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Cultures of surveillance in late medieval English towns: the monitoring of speech and the fear of revolt¹

Christian Liddy

The sheriffs, wrote John Carpenter in his 1419 book of the customs of London, ‘are called “the eyes of the mayor”’. They are ‘the eyes of the mayor, watchful and supportive of the responsibilities which the said mayor, as one person, is not able to bear on his own’ (*Sunt quoque Vicecomites Majoris oculi, conspicientes et supportantes partem sollicitudinis quae dicti Majoris personae singularitas portare non sufficit*).² At first glance, Carpenter’s metaphor does not seem at all surprising: the inhabitants of late medieval English towns were accustomed to think of their communities as urban bodies. The organological metaphor was so familiar that it could serve multiple and, sometimes, conflicting functions. It informed contemporary attitudes towards public health and animated far-reaching social, moral, and environmental policies.³ Politically, organic imagery could appeal for a state of reciprocity between the limbs of the urban body politic. More contentiously, it could demand the subordination of the various members of the body to the chief magistrate, the ‘head’. Carpenter’s appropriation of the metaphor was unusual because of his interest not only in the ‘head’, but also in the ‘eyes’. If the ‘head’ represented intellect and reason, and was the source of wisdom, the ‘eyes’ were the senses. The burden of office in London was too great for any one man, Carpenter suggested. The mayor could not do everything; he needed help to discharge his official duties. The sheriffs were there to share the heavy weight of public responsibility. They were the mayor’s ‘eyes’; they could see what he could not.

Carpenter was not the first writer to approach the practice of government as a sensory experience. In Book 5 of the *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury deployed his classical learning to imagine the twelfth-century kingdom of England as a human body, in which the king was the head, and the judges and sheriffs – ‘provincial governors’ in the language of the Roman Empire – were the eyes, the ears, and the tongue. These three organs endowed the prince’s judicial officers with the faculties of sight, hearing, and taste. Exercised by others on his behalf, these senses joined body and mind, increased the prince’s cognitive powers, and enabled him to administer justice through greater knowledge and understanding.⁴ Carpenter’s description of the London sheriffs differs in three respects. First, where Salisbury is concerned with princely virtue and with the positive role of the prince, Carpenter’s tone is less confident and more apprehensive. Secondly, where Salisbury’s framework is multi-sensory, Carpenter’s attention is exclusively to the eyes. And thirdly, Carpenter’s conception of the sheriffs’ vision is much more literal. The nineteenth-century editor of the London customal translated the participle *conspicientes* as ‘ever on the watch’.⁵ Against whom were the sheriffs to be vigilant? Who were they to watch? Which areas of the city were they to watch?

The short passage from Carpenter’s *Liber albus* helpfully introduces the theme of this essay: the relationship between surveillance and urban disorder. Carpenter’s choice of the noun *sollicitudo*, which could be translated not only as ‘duty’, but also as ‘anxiety’, conveyed the general uneasiness that surrounded the mayoral office in early fifteenth-century London. The memory of the 1380s – of confrontations on the streets of the capital between the supporters of rival claimants to the London mayoralty, John of Northampton and Nicholas Brembre – had not dimmed by the late 1410s, when Carpenter completed his book.⁶ But in prioritizing the eyes over the ears, Carpenter’s

dread was large-scale, open revolt. The argument here is that surveillance arose from a complex connection between rebellion and speech.

The *word* ‘surveillance’ is a nineteenth-century coinage; and in the wake of Michel Foucault’s work on the invention of the prison during the Enlightenment, the *practice* of surveillance has tended to be examined in relation to one, or both, of two metanarratives: the onset of modernity and the emergence of the disciplining power of the state.⁷ The origins of modernity are, of course, a matter of debate. Medievalists, interested in questions of power and social control, have explored concepts and mechanisms of surveillance in earlier periods and practised by a variety of institutions. R. I. Moore’s now classic story of the western church’s use of techniques of religious and moral surveillance to ensure doctrinal orthodoxy, and to maintain authority between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, continues to be a touchstone for scholarship on the classification, stigmatization, and extirpation of ‘dissent’ in the Middle Ages.⁸

Surveillance has also been subsumed into the paradigm of ‘early’ modernity. To write about surveillance in the early modern period has been to reconstruct the processes by which states were centralized, extended, and consolidated. The dynamics of state growth were not homogeneous. To historians of continental Europe, Jacob Burckhardt’s cultural history of the ‘Renaissance’, which the nineteenth-century historian saw not as a transition but as a rupture with the medieval past, has cast a long shadow. According to Burckhardt, the Renaissance was not so much a rebirth as a new beginning, characterized by a modern kind of politics, which was brutal, calculating, and atomizing, and by a new sense of individuality. Governments investigated, recorded, and counted their citizens, for reasons of state.⁹ The Venetian

city-state, Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan has argued, was built on the collection and control of information. Between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, surveillance of the spoken and written word became an everyday political activity for a regime that aspired to omniscience. It was, Crouzet-Pavan concluded, an important stage in the movement towards 'modernity'.¹⁰ Over the last twenty years, historians of early modern England have presented a co-operative and composite model of state development, in which the encroachment of the monarchical state upon the lives of ordinary subjects depended, simultaneously, upon their active participation in government. The governing culture of early modern England, where the multi-layered apparatus of the state was embedded in the structures of local society, was one of information-gathering: names were listed, people counted, land surveys commissioned, and economic resources tabulated.¹¹ However we wish to consider the 'state', and however we define 'modernity', these concepts have dominated accounts of surveillance.¹²

This essay is about neither the dynamics of state formation nor the route to modernity. It makes three points. First, late medieval English towns were surveillance societies, in which townspeople were habitually watched and their activities reported for the benefit of government. Secondly, there was a qualitative and quantitative expansion of surveillance, and changes in modes of data collection and record-keeping, from the last quarter of the fifteenth century. There was a specific, and sustained, focus upon the monitoring of speech. And thirdly, the need for surveillance became more urgent in this period because of the fear of revolt. Ultimately, in linking surveillance to revolt, the intention of this essay is to reconceptualize 'revolt': to see it less as a single, extraordinary event than as a state of resistance, which could be verbal as well

as physical. Rulers were not killed, and property was not destroyed, but speech was an act that struck at the social roots of political power.

I

Following a meeting of the court of mayor and aldermen on 10 December 1478, a London draper named William Capell entered Newgate prison, where he was to remain until further notice. His wrongdoing was recorded by the clerk of the court. Capell had exclaimed publicly that he wanted to thrust his knife into Robert Drope, alderman and late mayor of the city, and that, ‘if he were imprisoned on that account’, he would break out straight away with twenty prisoners.¹³ Capell’s crime was not the completion of a violent assault, but the anticipatory longing to inflict bodily harm upon Robert Drope, to which he had given voice. His proud boast that the city gaol would not contain him was equally provocative. He was detained for the uttering of words, which were dangerous because of their publicity, their vivid imagining of the death of an alderman, and their brazen contempt towards an institution of law enforcement.

