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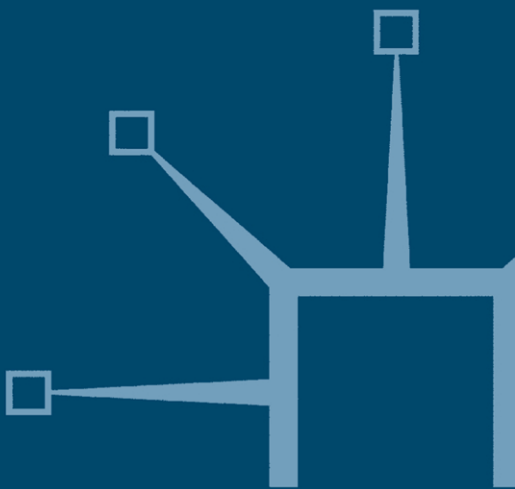
# Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England

Edited by
Norman L. Jones and Daniel Woolf



Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England

*Also by Norman L. Jones*

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16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07

# Contents

# List of Figures and Tables

## Figures



## Tables

# Robert Tittler: An Appreciation

Robert Tittler is a seminal figure in the study of local identity and political culture in the early modern period, as well as a friend and mentor to all those in the field of Tudor and Stuart history. His far-ranging researches have taken him, seemingly, to every local archive in England, and he has a grasp of English local history unrivalled by anyone in the business. Bob's career did not begin with questions of local identity and political culture. A native of New York City, he took his BA at Oberlin and his PhD at New York University (NYU). In the beginning he was, like many graduate students in his generation, set to doing political histories of important men. In Bob's case, that meant Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper under Queen Elizabeth, husband to the impressive Anne Cooke, and brother-in-law to Lord Burghley.

When he was at NYU, it was not a hotbed of early modern studies. Bob was not formally supervised by any of the 'great men' of Tudor history, and as a result he did not acquire either the prejudices or the connections that came with established programs with major scholars. While conducting his research in England, he did have the opportunity to attend seminars at the Institute for Historical Research, and the benefit of mentoring from S.T. Bindoff and Joel Hurstfield, but he had to make his own way in the world without a powerful patron. This may be why Bob's scholarly eye sees things that many others miss. He was never prevented from asking the unexpected question of his sources by prejudices inculcated by early training.

In 1969 Bob, who did not complete his PhD until 1971, became an Assistant Professor at Loyola College of Montreal, which later merged with Sir George Williams University to become Concordia University. He has been there ever since, teaching and sometimes chairing the department, but without doctoral students or the luxury of deep specialization. Despite all this, he remained committed to research, following his own set of questions away from political biography toward the towns.

His first book, *Nicholas Bacon: The Making of a Tudor Statesman*, appeared in 1976.[1] As its title suggests, it was in a genre that Conyers Read and other political biographers had established, and it was a good book. In fact, it remains the only biography of Nicholas Bacon. That done, he turned away from high politics, and introduced himself to the realities of local and social history, editing the *Accounts of the Roberts*

*Family of Boarzell, Sussex, c 1568–1582* (1979) for the Sussex Record Society.[2] This required him to enter deeply into the world of farmers, cattle and material culture. We doubt there are many historians of Tudor political history who can participate in a discussion of what Elizabethan cows weighed!

While learning about cows he was also working on the reign of Mary Tudor, work which produced *The Mid-Tudor Polity* (1980) and *The Reign of Mary Tudor* (1983). He was doing, as he says, 'conventional, nationally focused, and narrative' political history, and his contributions in that area are not to be slighted, but he began slowly to develop an interest in the social and economic history of towns that was evidenced in articles he was publishing in the late seventies. By his own account, he was converted to their study in 1975, when he read Peter Clark and Paul Slack's *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, a collection whose arguments have continued to engage him. Perhaps, he was reading them because in the middle of the 1970s he had begun work on the fishing industry of Great Yarmouth and the issue of civic incorporation.[3]

By the time his sabbatical came around in 1982, he was ready to begin his famously manic dashes to town archives all over England. He has probably worked in more of these than anyone in North America (with the possible exception of Marjorie McIntosh) and they have provided him with a world of material for exploring how townspeople perceived and ran their communities. His early articles on towns led him naturally toward the problem of community self-perception. In particular, he published an important article on the 'Emergence of Urban Policy, 1536–58'.[4] There, he showed how towns were used by Westminster and the ways in which they used Westminster in their turn, especially to gain incorporation and Parliamentary representation. In the wake of the Reformation, towns were forced to fill many of the voids left by disappearing ecclesiastical institutions, such as the great monasteries at Reading and Bury St Edmunds, but in exchange they acquired a much stronger position in the nation. In this period, 44 new boroughs were incorporated in England, each with better demarcated borders, roles and rulers. These new powers, and the opportunities that accompanied them, created new needs for social definition, along with a new kind of urban politics. Understanding what happened in the resulting process would occupy Tittler's mind for many years to come.

