liberties, were generally relatively short-term, although the debts caused by these penalties could sometimes last for a number of years, as at Norwich in the 1440s and 1450s. The temporary nature of reprisals tied in with ideas of redemption and mercy which were at the heart of contemporary expressions of political power. It was also a very practical consideration, as perpetual punishments like those enforced in Oxford and St. Albans were likely to be deeply resented and lead to further problems. As these cases emphasised, the long-standing nature of these sanctions was designed to enhance their severity in the eyes of the current offenders.

In the practice of late medieval English town politics, municipal governments were not particularly concerned regarding the soul of the *persona ficta*; that particular discussion remained largely the preserve of legal scholars and theologians. Members of the civic governing elite were, however, very aware that as mortals they all had souls potentially ripe for damnation. There was an uncomfortable religious emphasis on how the rich and the powerful would be held to account for their actions in the next world, and contemporary political protest, most notably during the rebellion of

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8 *VCH Oxshottshire: City of Oxford*, p. 56.
9 *Above*, p. 151.
10 *Above*, p. 121.
1381, provided a stark reminder to authority figures that in this world they also had bodies to be kicked. Leading townsmen and their wives usually placed a high priority on charitable giving in the urban sphere and local recipients included parish churches, almshouses, hospitals, prisons and the impotent poor. These gifts, particularly in the case of testamentary bequests, were intended to act as remembrances, so the souls of the dead would be recalled by the living in prayer to save them from purgatory, and also so that their worldly reputation would live on within the urban community. Corporations, with their emphasis on written records and public ceremonial, were particularly useful as vehicles of remembrance, because they made it their business to record the 'worshipful' acts of their former members for posterity.

Posthumous remembrance, then, was a collective concern. To some extent, civic records sought to emphasise that their town had always been virtuously governed, by successive generations of officials, but personal involvement was generally prioritised. Some mayors sought long-lasting fame by commissioning new urban customs, while others sought to make their mark through reforming local ordinances. Thomas Spicer, burgess of Bristol, was therefore recorded as saying of William Spencer that 'surely his is a worshipfull man and sith Canynges tyme there was never no suche maire in this town'.

Canynges had, of course, instituted a number of reforms of civic government, as well as endowing two civic chantries. For all the contemporary emphasis on 'ancient custom', simply carrying on with tradition was not generally the most high-profile method of ensuring remembrance for posterity, and so the introduction of new measures, together with posthumous giving, was sometimes used to ensure a long-lasting reputation.

The interdependence of the reputation of the corporation as a whole, and of its individual members, meant that leading men were prepared to finance some aspects of civic political display out of their own pockets, including paying for feasts and 'drinkings' for their fellow officers and select members of the commons. There was clearly an expectation that leading men would use their wealth in this way to promote the 'worship' of the town by providing an opportunity for conviviality. Such expenditure was usually couched in terms of serving the 'common good', as by

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11 GRB, IV, p. 66.
promoting harmony in the governing elite, such events were seen as a method of ensuring the health and spiritual well-being of the whole town and its inhabitants. There was, however, some contemporary unease concerning how such festivities should be funded and many civic officers were careful to pay for these events themselves, rather than taking the money from the common funds, suggesting that they were sensitive to the possibility of criticism of the misuse of civic money.

These group festivities – and the processions and displays which they often accompanied – were important methods of communicating the 'worship' and lordship of both the corporation and individual officers to the wider urban community. The need for an audience is a reminder that civic identity was not only shaped by town officers; the people they governed were partners, albeit junior partners, in the development of civic political ideology. The depiction in the records of civic officers' behaviour as judges in the local courts and as police officers highlights that there was a contemporary sense of *bourgeois oblige* in town administrations, which was recognised as an essential aspect of the political system by both rulers and the ruled. In general, therefore, anti-government sentiment was expressed not in terms of a complete rejection of the civic ideals articulated by local leaders, but by criticism that those ideals were not put into practice by corrupt or incompetent officials.

This thesis has focused on urban political identity, but it is very evident that the ideologies of townspeople were influenced by broader social norms. Above all, ideas of what constituted 'worshipful' and virtuous behaviour were dependant upon the rhetoric of Christian justice, mercy and charity, themes which were all-pervasive in late medieval English society. Christian teaching also, of course, prioritised both the concepts of individual and collective responsibility for sin: while individual souls were weighed before God at the Last Judgment, Divine wrath or pleasure could also be targeted at entire urban groups, such as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah or the earthly Jerusalem. As self-styled representatives of the whole town, therefore, civic officers were responsible for both their own behaviour and the behaviour of their subordinates, both in the eyes of the king and of God. Edward Thurlow would doubtless have found much to admire in the late medieval construction of urban corporate identity.
Illustrations

Fig. 1. Oath-taking ceremony of new mayor in Bristol from Ricart’s *Kalendar*, 1479. Bristol, BRO, 04720, f. 152v. Reproduced with the permission of the Bristol Record Office.
Fig. 2. Initial 'E' of 'Edwardus from Edward III's royal charter to Bristol, 1347. Bristol, BRO, 01250. Reproduced with the permission of the Bristol Record Office.
Figure 3. Initial ‘H’ of ‘Henricus’ from Henry VII’s royal charter to Bristol, 1499. Bristol, BRO, 01230. Reproduced with the permission of the Bristol Record Office.
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