The cause of the dispute is unknown, although its origins may well have lain in a commercial quarrel. Both the perpetrator and the object of this verbal threat belonged to the drapers’ craft, one of London’s mercantile companies, from whose ranks the fifteenth-century mayors and aldermen were mostly drawn.¹⁴ It was no doubt because of Capell’s high status within London society that the king learned of his detention; and Edward IV sent a writ of *habeas corpus cum causa* to the mayor, aldermen, and sheriffs summoning Capell before his justices.¹⁵ In response, London’s magistrates

summarized the circumstances of the case, about which they had been informed both at the personal complaint of the victim and on the more general report of ‘many trustworthy witnesses, citizens of the city’, who had heard Capell talking in an arrogant manner (*imperime*) and proclaiming ‘various bold and opprobrious words on several occasions and in several locations, in the presence of many people’. In accounting for Capell’s arrest and imprisonment, the mayor, aldermen, and sheriffs were eager to justify London’s autonomy. In order to observe the ‘good, politic and sound rule’ of London, Capell’s crime ‘ought’ to be punished and corrected by the mayor and aldermen, according to their discretion, ‘just as other similar offences are, and have accustomed to be, punished and corrected, from time out of mind’. The efforts of London’s mayor and aldermen to retain their judicial independence and to deal with Capell as they desired, free from crown intervention, were successful. The tone and content of their reply to the king’s writ communicated a grudging reluctance to hand over the prisoner to an external court of law. On 22 December, less than two weeks after his arrival in royal custody, Capell was released back to the mayor and aldermen, who were now to decide his fate.

The case illustrates two aspects to the accumulation and verification of information in English towns. First, London’s mayor and aldermen were given the news of Capell’s speech acts by other citizens. Surveillance was not an instrument of social control, wielded by an all-powerful elite; it involved citizens informing the city council about the rebellious words of one of their own.¹⁶ To understand how and why this happened, it is significant that the basic structure of urban policing – frankpledge – was communal and self-regulatory. Adult, male residents – householders and servants – each of whom had to swear an oath to keep the peace, were organized into groups of ten people. These tithings were headed by a capital pledge, whose role it was to bring

to light the misconduct of his fellow pledges to the juries of the courts of the ward or leet, into which the town was divided.¹⁷ Although they had no punitive power and could not prosecute the accused, these juries presided over local neighbourhood watch schemes that scrutinized the moral and social conduct of neighbours and household members. The household was not a private space; male householders were answerable, publicly, for all who lived under their roof. A patriarchal household of bourgeois respectability was the bedrock of a well-ordered city.¹⁸ The imperative was practical as much as it was ideological. Towns were fluid and unstable societies, in which the regular arrival of incomers for the pursuit of trade and other opportunities created conditions of ‘flux and mobility’ that was not conducive to the preservation of urban peace.¹⁹ While townspeople had to be enrolled in a tithing, the same principles of incorporation and regulation applied to foreign migrants who had newly arrived to trade. They were allowed to stay in the town only for a short period of time and were subject to a hosting system that, like frankpledge, was compulsory. The alien merchant was housed in the property of a civic householder, usually a citizen, who was to account for his behaviour before the town government. Hosting operated locally, in several major English towns and cities such as London and Norwich, before being rolled out nationally in the 1439–40 parliament.²⁰ Towns were not naturally face-to-face societies, in which everyone knew each other’s affairs, but by the fifteenth century anonymity was made more difficult by the presence of deeply-engrained structures of inclusion, supervision, and regulation centred upon the urban household. Surveillance was routine.

The second point of interest in the case of William Capell is that townspeople denounced the draper for what he had said and for what he hoped to do. Citizens had seen Capell, but they had also heard him speaking. Although fifteenth-century

monarchs were able to adapt the 1352 treason statute and to incorporate the utterance of words within the act of plotting the king's death, it was not until the religious changes of the 1530s that the crown took the decisive legislative step of determining that words alone, without the necessity of an overt action, were enough to secure an indictment for treasonous desire.²¹ Expressed grammatically almost entirely in the subjunctive mood – ‘if he were imprisoned ... if he were to go to prison’ – William Capell's speech in 1478 was wishful, hypothetical, and contrary to fact. The sense of unreality was conveyed syntactically in Capell's alleged words, which transferred the human inclination to slay the London alderman, Robert Drope, to the murder weapon itself, the knife. Capell is supposed to have ‘declared publicly to have wished his knife to have stabbed and cut open the body of Robert Drope’.²² Already in London, before the redefinition of treason in 1534 that made fantastical yearnings towards immediate members of the royal family a treasonable offence, the city's rulers were policing the porous boundary between language, thought, and action. What made London's mayor and aldermen so anxious was the possibility that Capell's words might embolden others to follow his example of dissident speech.²³

Civic elites were sensitive to any kind of verbal slight, whether it was personally abusive or endangering, or more widely critical of their policies. Confidence was brittle because the basis of their authority was inherently contestable. The townsmen who occupied the senior positions in civic government were known collectively as the *probi homines* (‘worthy men’), their ‘worthiness’ a group attribute that was closely associated with ‘wisdom’ and that, therefore, validated their political leadership.²⁴ Reputations could easily be dented by a few contemptuous words, and civic officers, who were also citizens, were prone to verbal attacks from fellow citizens keen to remind them of this shared identity. Office was transitory.²⁵

Their power was equally open to question. In contrast to the gentry and nobility in the countryside, their ability to reinforce orders through coercion was uncertain; they did not have the manpower derived from the ownership of land.²⁶ Mayors and sheriffs had official households, including macebearers and swordbearers, and mayors and aldermen wore a distinctive livery to denote their official status, but otherwise urban retinues were likely to provoke censure. Town clerks diligently copied royal missives against ‘livery and maintenance’ into their civic registers, and they issued their own laws against the practice.²⁷ In 1479 a Bristol burgess, who was charged locally with breaking parliamentary statutes on retaining, defended his activities on the grounds that he was a royal customs collector in the port of Bristol and that he was impotent to prevent merchants from bringing their goods to the quayside at night, when they might arrive under cover of darkness to avoid the payment of customs duties. He had searchers to assist him, but these ‘pore’ royal officers could not apprehend smugglers ‘without supportacion of strong pouer at their nede’. They had authority – they represented the crown – but they did not possess the brute strength that was sometimes needed and that could be supplied only by those prepared to risk life and limb in pursuit of justice.²⁸ The burgess’s explanation may have been disingenuous, but he thought that it might carry weight with the king, whom he believed would recognize that what was applicable in the counties of late medieval England, where effective government demanded the exercise of patronage and the exploitation of private power to uphold public authority, would hold true in towns and cities.²⁹ But personal retinues were regarded as a source of division and a cause of conflict within urban communities.