Because he was interested in what happened in the middle of the sixteenth century, he had to understand the structures and economies of medieval towns. As he felt his way into the subject, he wrote an article on how we understand late medieval urban prosperity through the town

records.[5] A short piece, it suggested the problems of late medieval tax records, and the difficulties of writing urban histories at the intersection of two historical periods. Yet, for Tittler, the close of the Middle Ages had a very clear date: not the 1485 accession of the first Tudor, Henry VII, but 1540, the opening of what was once famously called 'Tawney's Century', when the dissolution of the monasteries changed both the urban and the rural world. In many English towns, the Reformation almost literally ended the Middle Ages.[6]

What happened in English towns because of the Reformation fascinated him. While studying incorporation, he had realized that the successive waves of ecclesiastical reorganization, dissolution, iconoclasm and restoration that had washed back and forth over the towns had made a deep impression on many of them. The disappearance of monastic landlords, the emergence of a class of new lay oligarchs, the loss of revenues, the opportunities for self government, and all the other effects of the Reformation forced the better sorts of town folk to renegotiate both their individual and their civic identities – it is these negotiations, among many possible lines suggested by Tittler's work, that we have taken as the theme for the present collection of chapters.

The evidence soon led Tittler into the even larger issue of the political cultures of the towns. Thinking further and further outside the box of traditional political history, the connection between civic architecture and power in the towns pounced on him when he least expected it. Once grabbed by the connection, he began to wander in fields frequently avoided by more traditional historians. First, like the antiquaries of the sixteenth century, he went to the towns themselves to see the physical remains of the urban environments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As he remarked, 'our near exclusive preoccupation with written or spoken sources has overwhelmed a consciousness of the physical record'.[7] Secondly, he became interested in the anthropological theories of the late Clifford Geertz about display and the use of space, a thoroughly pragmatic and evidence-driven scholar flirting with a much more theoretically informed and extradisciplinary way of looking at the function of town halls. Last but not least, he asked the critical questions how these new civic spaces were used and what those uses could tell us about the way urban identity was enacted.

The book that embodied these approaches began with a history of the architectural genre (a chapter that Bob self-effacingly suggested could be 'skipped altogether by the "pure" historian in a hurry'), before moving to more abstract, anthropological considerations of urban autonomy, oligarchy, and, ultimately, civic culture.[8] As the book's title implies,

he had been impressed with the insight that Geertz and his students have brought to our understanding of the ways buildings interact with social display and the maintenance of power, so it is not surprising that he taught us to see town halls as the doorways into the towns themselves, portals playing a pragmatic economic role while also transmitting the shared values of the dominant merchants. The buildings mediated between the urban community and the agrarian milieu in which the towns were located, conveying – through their clocks, bells, market-by-laws and portraits of the merchant-mayors who presided there – the aspirations of a bourgeois society.

Work on the town halls, however, was part of a higher and more ambitious trajectory. Tittler continued to research the impact of the Reformation on the towns, and the political culture of the urban elites who led their communities through all the changes of the sixteenth century. In 1997, over 20 years of research on English towns came together in his magisterial *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540–1640*. Opening it, one can see the bones of his earlier research, and the way earlier books and articles began to form coherent patterns that document the material and cultural impact of the urban Reformations. Unlike Christopher Haigh's fine book on the plural reformations of English parishes,[9] Bob, in this work, was not looking at religious effects *per se*. He concentrated on the material implications of the great religious upheaval as it was enacted in hundreds of communities across the realm. One of his important points, again hearkening back to R.H. Tawney and even to the seventeenth-century political writer James Harrington, was that the Reformation created great opportunities for acquisition of property, while changing the balances of power. When the dust from the destruction began to settle, the towns were faced with the necessity of working out new lines of authority and dealing with what, for some, was almost an 'orphan' status.

The material changes in the communities changed their identities, and the people who began to redefine the towns were the oligarchs who emerged as the new urban elite, displacing and replacing older authorities. It was these merchant leaders who caught his attention as he worked on town halls and on the Reformation. The ways they understood their places in their communities and the way they expressed their position, imposing civic identity on their towns, became the focus of his next book, *Townspeople and Nation English Urban Experiences 1540–1640* (2004). This charming work consists of a set of biographies of people whose lives stand out in the histories of their communities: John Browne of Boston, John Pitt of Blandford Forum, Joan and John

Cooke of Gloucester, Thomas White of London, Henry Manship of Great Yarmouth, Joyce Jeffries of Hertford, and an odd pair, Swaddon 'the Swindler' and Pulman the 'thief taker' of London. They all leap from the records as people of note, men and women who contributed both to creating the identity – or identities – and to shaping the collective memory of their communities.

By the time Bob Tittler was writing this book, his views on town culture had become very nuanced and highly sophisticated. At bottom, of course, he knew that one could not understand the towns without understanding the interests, desires and motivations of the people who gave them their identities. Consequently, he was moving beyond questions of social and economic life, politics and government to considerations of more ethereal issues of collective memory, identity and reputation. All of these, he has argued, apply to civic behaviour and urban life and are emphatically *not* susceptible to analysis over *la longue durée*. They are only visible in the lives of individuals, whose 'stories remind us that historical themes are often shaped by the collective activity of myriad individuals, and that a nation's history is also a history of the collective experience of its people'.[10]

As in so many of his works, Bob was wrestling with Paul Slack's and Peter Clark's argument for urban crisis in the period, and with the work of other urban scholars such as Charles Phythian–Adams. Their work had been firmly rooted in economic and social history of the sort approved by the *Annalistes*, somewhat less interested in people than in macrolevel issues. After all his years spent exploring the history of English towns, Tittler had found their histories much more complex and chronologically specific. Slack and Clark may have been right about the big picture, but the little pictures differed from place to place and person to person. This was borne home to him in the literal proliferation of little pictures – portraits to be exact, the paintings that began to appear in town halls to rehearse the genealogies of the local oligarchies that ran the towns and to commemorate their individual members.

In his efforts to understand the cultures of English towns, Tittler has modeled sophisticated ways of thinking about how community identity is formed, how individuals find and project their own identity or plural identities in the context of their several intersecting circles of social engagement, and the ways in which community identity is displayed. Any scholar interested in his field would find Tittler's work powerful and influential, but, as every contributor to the present volume can attest, his willingness to support other scholars and to lead his colleagues in shaping our work has made a deep impact. We can perhaps see this most

succinctly in the article in *Albion* wherein Tittler rallied us all to think in new ways about the study of early modern England.[11] There, he calls for scholars of early modern Britain to use the tools of other disciplines, and to escape the simple positivism of earlier and more narrowly political conceptions of its history. His personal search for the sources of local political cultures informs his, and our, understanding of the organic nature of community and identity.

Of course, any student of political culture will recognize that we are all immersed in our own communities, and those of us who live intellectually and professionally within the often fractious and increasingly open-bordered community of early modern English historians recognize, above all, Tittler's great generosity of spirit and commitment to helping other scholars, including many at the very outset of their careers. Our particular historiographic town has been shaped and lent its historical identity by Robert Tittler. The chapters that follow, and the authors, are all indebted to him.

## Notes

1. *Nicholas Bacon: The Making of a Tudor Statesman* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976). Works cited below are all by Robert Tittler.
2. *Accounts of the Roberts Family of Boarzell, Sussex, c 1568–1582* (Lewes: Sussex Record Society, 1979).
3. This work produced 'The English Fishing Industry in the Sixteenth Century, the Case of Great Yarmouth', *Albion*, 9 (1977), 40–60; and 'The Incorporation of Boroughs, 1540–1558', *History*, 62 (1977), 24–42.
4. 'The Emergence of Urban Policy 1536–58', in Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler, eds, *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c. 1540–1560* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), pp. 74–93.
5. 'Late Medieval Urban Prosperity', *Economic History Review*, 2nd edn Ser. 37 (1984), 551–4.
6. 'The End of the Middle Ages in the English Country Town'. *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18:4 (1987), 471–87.
7. *Architecture and Power. The Town Hall and the English Urban Community c. 1540–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1.
8. Ibid., p. 21.
9. *The Reformation and the Towns in England. Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
10. *Townspeople and Nation. English Urban Experiences 1540–1640* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 5.
11. 'Early Modern British History, Here and There, Now and Again', *Albion*, 31 (1999), 190–206.

# Notes on Contributors

**Ian W. Archer** is Fellow, Tutor and University Lecturer in History at Keble College, Oxford. He is the author of *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London, The History of the Haberdashers' Company*, and various articles on the social and cultural history of early modern London. He is currently working on aspects of charity, and a general book on London, 1550–1720. He is also the General Editor of the AHRC funded Royal Historical Society Bibliography of British and Irish History (www.rhs.ac.uk/bibl).