In the event of serious unrest, civic magistrates could call upon the resources of the crown, but they were hesitant, for to invite intervention from outside was to weaken

the tradition of self-government that townspeople swore to protect. In any case, royal officials tended to be of the opinion that, when push came to shove, there were others who had more power than elected mayors and aldermen. In 1517 Bishop Fox of Winchester wrote to Cardinal Wolsey to commend him for his handling of an enclosure riot in Southampton, which was 'better' than that of 'the governours of hampton' because Wolsey had entrusted one Master Sandes with the responsibility for its resolution. Among the population of Southampton, Sandes was 'ther mayre balif and all the holl [i.e. whole] Ruyller of the town', who enjoyed the king's favour and who garnered 'the love and credite' of 'the people'. When he was in Southampton, Sandes commanded their attention, and 'may more doo with theym then may doo the mayre and all officeres' of both the town and the port.³⁰ Sir William Sandes was not only a royal courtier, but a member of the Hampshire gentry, a soldier, and a constable of Southampton castle, who had troops at his disposal.³¹

How do the few govern the many, and how, especially, do they ensure compliance with their decisions? These are questions that can be asked of any government, in any period of history;³² but if urban elites were not unusual in being vastly outnumbered by the people whom they ruled, these questions were more pressing and yet harder to answer in late medieval English towns because the sources of authority and the forms of power found outside the town walls were not so readily available. Surveillance worked as a means of integration by empowering householders and by giving them a stake – and a voice – in their community. Urban householders, who observed and reported the behaviour and speech of those permanent and temporary residents with whom they had contact, were complicit in their own governance. With mutual surveillance, the few did not govern the many; the many governed the many.

II

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century the processes of monitoring and identification were directed, more insistently, from above, and the surveillance of speech acquired greater – and particular – significance. In April 1473 the mayor and aldermen of London sent out new guidelines to the juries of the city's wards. Unlike previous instructions, from the 1370s and the 1410s, the 1473 articles contained a provision about the spoken word: juries were to elicit 'the names of all persones dwellyng commyng or repairyng vnto your said wardes which fynde conterfet forge or tell any fals or feyned tales or tydynges or sowe any sedicious langage'.³³ Juries were expected to glean this information from the informal, social networks of local knowledge, which leave little or no trace in the civic records, but whose existence is suggested by the deponents who were ordered before the town council and who were enjoined, under oath, to reveal what they knew: people such as Elizabeth Worthowe, who in 1512 told the court of mayor and aldermen in Norwich that, whilst in the home of John Barne, a trader in second-hand goods, one William Herberd, a hatmaker, remarked that many a scoundrel had aspired to be a sheriff to cause hurt to others, but that they would inflict no harm upon him.³⁴ Witness statements were prone to inaccuracy, and though Worthowe attested that the hatmaker's boast had been made before a widow and a priest, returning from mass, neither claimed in court to have heard the words attributed to Herberd. The truth was secondary, however, to the rigours of examination.

Well before the Tudor treason and sedition laws of the 1530s, 1550s, 1570s and 1580s enabled the early modern state to investigate treasonous and seditious words against

the policies and personnel of the national government,³⁵ town governors were holding inquiries into speech crimes, whose prosecution depended upon the policing of space, the deposition of witnesses, and the interrogation of the accused. In 1480 a York butcher and parishioner of St Peter the Little, came into the council chamber, where he was quizzed about what he had ‘herd’ the parish priest ‘say’ about the city’s mayor.³⁶ The appearance of a York merchant before the town council in 1498 can have been occasioned only by a fellow parishioner, who had seen the citizen approach one of the city’s tax collectors during mass at the church of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, and had heard him expressing his surprise that he had been assessed at so high a rate for the recent parliamentary subsidy.³⁷ Like the parish church, the workshop was both a venue of social interaction and a political space. It was not that artisans *suddenly* started talking about politics; the difference is that the civic authorities were much more interested to discover what its citizens were saying, both while they worked and while they were at their leisure. When a cook who worked for the cathedral priory of Norwich walked into the shop of a local fletcher in 1506 and conversation turned to the mayoral election, the city’s mayor and aldermen quickly knew what had been said and by whom.³⁸ The cook did not think highly of the choice of mayor, for he was no friend of the priory, but he assured the fletcher that he would speak to him again within six months, when he would ‘come and tell the a newe Tale’. The balance of power between cathedral and city would soon alter, the cook avowed, when the citizens lost the support of the local lords and gentry,³⁹ after which ‘the monkes truste to haue more priuilage in the Cite than they haue had be fore tyme’. Relations between the city and the cathedral priory had been antagonistic periodically from the thirteenth century, and in 1272 and 1443 the citizens had besieged the cathedral precinct.⁴⁰ In the early sixteenth century there were renewed strains in their

relationship, the nature of which was a topic of public discourse on the streets of Norwich.

Townspople drank and spoke about politics in the tavern and alehouse, as they always had. These drinking establishments had long been the repeated target of civic ordinances. Temporally and spatially, they were liminal places. In the eyes of London's mayor and aldermen, they encouraged Londoners to be out on the streets past the hour of curfew; as places of unlicensed social gathering, they were thought to be populated by a sub-culture of prostitutes, criminals, and the indolent, whose presence was a moral temptation and a physical threat to respectable citizens.⁴¹ One of the charges put to the juries of London's ward courts in the late 1370s was to inquire whether any innkeeper, taverner or brewer 'holdith his dore open after the houre lymyt bi the maire'.⁴² Drinking houses were potential sites of violent crime and immorality. Behaviour, not speech, was the principal concern. Observation was visual. But a hundred years later, it was emphatically auditory. The York tavern of the citizen and vintner, Richard Gascoigne, was under suspicion in the 1480s.⁴³ The city council learned, presumably through an informer, of the 'unsittyng language' – a phrase indicative of verbal abuse – employed 'enenst [i.e. against] the maire and shireffes' in 1480 by a tailor, who was in Gascoigne's tavern. Four years later, Gascoigne was found guilty of speaking offensive words against the then mayor and removed from the freedom of the city for not obeying a mayoral summons. Just as the later treason and sedition legislation of a succession of monarchs in early modern England produced a febrile climate of accusation and counter-accusation, in which 'suspects fell over one another to deny or modify their purported words',⁴⁴ so Gascoigne subsequently repudiated upon oath 'the langage reportid upon hym'. In February 1483 York's council had to sift through and mediate the conflicting accounts

of a group of artisans, whose heated exchanges about the mayoral candidates in the forthcoming election, while they were ‘sittyn at ale’, first came to the attention of the city fathers through the contested testimony of another craftsman, a cooper by the name of William Welles.⁴⁵ In 1511, ‘when he was setting at the ayle house’, a York miller lambasted one of the aldermen for having lost some of the city’s common lands during his time as mayor, a treacherous exploit for which he would never again be elected to the mayoralty. The miller was obliged to deliver guarantees that he would ‘never more ... comon [i.e. talk]’ of the alderman or of any of the town council, when he was in either alehouse or tavern.⁴⁶ The Middle English verse, ‘Ewyre say wyll, or hold the styll’, dating from around 1480, recommended an attitude of studied caution towards those with whom one kept company (‘who syttys the by’), at church, in the marketplace, or in the alehouse, lest ‘he wyll repport thi talle’.⁴⁷ Like the York miller, he could never be sure who might be listening and who might denounce him.