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Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire for a future REED volume. She has written extensively on many aspects of early English drama.

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**Shannon McSheffrey** is Professor of History at Concordia University in Montreal. She has published a number of scholarly articles and four books on issues related to heresy, gender and marriage in England in the late Middle Ages, most recently *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London (2006)*. Her article 'Heresy, Orthodoxy, and English Vernacular Religion, 1480–1525', published in *Past and Present* in 2005, won the 2006 NACBS Walter D. Love Prize for best article. She is currently at work on a book exploring how late medieval Londoners

used the legal and archival powers of governing authorities in order to negotiate their lives.

**Catherine F. Patterson** is Associate Professor of History and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Houston. She is author of *Urban Patronage in Early Modern England: Corporate Boroughs, the Landed Elite, and the Crown, 1580–1640* (1999), as well as a number of scholarly articles on urban political culture and government. She is currently working on a book manuscript on urban politics in the 1620s and 1630s.

**Joseph P. Ward** is Associate Professor and Chair of the History Department at the University of Mississippi. He is the author of *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (1997) and an editor of *Protestant Identities: Religion, Society, and Self-Fashioning in Post-Reformation England* (1999); *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850* (1999, reissued 2006); and *Britain and the American South: From Colonialism to Rock and Roll* (2005). His chapter in this volume is drawn from his current research into the cultural relations between early modern London and provincial communities.

**Daniel Woolf** is Professor of History and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. Among his books are *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (1990), *Reading History in Early Modern England* (2000), and *The Social Circulation of the Past* (2003). In addition he has co-edited several volumes of essays and is the author of articles in journals such as the *American Historical Review* and *Past* and *Present*. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Society of Canada, and the Royal Historical Society.

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# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| *Alum. Cant.* | *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, ed. J. Venn and J.A. Venn, 2 pts in 10 vols (Cambridge, 1922–1954) |
| BL | British Library, London |
| Bodl | Bodleian Library, Oxford |
| GL | Guildhall Library, London |
| GLRO | Greater London Record Office |
| *ODNB* | *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) |
| RO | Record Office |
| *STC* | *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English books printed abroad, 1475–1640 first compiled by A.W. Pollard & G.R. Redgrave*, 2nd edn, ed. W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson, and Katharine F. Pantzer, 3 vols (London: Bibliography Society, 1976–1991). |
| TNA | The National Archives: Public Record Office (formerly PRO) |
| VCH | Victoria History of the Counties of England |

# Introduction

*Daniel Woolf and Norman L. Jones*

This book grew out of our conversations about Robert Tittler's retirement and the ways he has taught us to understand the complexity of issues of identity and community in late medieval and early modern England.

We live today in a world of 'identity politics' in which deeply held convictions about race, religion, nationality, gender and sexual orientation frequently collide and erupt into debate, argument and violent confrontation. These issues are not confined to the obvious ethnic 'hot spots' – the former Yugoslavia, the remnants of the Soviet Union, the Middle East and Africa – that continue to dominate international news coverage with depressing frequency. Nor, of course, are they even confined to the ethnic issues that provided a backdrop to much of the global confrontation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which find latter-day successors in Rwanda and Sudan. Western nations have experienced different sorts of identity conflicts in recent years, and while these have rarely exploded into genocide or civil war, they have proved just as intractable. The economic and communications 'globalization' of the past decade has been simultaneously the financial Grail of the right with its promised erasure of fiscal, trade and political barriers, and the modern Antichrist of the left because of its destruction of local economic and political autonomy and its perceived widening of gaps between haves and have-nots.

If it is true, as Benedict Anderson and others have suggested (and not all scholars would accept this argument), that 'nationalism' is a creation of the modern world,[1] it is certainly not the case that a sense of nationality or race, allowing for changes in meanings of terms, also emerged only in the post-Napoleonic world of ethnic awakening and romantic historicism. There is plenty of evidence locating such sentiments in times as far back as the early Middle Ages or even in antiquity. In late

medieval and early modern England, the focus of this book, nationality was constructed, virtually in an Andersonian sense, by chroniclers, playwrights, poets, historians, religious and other writers, building on a well-developed foundation of 'mythistory' traceable back through the *Brut* and Geoffrey of Monmouth.[2] These included the antiquaries and 'chorographers' who, even when they characterized single shires only, did so within the context of that broader Britain described by the most influential of their number, William Camden in his *Britannia* (1586).[3] The almost incalculable importance of a work such as Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, the 'Book of Martyrs', in formulating English identity has received much attention in the past few years,[4] but the printed word alone, however influential, did not create that identity, much less the nascent imperial Britain whose further development has been traced, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, by Linda Colley.[5] Students of seventeenth-century popular rituals and calendar celebrations, in particular, have enriched our understanding of how key events such as the Gunpowder Plot and the Spanish Armada, or the accession of Elizabeth I on 17 November 1558, annually commemorated, established the 'public' sense of England as a Protestant nation.[6] Protestantism (and its unifying feature, anti-catholicism) continued to be a defining feature first of 'Englishness'; later, following union of the kingdoms in 1707, it continued to lie at the core of 'Britishness' throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century, though the definition of what was and was not Protestant itself proved increasingly fractured.[7]

But it is a mistake to conflate sense of identity with sense of nation, however the latter term be defined. As modern and postmodern discussions of individual affiliation, especially in the West, have illustrated, identity is formulated around discreet persons' understanding of their place in time and history, their social context, their involuntary affiliations (sex, parentage and heredity; birth-order; birth-class), and their voluntary – which does not equate to 'free' – associations (religion; marital or cohabitational relationship; career; social organizations; place of residence). Moreover, identities are now deemed to be fluid, protean and socially or rhetorically constructed, by the subjects themselves as well as by their associates. Indeed, identity is in many ways defined or crystallized only in the course of argument – it is not necessary to assert one's status as white or black, straight or gay, white-collar or working-class, Jewish, Muslim or Catholic unless that identity is challenged, its value questioned, or its existence threatened. What is also very clear is that individuals construct and present different identities depending not only upon their personal circumstances but also upon the constantly

changing present circumstances in which they find themselves. The two editors of the present book both live in western parts of Canada and the United States but neither would identify themselves principally by geography of either birth or habitation. Both of them are historians, even 'early modern British historians', but may identify with different sub-groups – historians of politics and religion and/or social-cultural historians.

Identity (and specifically consciousness and definition of 'self') has been a favoured subject of philosophy and its modernist offshoot, psychology. Unlike discussions of nationalism or race, psychohistorical approaches such as those famously published by Erik H. Erikson begin with the individual, in particular the infantile individual, and trace the process of ego-formation within its historical and social context, and as the once-formed identity in turn behaves in ways that affect external events significantly.[8] Students of 'life-writing', including the genre of autobiography but also more informal modes of written self-presentation, while by no means subscribing to a single school of psychological theory, have in the past 30 years explored many aspects of the interaction between lives lived and lives written, both by others and by the life's own liver.[9] Political philosophers such as Charles Taylor have traced the 'making of the modern identity' and with it the birth of a sense of inwardness, by way of explaining the emergence of the autonomous, moral individual.[10] Hot on the heels of existentialism, postmodernism has in turn challenged the very notion of a stable 'inner personal identity': according to Michel Foucault, Roy Porter has suggested, 'We don't think our thoughts; they think us'.[11]

While a good deal of this literature focuses on the Enlightenment and even later periods, there has been considerable attention to the late medieval and Renaissance eras, the time at which, it can still be argued, something like the modern sense of self or subjectivity first appeared as a cultural feature,[12] and when notions of 'private' and 'public' also began to emerge.[13] In the scholarship on early modern England, the heirs to an older Burckhardtian tradition of Renaissance individualism have, in the past generation, been New Historicists who have used literary and historical evidence to explore the ways in which selves were fashioned, indeed 'self-fashioned', by those with social and political aspirations.[14] Others have approached the issue of individual identity through analysis of religious choice – especially the conscious decision to join, or leave, a suppressed or persecuted minority or even radical group – and economic or political affiliation. Most recently, medieval and early modern gender studies have added a further dimension as, in addition to the

birth-category of sex, the contemporary definition and understanding of terms such as 'male' and 'female' and 'masculine' and 'feminine', and the social and cultural processes at work in 'becoming' masculine or feminine must now be considered.[15] Others have reminded us that age-cohort and generation will surely have featured in any individual's understanding of whom and what they were.[16] Of course, individuals have multiple and evolving identities because they belong to overlapping and interlocking communities defined by age, gender, social status, profession, habitation and other things. And in many of these areas, different forms of social capital were generated that guided performance within the various communities.