This imposed culture of surveillance was accompanied by the intensification and invention of forms of identification. Historians have written extensively about contemporary understanding of the problem of poverty, the public perception of which ‘increased, with a high point of concern around 1500’, even though there were considerably fewer poor people in England in 1500 than, say, in 1300.⁴⁸ Anxieties focused on the phantom of ‘vagabonds’ and ‘beggars’, two related categories of able-bodied poor, supposedly disinclined to work and of no fixed abode, with a propensity to enter towns, to wander the streets in search of aid, and to commit crime.⁴⁹ But the bureaucratic energies of civic leaders were devoted less to the labelling of undesirable individuals among the lower orders and more to the registration of their own citizens: the enfranchised members of the urban community, also known as the freemen.

On the one hand, there was a vigorous campaign in London to make non-resident citizens assume permanent residence. The ambiguous status of this type of freeman had always been a grievance because of the feeling that those who lived outside the town were able to assert their entitlement to enjoy the privileges of citizenship, without having to bear its costs.⁵⁰ The temperature of this rhetoric rose dramatically. In 1472 the London court of mayor and aldermen discussed the proposition that all freemen dwelling outside the capital should return to the city with their household or else lose their liberty.⁵¹ In 1476 a civic ordinance was proclaimed that citizens within twenty miles of London had six months to take up residency; people further afield had nine months.⁵² When the alderman of one London ward continued to maintain his home beyond the capital, perhaps thinking that he was above the law, the mayor and aldermen threatened him with a financial penalty of £500.⁵³ In 1500 the time limit for the repatriation of non-residents within a radius of twenty miles was reduced to three months, but, more importantly, the acceptance of future entrants to the civic franchise was to be standardized and uniform: they were to live permanently in the city within six months of their admission as a citizen; and the wardens of the crafts (which controlled access to the freedom of London) were assigned to submit the names of each and every member of their craft who currently were, or who in future might be, absent to the mayor and aldermen.⁵⁴ Disquiet was not just one of inequity, but of uncertainty: who were these citizens? The answer to this question would provide the means of discrimination and exclusion.

On the other hand, there were stricter rules and new archival mechanisms for the enrolment of certificates of apprenticeship, one of the main routes to citizenship. In London it was customary for the master craftsman to present his apprentice in the Guildhall, where, before an audience of the mayor and aldermen, the indenture of

service was examined and copied into a special register. This reproduction was to be made within one year of the sealing of the contract between master and apprentice.⁵⁵ The system was of financial value to the town government, which charged a small fee for the clerical work, but its chief importance was legal: in the event of breach of contract, the terms of the indenture could be enforced in the city's courts, an oversight that might be to the advantage of both the master and the apprentice.⁵⁶ From 1415 there were the same arrangements in Norwich, where citizens had to record the details of their new apprentices within 'twelmonth and oon day befor y^e Meir' in the Guildhall.⁵⁷ Towards the end of the century, one year was too long. The process was debated in the city's common assembly in 1485, and in 1512 the assembly decided that the period between sealing and enrolment before the mayor would be shortened to three months.⁵⁸ The motives behind registration were neither financial nor legal. The impulse was bureaucratic. There was a desire for faster, more efficient, and more comprehensive methods of record-keeping.

In York and Coventry bespoke civic books of apprenticeship indentures were compiled for the first time. In York crafts such as the weavers had kept their own registers of apprentices, but in 1515 it was announced that in future a citizen should bring his apprentice, within one month of the making of an indenture, into the council chamber, 'and ther his indentier to be inrolled'.⁵⁹ In Coventry, where there was not yet a civic apprentice book, the city's legislative body – the leet court – issued a new ordinance in 1494 that henceforth made it mandatory for apprentices to swear an oath before a representative of the city government and for their names to be written into 'a Registre'.⁶⁰ Civic registration of the name of the apprentice was also to take place *before* the master even sealed the indenture with his apprentice. The reciprocal conditions of the agreement between master and apprentice were of little interest to

Coventry's rulers: the name of the apprentice, his geographical origin, his master's name and occupation, plus the length of service, these were the bare – but essential – facts.⁶¹ Unlike the convention in other towns, apprentices in Coventry were also to take the freeman's oath at the beginning, rather than at the end of the apprenticeship.⁶² The other novelty was the wording of the oath. Where these oaths had previously spoken of mutuality, even if this was in the sense of the performance of civic duties, such as the responsibility to pay taxes and to hold office, to which everyone within the community of citizens was liable, the Coventry oath said nothing about mutual aid. To be sure, he was to defend the city's corporate liberties, but the oath was couched exclusively in a legalistic discourse, which emphasized hierarchy rather than fraternity: he was to be 'goode and true' to the king, the mayor, and sheriffs; he was not to commit or be party to any felony or treason, and he was to warn the 'kyng or his officers' if he knew that such a crime might be perpetrated; and he was 'duely' to 'obbey, observe kepe & perfourme' the city's laws.⁶³ This was the template for the law-abiding citizen, who was to be faithful and obedient not to his community and to his neighbours, but to his lords and masters.

From the late fifteenth century the monitoring of both the people and places that constituted the urban space entailed the making of new laws, the adoption of new archival practices and the writing of government registers, the listing of individuals, and a redefinition of citizenship, both in theory and in practice. What was distinctive about this period that explains these changes?

To read the royal charters and other written instruments from the late fifteenth century that remodelled town constitutions and that created closed, self-selecting structures of urban government, one might be inclined to believe that the position of the politically dominant in English towns – the so-called *probi homines* – was more hegemonic than ever.⁶⁴ To read the minutes of town council meetings, royal correspondence to towns, and craft ordinances from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is to detect a completely different atmosphere, politically fraught and socially fractious. The ‘close corporation’ existed in theory, but not in practice. Town government was not an entity in and of itself. There were pressures on civic rulers from above and from below, from without and from within the town walls. In these circumstances, surveillance, especially of the spoken word – and its regulation and documentation through the written word – was a necessity.

The charters that English towns had acquired from the crown in the communal movement of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did not free them from royal overlordship.⁶⁵ They enshrined and propagated the seemingly paradoxical principle of self-government at the king’s command and made urban governors aware that their authority – their legitimacy, their right to be obeyed – was derivative: it was the consequence of their role as the king’s representatives. In the late fifteenth century the symbiotic relationship between royal and civic authority became a stick with which to beat town rulers should they not comply with the king’s demands. A letter sent by Henry VII to Northampton in the later 1480s encapsulates the king’s general mood towards towns. Belittling and abrasive in its overall style and content, the preamble treated the mayor to a lecture about the results of good and bad government in towns and cities. Peace, love, prosperity, justice, and the common good sprang from the former; conflict, poverty, and misery would ensue from the latter. All this was by way

of telling the mayor, lest he forget, that it was the ‘duete’ of local officials to enforce law and order; that to rule effectively, they had to punish those who destroyed the king’s peace; and that their failure to do so would amount to disobedience. Most of all, the mayor and his colleagues were admonished to be alert to those spreading seditious words, starting rumours, and fabricating news about the king or others of high rank, all of which led innocent subjects astray and persuaded them to rebel (‘falle into rebellion and disobeissaunce’). They were to imprison indefinitely both those guilty and those suspected of such speech crimes and to send their names, along with the details of their offence, to the king.⁶⁶ Information would afforce the king’s security.