There is a parallel historiography on early modern England that has focused on identity more indirectly, by way of tracing the relationship between the local and the national. The impulse behind this scholarship, at least in its first iterations, has been the compelling need to understand the central political events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, respectively the Protestant Reformations and the English Civil Wars. (That these terms are now routinely pluralized, like the term 'identities', is a further testimony to the fact that we are riding the tube of a new wave of nominalism, in which pluralization is much safer than generalization.) Since the first county-based studies of the late 1960s and 1970s, which helpfully explored the role of England's shires in developing allegiances,[17] especially political and familial, thinking about the 'county community' has evolved. The integrity of the county as a meaningful region has been challenged by Ann Hughes and others. More recently, the previously supposed detachment and isolation of its inhabitants from events on the national and international stage has been called into question.[18] Others have found that larger regions such as the southwest provide more meaningful units of analysis. Within those regions, vagaries of landscape and climate, agrarian practices and settlement patterns were as likely to have been determinative of political and religious behaviour as the county itself.[19] The sophistication of local and regional studies has steadily increased, and has adjusted to both revisionism and post-revisionism; the authors of these studies have profited both from continental and global comparisons, where relevant, from the expanding literature since the late 1970s on popular culture and ritual,[20] and frequently from interdisciplinary research, especially in cultural anthropology.[21] Recent works on oral culture, by Adam Fox and Andy Wood in particular, have illustrated both the enduring power of the spoken word even in a rising tide of print, and the survival of

local and regional dialects, stories and traditions which in themselves fed into the creation and maintenance of local identities.[22]

The shires of course represent only one dimension of the local landscape. Cities and towns, in the counties but never entirely of them, were by the sixteenth century already for the most part long incorporated or chartered as autonomous political, fiscal and economic entities. Beginning with Peter Clark and Paul Slack's important edited collection, *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, the social structure and political, economic, material, religious and ceremonial lives of late medieval and early modern townspeople have been intensively studied.[23] If political and religious historians (and to some degree historians of crime) have dominated the county historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the pasts of the town and the city have preeminently been owned by social and economic historians, in particular those of the so-called Cambridge school of demography associated with Peter Laslett, Roger Schofield and E.A. Wrigley. Scholars such as Jeremy Boulton, in his study of seventeenth-century Southwark, have worked through the sources to reconstruct patterns of marital, occupational, religious and other affiliations.[24] Keith Wrightson and David Levine have studied smaller provincial communities, such as the Essex village of Terling and the northern coal-producing town of Whickham, over a longer period of time in order to develop a deep understanding of social life over a period of centuries, an approach also taken by Marjorie K. McIntosh in her magisterial studies of the late medieval and Tudor manors of Havering.[25] Much attention has also been focused on London and its environs, which grew from simply the biggest among several not-very-big urban communities at the end of the Middle Ages into the largest metropolis in Europe by the start of the eighteenth century.[26]

Focusing on the earlier seismic rupture of the advent and spread of Protestantism, two generations of historians of religion have shifted our gaze from the court, Parliament and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the religious opponents of both on Catholic and recusant right or Presbyterian and sectarian left, and on to the dramas that played out in specific towns, villages and parishes.[27] Just as the county historiography of the seventeenth century has its urban twin in studies of city politics during and after the civil wars and Restoration,[28] so the early revisionist works of Reformation scholars such as Christopher Haigh,[29] again focused on the county as the unit of analysis, have been joined by many studies of religious life and spirituality at the municipal, parochial and even neighbourhood level.[30] A recent useful collection of essays has

summarized current scholarship on various types of administrative unit under the broad but inclusive rubric of 'communities', while reminding us that more informal, and trans-local or trans-national communities such as social networks and rhetorical or literary circles were historically just as important as local and formal ones in defining spheres of interaction.[31]

The point of the previous paragraphs has not been simply to summarize the richness of 30 years of early modern historiography but rather to illustrate two different points relevant to the current book. The first is the complexity of different threads of scholarship that have, in different and often parallel rather than overlapping ways, illuminated our understanding of the significance of the local, however that is defined. In geographic terms, one's locality is as broad as one chooses to make it, and is probably best conceptualized as a series of overlapping rather than concentric spheres beginning with individual and family and radiating out from there; while it is no longer widely believed that there was little geographic mobility in early modern England, it is certainly still true that for the vast majority of the poorer and middling sort, the quotidian world unfolded principally in the narrowest of these spheres, the family, and generated out from there to include parish, town, nation and, for those who either joined the ranks of international trading companies or of early colonists, the wider globe. The second point takes us back to the beginning of this introduction and the problem of defining identities themselves, local or otherwise, as these are realized in historically concrete situations. The authors of chapters in this book have all approached the historical problem of the local in different ways, but all have here and in previous work explored the impact of local affiliation on the formation of individual and collective identities. Each of them, along with the two co-editors, has been influenced by the work of Robert Tittler, who in the past 25 years has produced an extraordinary quantity of scholarship on civic life in early modern England, particularly in smaller and less studied urban communities.[32] This book is occasioned both by a common problematic – the place of the local in the making of identities over the period from the later Middle Ages to the end of the seventeenth century – and by the scholarship of Tittler himself, who has borrowed from literary analysis, art history and economic and social history to fashion a rich 'portrait' of local and especially urban communities during the spread of the Elizabethan and early Stuart Reformations.