So too would the maintenance of the law. When Henry VII summoned the mayor and aldermen of York to Greenwich in 1495, he recalled how their ‘wyse and polytik ordre and rewle’ in the past had the source of York’s ‘prosperite and welth’ and declared that he would not see the city go to ruin for the lack of good governance. There was no other city in the kingdom where the mayor could ‘more boldly rewle or governe’, ‘for within your fraunches and libertiez ye may rewle accordyng to my lawez as and I were ther my nawn [i.e. own] person’. These were not words to comfort and to reassure but to intimidate. If the mayor and aldermen did not rule as the king required, they would be replaced: ‘I most and woll put in other rewlars that woll rewle and govern the Citie accordyng to my lawez’.⁶⁷ A year later, the king wrote to the mayor and aldermen of Coventry, and lamented ‘the disordering of our said citie and subuersion of such politik rules as hertofor haue been vsed’. Coventry, according to the king, had flourished hitherto under the wise governance of the city’s magistrates, and they were commanded again ‘duely’ to ‘execute’ ‘thauncient and laudable custumes of our said citie’. The city’s economic health was imperilled.⁶⁸

Law, preceded by the definite article, was tangible, rather than abstract; the benefits of its rigorous administration particular, calculable, and enumerative.⁶⁹ The crown's insistence on the application of a body of rules, customs, and laws, not simply the obligation to render justice, did not so much empower as unsettle civic officeholders, who were under surveillance.

Royal government reiterated this language of law because of its fear of popular uprising. In the civil war of the middle decades of the fifteenth century successive kings were so worried about the power of public opinion and popular activism to resist royal authority that they employed spies.⁷⁰ Speech was toxic because of its dynamic and incremental potential to fuel rumour and gossip, inspire conspiracy, and provoke insurrection. In April 1485 Richard III wrote to a number of English towns, such as York and Southampton, to warn them of the destructive actions of 'diverse seditious and evil disposed personnes', who had been active in London and in other unnamed locations within the kingdom. Some had written bills, some had sent 'furth of false and abhominable langage and lyes', and some had uttered 'bold and presumptuous speech'. Civic officials were to arrest not only individuals speaking ill of the king or of 'any othere lord', but those 'telling tales and tidings wherby the people might be stirred to commotions and unlaful assemblies', and to track down the original instigator of the story.⁷¹ In 1487 Henry VII issued a mandate to the mayors and bailiffs of English towns, including the capital, that they should 'sette' such people 'vpon the pillorie' for as long as they thought appropriate.⁷² Twenty years later, Edmund Dudley, the early Tudor social theorist, implored the common people to beware the temptation of rumour, which might 'induce you to grudge or disdain to be in suche obediens or subiection to your superiors or betters'.⁷³ Subversive speech was an infection to the body politic that could travel quickly. It was 'seditious'

because it could incite commotion. The natural condition of the lower orders was one of quietude and conformity.

Civic officials had little choice but to co-operate with central government in the investigation of speech that was in contempt of the king.⁷⁴ On taking possession of Henry VII's writ in 1487, London's mayor and aldermen convened the common council, the masters and wardens of the crafts, and the constables of the city, with a view to its general dissemination.⁷⁵ In late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Norwich, prophetic talk of the return of royal contenders for the throne and predictions of an imminent tax revolt pricked the ears of the mayor and aldermen, who learned of conversations involving a draper at a window of a bookbinder in the cathedral close, and between two apprentice cordwainers in their master's workshop.⁷⁶ In 1515 the mayor and aldermen tried to establish not only the content, but the meaning of certain words attributed to a tax collector, appointed to assess and levy the subsidy granted that year in parliament.⁷⁷ The tax collector was reported to have said to the royal commissioners, on receiving his charge, that if he and 20,000 like-minded men, 'more such as I am hadde be in the parlement house', then 'we shuld [have] amended' the subsidy. Was this a call to arms? Another citizen, a painter by trade, who was present at the verbal altercation, confirmed the statement and added that the tax collector had gone on to say that his intention was 'not to make insurreccion', but that 'he and they' – the 20,000 – 'wold haue made petition for the mater to the kyng'. Petitioning was an alternative to rebellion. But Norwich's mayor and aldermen were sceptical, and held further inquiries: a parish clerk gave testimony under oath, as did several fishermen, a dyer, and a worsted-weaver. These witnesses were from the same, artisanal stratum as the tax collector, who was a freeman and a pointmaker.⁷⁸ Perhaps he should have known better than to contend that the tax would

be ‘harde for the pore comouns to paie’, that it was a pity that ‘pore men aren thus pollid [i.e. fleeced]’, and that the aim of his petition was tax relief for the ‘pore comouns’.

The line between petitioning and violent collective action was blurred: a petition to the king at parliament was, of course, the normal method of obtaining redress, but what was the status of a petition if it was accompanied by the latent promise of coercive force?⁷⁹ Petitions were part of the traditional pattern of revolt. In the large-scale uprisings of 1381, 1450, 1497, 1536–7, and 1549, English rebels conceived themselves as petitioners of the king.⁸⁰ In the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 the rebels had assumed the name the ‘true commons’ to claim that they, and not the MPs who sat in the House of Commons, represented the wishes of the kingdom.⁸¹ The connection in 1515 between popular mobilization, petitioning, and parliament raised the spectre of armed resistance, which Norwich’s aldermanic class could not ignore.

The apprehension was not entirely a figment of the collective imagination. While their authority was tested by the crown, the power of civic rulers was opposed and undermined by their own citizens. There were ‘enclosure riots’ in many English towns between the 1480s and 1520s, which were, in fact, neither of these things: the uprooting and levelling of hedges was not spontaneous and chaotic, but planned and disciplined; and they were *about* a much larger set of grievances than the enclosure of fields. They were, as I have argued elsewhere, ‘risings of the commons’,⁸² and they had multiple causes: they arose from a conjunction of enduring, unresolved constitutional and political questions – about the relationship between ordinary citizens and the *probi homines* and about the concept of citizenship – and short-term, economic decline, the financial manifestation of which was visible in the balance

sheets of civic income and expenditure. These risings were reason enough for urban elites to listen out for deviant speech. Speech could intensify and mutate, in an ever widening circle of publicity, from murmur to rumour and from individual words of complaint, whispered secretively in an alehouse, to collective discussions in a craft's guildhall, and, ultimately, to open, collective action, with violent deeds as well as sharp words.⁸³

Surveillance, along with the development and use of other means of personal identification, however, was the product of broader and deeper elite anxieties about the structure and composition of urban society. These cohered around the fear, not of a siege of the town hall or of any of the other actions upon the government of the town that historians have seen as characteristic of urban revolt, but of something less obviously confrontational, but far more routine, insidious, and fundamental: the uttering of words that challenged and subverted the social hierarchy.