In this portrait, he manages to revivify political history because of the way he came to study these places. The result is a salutary emphasis on 'political culture' as an explanatory tool.

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Although unlike parishes, counties, manors and towns they had no legal or formal definition, the neighbourhood formed the most immediate and inescapable social context for all but the most migrant members of the population. The decline of neighbourliness in an economy of nascent capitalism and frequent sharp social dislocation has been posited many times, in parallel with the decline in hospitality which was also once believed to have occurred in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[33] In the opening chapter of the book, Keith Wrightson offers a reconsideration of the role and status of neighbourliness in the early modern era. As Wrightson suggests, neighbours depended on each other for both practical assistance and for common spiritual salvation. Protestantism seriously diminished the capacity of the neighbourhood to contribute to the latter over the course of a century and a half, first by rupturing the community of late medieval catholic belief and practice and later (and more seriously) further subdividing itself into sectarian divisions following which 'parish' and 'neighbourhood' lost any remaining quality of alignment. Wrightson does not suggest that neighbourliness did *not* in fact decline, but he points to questions of conflicting individual affiliation – how and with whom families and individuals identified must be seen as critical to further exploration of the question.

Religion created other forms of complexity within social relations, well before the advent of Protestantism. The long-running conflicts between ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction played out on a local stage when the disciplining of pre-Reformation clerics was an issue. In late medieval London, as Shannon McSheffrey demonstrates in her chapter, sexual offences by the clergy created tensions within the urban community. Were priests and friars members of their estate first and foremost and thus immune from civil prosecution? Or were they denizens of a community and thus answerable as much to local as to church authority? Re-reading a well-known medieval fictional account of clerical lechery, Geoffroy de la Tour Landry's *Book of the Knight*, against contemporary judicial records, McSheffrey sketches the careful and sometimes hesitant manner in which civil authorities tested the limits of their jurisdiction, and pushed the question of the status of the clergy

among their number. In doing so, she reminds us, they were not simply addressing practical problems of sexual licentiousness but also adopting a moral and spiritual position: 'their rule was godly as well as worldly'.

A fundamental aspect of identity formation is the establishment of those who belong and those who do not, and the management of the integration or expulsion of the latter. Marjorie McIntosh's chapter focuses on the problem of the outsider in late medieval and Tudor market towns. Using a wide array of records, McIntosh demonstrates how powerful families employed their local courts from the late thirteenth to the early seventeenth century 'to define membership within the physical and administrative space they controlled', thereby fashioning and maintaining a local identity. As with much of her earlier work, McIntosh's useful straddling of the canyon that often divides the late medieval from the early modern reveals habits of urban identity formation, including the processes of selectively admitting 'strangers' and 'foreigners' (outsiders of any kind rather than persons of a non-English origin) and of expelling miscreants – of however long residence – from the fold; these habits survived both the social dislocations of the sixteenth century and the impact of the Tudor Reformations.[34]

As the preceding chapters suggest, identities are formed at least as much by defining the outsider from the insider, and by setting boundaries between the two that are not only geographical but also social and perceptual.[35] 'The boundary' as one social scientist has observed, 'marks the beginning and the end of a community' and arises from 'the exigencies of social interaction'.[36] The problem of municipal demarcation, the urban cousin of the parochial 'beating of the bounds', took on another dimension of complexity when national political boundaries, themselves unstable and contested, were also at issue. Through the case study of the border community of Berwick (prior to the union of the Crowns in 1603, officially an English town but with a considerable Scottish population both resident and transient), K.J. Kesselring suggests that issues of national allegiance and sovereignty could not be resolved by contemporaries in the abstract, or even simply by reference to royal politics and legislation. Borrowing from continental European work on border regions such as the Pyrenees,[37] Kesselring shows that the local was not only defined by the national but itself also created nationality. Citizens of Berwick adopted English identity, at least in part, because of the peculiar circumstances of their town. Berwick had suffered economically over a period of three centuries from military conflict, from changes in possession, and from the imposition of putative borders that belied the cohabitation of Scots and English. Its citizens not infrequently

combined to pursue their own collective interests rather than those of their respective crowns. Borderers could alternately resist or adopt the interference of the state into their affairs as it suited them to do so. The succession of James VI to the throne of England altered this picture somewhat in the sense that the wall-building and fortification that had marked especially the early years of Elizabeth's reign finally gave way, Kesselring suggests, to 'bridge-building', but the foundations for this bridge, and for amicable Anglo-Scottish co-existence within the most disputed of all regions of both countries, had been laid out by townsfolk long before.