How might social relations in England's larger towns around 1500 be understood? The subject awaits detailed study.⁸⁴ On the one hand, the work of social historians of early modern England, which has done so much to transform our knowledge of the structural inequalities and solidarities of Tudor and early Stuart society, has tended to start after the middle of the sixteenth century.⁸⁵ On the other hand, there is still little agreement about the economic fortunes of late medieval English towns. We know much about the 'great depression' of the mid fifteenth century, which saw a severe bullion shortage and the precipitous collapse of overseas trade, particularly the export of cloth, upon which major English towns were dependent.⁸⁶ The symptoms of economic contraction – the 'flight' from civic office, appeals to the crown for tax reductions, the fall in rental values of urban property – have been endlessly debated,

without a clear conclusion. What, precisely, do they demonstrate: the politics of urban poverty, or genuine decay? The evidence of accelerated population decline in many provincial towns seems irrefutable.⁸⁷ Yet with one or two exceptions, far too little attention has been paid to the results of these changes upon urban society.⁸⁸ London was different: its population was on an upward trajectory.⁸⁹ Population growth, as early modern social historians have underlined, brought its own problems. By contrast, studies of late medieval London have no more than hinted at rising social tensions in the capital arising from the lack of work, which can be discerned in the prickly conflicts over social precedence between the crafts, the amalgamation of several manufacturing crafts, and the large number of crafts that petitioned the mayor and aldermen for the enrolment of their ordinances from the later fifteenth century.⁹⁰ The overriding impression is of London's political stability and social cohesion at the end of the Middle Ages.⁹¹

Whether urban economies were undergoing recession or restructuring, or even expansion, townspeople were conscious of a changed constellation of power within their communities. And whether urban social relations were more unstable and fluid than in the period after the Black Death, upon which the research of medievalists has focused, is beside the point; crucially, urban inhabitants thought that they were. From the moment that they appeared in the written record as corporate bodies, their powers of self-government authorized by the crown, English towns were divided societies and townspeople were accustomed to think of the urban world in binary terms: between *probi homines* and commoners; between citizens and non-citizens. In later fifteenth-century London the petitions to the mayor and aldermen, from the 'good men' of many crafts about the economic activities of non-freemen, indicate that few believed that the linguistic categories of social differentiation matched the complexity of social

place and the reality of work.⁹² In York the expression of anti-alien sentiment was louder and had a harder, more insistent, calculating edge: foreigners were listed and their place of residence within the city ascertained.⁹³ The lines of social demarcation were redrawn and restated. The effect was to create ‘sharper social distancing’ between rulers and ruled, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders.⁹⁴

Craft ordinances, scrutinized and endorsed by the civic authorities and enrolled in civic registers, reveal a fixation with the verbal language of social distinction, where interest among the crafts in social deference – as opposed to, say, the quality of workmanship or the conditions of work – had previously been sporadic.⁹⁵ In London these ordinances, which fill the pages of *Letter-Book L*, imagined a hostile relationship between the ordinary freemen and the craft officialdom, and almost all contained an edict about abusive speech directed to the wardens.⁹⁶ Upon their unification in 1479, the Bristol bowyers and fletchers settled upon a new governing structure of two wardens, whose position they endeavoured to shore up with a statute against the speaking of contemptuous words towards them. In 1483 the Bristol shearmen made it a crime verbally to rebuke or disobey their two chief officers with disorderly (‘dessordinat’) language.⁹⁷ The obsession with speech was the consequence of both a steeply polarized model of social relations and the dread of its rejection.

What was unacceptable was not so much the slanderous assault upon the good name of the individual guild official, but its disruption of the internal organization of the fellowship, where the social gulf between the governing elite and the rank and file was symbolized, in the capital at least, by the wearing of a livery.⁹⁸ Bad language was not merely – not even – antisocial language. To speak offensively was to resist authority. To put it more strongly, rebellion was conceived increasingly as a speech

act. When confronted by the ‘mysrule & disobedience of certeyn persones’ of the same craft in 1477, the leading men of the London girdlers drew up new corporate rules. The first ordinance warned liverymen that they should neither ‘revile nor Rebuke’ a member of the livery and admonished those outside the livery that they should not speak ill of a liveryman. To do so was to perpetrate ‘wordes of violence’, an illuminating phrase, communicative of the injurious act of speaking rather than of the use of excessive physical strength.⁹⁹ It was a perceived threat from ‘self willed persones enfraunchesed’ of the butchers, who spoke in an unruly fashion (‘vnmanerly langage’) to each other and who refused to do as they were told, that mobilised the ‘wardens and oþer honest men’ of the craft in 1484. In their preamble to the 1499 ordinances of the London stringers, the ‘mayster wardeyns and gode Folkes’ explained that the ‘grete disobedience Rancour and malys’ displayed by ‘the Inferior persones to the superiors’ of the craft was the reason for their remedial action. The first article targeted those craftsmen who were of low status, whether ‘workeman’, ‘seruaunt’ or ‘apprentice’, who might ‘disobey rebuke or Revile’ their betters, the wardens of the craft.¹⁰⁰ What, then, was considered appropriate speech and behaviour?

The *probi homines* of city and craft worked together, ever more closely, to monitor speech, and shared information about incidents of verbal dissent. Craft officials were ‘the eyes and ears’ of the civic magistracy,¹⁰¹ but the relationship was also one of co-dependency. When the wiredrawers and cardmakers of Bristol merged in 1469-70, they decided that two wardens were to be chosen each year and that any craftsman who did not exhibit to the wardens the ‘Reverence and Worschipp’ due to them by virtue of their office, ‘in worde and deede’, should be handed over to the mayor and sheriff for punishment.¹⁰² Those guilty of illicit speech generally had to apologise to

the victim for their offence. Scripts were prepared by the civic government, so that the wrongdoer knew exactly what to say to make amends, and how. In 1517 a London haberdasher who had repeatedly ‘disobeyed & mysbehaued’ against the wardens of his craft, breached its rules, and spoken ‘sedicious & unsyttynge wordes’ to one of the wardens, was ordered by the mayor and aldermen to come to the haberdashers’ hall, where he was to acknowledge, on bended knee, before a party of aldermen and the officers of the craft, the full extent of his rebelliousness. In this submissive pose, he placed himself at the mercy of his ‘masters’.¹⁰³ The whole ritual was akin to an act of homage. Defiance was assuaged by deference.¹⁰⁴ Official scripts could be copied and their words repeated; their aim was to produce, and reproduce, a hierarchical social order and the normative social values of verbal self-control, respect for one’s superiors, and compliance with the law.¹⁰⁵ These values constituted the fifteenth-century notion of ‘governance’: not only the ‘ability’ of the individual ‘to master his or her own appetites’, but ‘obedience to the rule of those to whom the individual was subject’.¹⁰⁶

The surveillance of words was, however, deeply problematic. It disclosed the social friction, and sometimes generated the contempt of social gradation and recalcitrance towards authority, that was feared. Scripts were an unreliable guide to the messy reality of social relations. When the case of a London dyer came before the mayor and aldermen in 1518, they learned that the dyer had not only used abusive words about the mayor, but had ‘called’ his wardens ‘pollers & pyllers of pour men’ and spoken ‘many other Sedicious & obprobrious wordes’. In branding his wardens plunderers and thieves who oppressed the poor, the dyer thought little of his superiors; he dismissed their authority as tyrannical and unlawful. The mayor and aldermen ruled that the dyer should go ‘Immediately’ to the dyers’ hall, where he was to appear

before 'his seyd wardens & others good & Substanciall persones of the seyd ffelyship'. There he was to 'Submytte' to his wardens, from whom he was to ask pardon and forgiveness. To rebel was to sin. But the dyer did not follow the script. As the wardens later reported to the mayor and aldermen, the dyer came to the hall, where he was unwilling to perform the penitential part that was assigned to him. His demeanour obstinate and insolent, he pronounced publicly in the dyers' hall that he would sooner put a rope around his neck than yield to the wardens. Worse, he stood his ground and 'Justified' his opposition, stating that 'he knewe no cause' why he should apologise.¹⁰⁷ Here, in this one small scene played out in the dyers' hall, was an attempt to enact a magisterial concept of urban social order: one that was divinely ordained and hierarchical, in which the line between governors and governed was clear for all to see. As a craftsman but also a citizen, the dyer was much less certain of his social inferiority; he asserted his freedom to speak out publicly; and he was able to defend himself and to defy those in authority whom he deemed his equals. If the purpose of surveillance was, in the end, to limit what citizens could say and do, here was proof of its failure.

IV

The fear of revolt was the principal motivation for increasing surveillance in English towns between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This essay has not addressed the topics that a reader might expect to find in a discussion of 'revolt': the patterns of collective action; the ideology and goals of violence; the social profile of rebels. Indeed, there has been no analysis of an actual revolt – approached as a single event – at all. There has been very little physical violence, against person or property,

not much group conflict, and nothing about rebel demands, such as the acquisition of power.

The concern of royal government was the external consequences of speech: the anxiety that dissident words would lead inexorably to rebellious actions; that rumour would explode in armed conflict. Civic rulers had their own agenda about the issue of speech. They made inquiries, assembled and inspected case material, and heard witness statements. They were attentive to the exchange of news and to the expression of political opinions that were critical of civic and royal authority, in a proliferation of settings, public and semi-public. But they were vexed, above all, by the speech act itself. They were troubled by speech that was not only offensive, but unruly; that lacked verbal control, but that was also disobedient in its inversion of the verbal cues and body language of social hierarchy. To urban elites, who more than ever saw their power as dependent upon a 'sense of differentiation and distance',¹⁰⁸ speech crimes advanced an opposing claim about its distribution. Behind this preoccupation with speech was profound unease about the social structure of English towns, which was translated also into new practices of civic writing, registration, and identification. Everyone had to know his or her place. The fluidity and fragility of urban social relations, it was believed, could be stabilized by being inscribed, and fixed, on parchment. Through the writing of scripts, elites hoped to transform social antagonism into social harmony and order. Life would mirror art.

In exploring how urban disorder was conceptualized as a problem of speech, and how verbal misconduct was defined as rebellion, perhaps it is not helpful to draw too neatly the boundaries between different categories of rebellious behaviour. Revolt,

which might be a concrete action, visible, and collective, might also – as suggested here – be verbal, audible, and personal.

Abbreviations used:

CLB = M. D. Harris (ed.), *The Coventry Leet Book*, 4 vols, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 134-46, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907–13.

CRO = Coventry Record Office

GRB = E. W. W. Veale (ed.), *The Great Red Book of Bristol*, 5 vols, Bristol Record Society, 2–18, [Bristol: printed for the society], 1931–52.

LMA = London Metropolitan Archives

NRO = Norfolk Record Office

YCR = A. Raine (ed.), *York Civic Records*, 8 vols, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, 98–119, Wakefield: [printed for the society], 1938–52.

YHB = L. C. Attreed (ed.), *York House Books, 1461–1490*, 2 vols, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991.

¹ I would like to thank Caroline Barron for the photographs of Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. 0.3.11, and Emma Hamlett for her comments on a draft of the essay.

² H. T. Riley (ed.), *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis: Liber Albus, Liber Custumarum, et Liber Horn*, 3 vols in 4, Rolls Series, 1859–62, I: 9, 42.

³ C. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013.

⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. by C. J. Nederman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 91–5.

⁵ *Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London*, ed. and trans. by H. T. Riley, London: Richard Griffin, 1861, p. 37.

⁶ There are several studies of the causes of this factional struggle, but on its consequences, see C. M. Barron, 'Richard II and London', in A. Goodman and J. Gillespie (eds), *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, pp. 129–54. For the link between the *Liber Albus* and the earlier disturbances, see H. Carrel, 'Food, drink and public order in the London *Liber Albus*', *Urban History*, 33, 2006, pp. 176–94.

⁷ F. Nevola, 'Surveillance and control of the street in Renaissance Italy', *I Tatti: Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 16, 2013, pp. 85–106, at 93–4. The key text is M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Allen Lane, 1977. For its influence on studies of contemporary society, see D. Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, and W. G. Staples, *The Culture of Surveillance: Discipline and Social Control in the United States*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1997. For a more nuanced account, see E. Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁸ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

⁹ J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, transl. S. G. C. Middlemore, London: Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 50, 59, 63–4. Valentin Groebner's book, *Who are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*, New York: Zone Books, 2007, argues instead for continuities between the Middle Ages and the early modern period.

¹⁰ E. Crouzet-Pavan, ‘Les mots de Venise: sur le contrôle du langage dans une cité-état italienne’, in M. Balard (ed.), *La circulation des nouvelles au Moyen Âge*, Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994, pp. 215–18.

¹¹ P. Slack, ‘Government and information in seventeenth-century England’, *P&P*, 184, 2004, pp. 33-68. For analysis that emphasizes local, urban initiative, see P. Griffiths, ‘Local arithmetic: information cultures in early modern England’, in S. Hindle et al. (eds), *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013, pp. 113–34.

¹² A point noted also in J. R. Brown, ‘Drinking houses and the politics of surveillance in pre-industrial Southampton’, in B. Kümin (ed.), *Political Space in Pre-industrial Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, pp. 62–3.

¹³ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 189v: *pro eo quod dixit publice se voluisse cultellum suum penetrasse et perforasse corpus Roberti drope aldermanni nuper maioris huius Ciuitatis et si esset imprisonatum propter illam causam si iret ad prisonam cum vna exiret ab eadem cum xx personis.*

¹⁴ S. L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London [1300-1500]*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, pp. 328, 337–8.