Even well below the borders, the north presented governance problems throughout the late medieval and early modern centuries. The only major rebellion against Henry VIII emanated principally from the north, while three decades later the greatest crisis of the early years of Elizabeth's reign involved a revolt of northern earls still presiding over the remnants of a bastard feudal society.[38] The large and unevenly populated county of Lancashire, as Christopher Haigh showed long ago, was the very model of a 'slow Reformation' shire in which resistance to Protestantism continued well into the seventeenth century. Joseph Ward's chapter on the Lancashire parish of Kirkham and its connections with London return us to religious themes, and offer an enlightening illustration of the progressive Reformation of the parish as transplanted Protestant vicars stimulated godliness among local families, thereby fracturing what had been a firmly catholic parish through most of the sixteenth century. Godliness engendered a spiritual community but at the same time created or exacerbated tensions internal to any parish. The problem was accentuated, and parochial cohesion more difficult to enforce, in territorially large parishes such as Kirkham where geography kept many parishioners at worship in nearby chapels rather than in a common church. The result of some of this wrangling was an illuminating Restoration Chancery case in which the meaning of parochial identity was put to the test. The religious experiments of the 1640s and 1650s, such as the arbitrary grouping of Kirkham with several other parishes into a Presbyterian classis in 1646, further encouraged the 'disintegration of the parish into smaller communities with separate sensibilities', as Ward puts it, echoing Wrightson's earlier comments on Protestant fragmentation and neighbourliness. 'The church in Kirkham may never have exerted a strong influence over all of the people in its territory, but what little influence it may have had was shattered by the Civil Wars and Interregnum.'

The process of identity-formation was as complex for individuals as for the overlapping communities in which they dwelt. For the local worthy, the gentleman or knight with social and political ambitions and connections that straddled the manorial, county and national stages, a more fundamental sort of affiliation, the family, both consanguineous and marital, could provide the foundational and relatively coherent self-definition upon which would incrementally be superimposed a variety of political, religious and social roles. A reminder of the critical place of the family, and a useful illustration of individual 'self-fashioning', or at least of 'self-affiliation' is provided by Alexandra Johnston in the case of Sir Francis Knollys. A minor Elizabethan official, Knollys was connected to the queen by marriage to her cousin Katherine Carey, and to the Leicester faction at court through the successive matches of their daughter Lettice with Walter Devereux, earl of Essex and Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. Prominent and well-established in southern Oxfordshire, where his estates were principally located, Knollys had a very strong sense of his own 'local identity', but it was a sense constantly modulated by, and often in conflict with, his fervent evangelical Protestantism – he had endured exile to Frankfurt under Queen Mary – and with his national, parliamentary and courtly roles. Stability in house and estate was undercut by almost continuous concerns for the safety of the Queen and the future prospects of English Protestantism.

A foil to Johnston's conflicted Elizabethan courtier appears in Catherine Patterson's chapter. This offers us another individual portrait, this time of Francis Parlett, Recorder of King's Lynn. Parlett was born over 70 years after Knollys, but more than three generations and several decades separate them. The eldest son of a minor Norfolk gentleman, Parlett spent his career in much greater obscurity than Knollys, venturing into neither Court nor Commons. Parlett's own sense of identity could thus easily have become, apart from his friendships at Cambridge University and his professional connections as a lawyer, overwhelmingly local. A town-dweller though not engaged in a craft or trade, he was certainly comfortable in his urban prominence, at least until his Royalism forced his ejection as Recorder in 1643. However, the extensive diary that he kept exposes cracks in this confident façade. Where Knollys had half a century earlier been fixated on the stability of the Elizabethan regime and of the Protestant settlement, Parlett illustrates an obsessive concern with religious nonconformity, whether from recusants or 'schismatics', and with the need to maintain order in the face of misbehaviour, witchcraft, drunkenness and idleness, all of which were parcelled together with religious unrest. For Parlett, his