¹⁵ For this and what follows, see LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 191r.

¹⁶ For historical doubts about the sociological model of ‘social control’, see G. Stedman Jones, ‘Class expression versus social control? A critique of recent trends in the social history of “leisure”’, *History Workshop Journal*, 4, 1977, pp. 162–70.

¹⁷ S. Rees Jones, ‘Household, work and the problem of mobile labour: the regulation of labour in medieval English towns’, in J.S. Bothwell et al. (eds), *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000, pp. 133–53; C. M. Barron, ‘Lay solidarities: the wards of medieval London’, in P.

Stafford et al. (eds), *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, pp. 218–33.

¹⁸ P. Maddern, ‘Order and disorder’, in C. Rawcliffe and R. Wilson (eds), *Medieval Norwich*, London: Hambledon and London, 2004, pp. 189–212; S. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, Ch. 6.

¹⁹ J. Barry, ‘Bourgeois collectivism? urban association and the middling sort’, in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994, pp. 90–2.

²⁰ *Liber Albus*, p. 287; W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey (eds), *The Records of the City of Norwich*, 2 vols, Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1906–10, 2: 188–9; A. A. Ruddock, ‘Alien hosting in Southampton in the fifteenth century’, *EcHR*, 16, 1946, pp. 30–7.

²¹ J. G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 107, 116–23; G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 286–9; S. J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government, 1485-1558*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, pp. 181–2; C. R. Duggan, ‘The advent of political thought-control in England: seditious and treasonable speech, 1485-1547’, PhD thesis, Northwestern University, Chicago, 1993, chs 2, 5.

²² See above, n. 13.

²³ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 191r.

²⁴ R. Hilton, ‘Status and class in the medieval town’, in T. R. Slater and G. Rosser (eds), *The Church in the Medieval Town*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, pp. 12-13.

²⁵ C. D. Liddy, ‘“Sir ye be not kyng”: citizenship and speech in late medieval and early modern England’, *Historical Journal* (forthcoming).

²⁶ P. Fleming, 'Telling tales of oligarchy in the late medieval town', in M. Hicks (ed.), *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004, p. 178. Cf. C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 47–8, 283–4.

²⁷ *CLB*, pp. 319–20, 373–5; M. Sellers (ed.), *York Memorandum Book*, 2 vols, Surtees Society, 120, 125, Durham: Andrews & co., 1912–14, II: 200–2; *YCR*, 2: 181.

²⁸ *GRB*, 5: 62–7, 71–2, 88–91, esp. pp. 90–1.

²⁹ E. Powell, 'After "after McFarlane": the poverty of patronage and the case for constitutional history', in D.J. Clayton et al. (eds), *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Later Medieval History*, Stroud: Sutton, 1994, pp. 11–13; J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 91–101.

³⁰ TNA, SP 1/232, fol. 33.

³¹ R. H. Fritze, 'Sandys, William, first Baron Sandys (c.1470–1540)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004: <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24653>>.

³² See, for example, P. Wormald, 'Germanic power structures: the early English experience', in L. Scales and O. Zimmer (eds), *Power and the Nation in European History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 105–24.

³³ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 49r. Cf. Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. 0.3.11, fol. 144v–146, and *Liber Albus*, pp. 287–92.

³⁴ NRO, NCR, 16a/2, p. 9.

³⁵ This judicial material has been a rich mine for historians of early modern popular politics: A. Fox, ‘Rumour, news and popular political opinion in Elizabethan and early Stuart England’, *Historical Journal*, 40, 1997, pp. 597–620.

³⁶ *YHB*, 1: 207-8.

³⁷ *YCR*, 2: 136: ‘sayng he marveled that he was set so myche to the aiede’.

³⁸ For what follows, see NRO, NCR, 17d/1, fol. 53r.

³⁹ ‘at y^t tyme the Cyte wold nat be rewlyd nor uowert be lorde ne gentylmen in the Countre’. See *Middle English Dictionary*, sub ‘vouen’ (1c): ‘to uphold, support’.

⁴⁰ N. Tanner, ‘The cathedral and the city’, in I. Atherton et al. (eds), *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City and Diocese, 1096-1996*, London: Hambledon Press, 1996, pp. 255–69.

⁴¹ H. T. Riley (ed.), *Memorials of London and London life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868, pp. 193, 272–3, 534–5; F. Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁴² Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. 0.3.11, fol. 145r.

⁴³ For what follows, see *YHB*, 1: 223–4, 301–2, 421.

⁴⁴ A. Wood, ‘“Poore men woll speke one daye”: plebeian languages of deference and defiance in England, c.1520-1640’, in T. Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500-1850*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, p. 85.

⁴⁵ *YHB*, 2: 707.

⁴⁶ *YCR*, 3: 36.

⁴⁷ J. O. Halliwell, *Early English Miscellanies, of Prose and Verse*, London, 1855, p. 63.

⁴⁸ The quotation is from C. Dyer, 'Poverty and its relief in late medieval England', *P&P*, 216, 2012, p. 42. For the figures, and the methodology underpinning them, see *ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

⁴⁹ M. K. McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, is the most recent study of poverty, its definition and relief, across the late medieval-early modern divide.

⁵⁰ See, for example, R. R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of the Letter-Books of the City of London*, 11 vols, London: John Edward Francis, 1899–1912, *Letter-Book H*, p. 146, and *Letter-Book K*, pp. 161–3.

⁵¹ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 33v.

⁵² LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 127v.

⁵³ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/009, fol. 46v.

⁵⁴ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/010, fol. 179v-180r.

⁵⁵ E. Ralph and N.M. Hardwick (eds), *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book 1532-1565, Part II: 1542-52*, Bristol Record Society, 33, [Bristol: printed for the society], 1980, p. ix; Robert Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, ed. L. T. Smith, Camden New Series 5, [London: printed for the society], 1872, p. 102.

⁵⁶ S. R. Hovland, 'Apprenticeship in later medieval London (c.1300-c.1530)', PhD thesis, University of London, 2006, pp. 15–16.

⁵⁷ Hudson and Tingey (eds), *Records of the City of Norwich*, 1: 106.

⁵⁸ NRO, NCR, 16d/1, fol. 128v, and 16d/2, fol. 92v. Bundles of apprenticeship indentures are extant in the civic archives from 1515, and there are enrolments from 1510: NRO, NCR, 10a, and 1d/22. My PhD student, Dana Durkee, kindly supplied these references.

⁵⁹ For the weavers' register of apprentices, 1461-1502, see York City Archives, D11.

The 1515 ordinance is in *YCR*, 3: 46.

⁶⁰ *CLB*, pp. 553–4, 558–9, 560. The claim that the ordinance was merely a confirmation of an older by-law was untrue. The *Leet Book* contains no such act.

⁶¹ *CLB*, pp. 560–3. Cf. N. R. Amor, 'Apprenticeship in late medieval Ipswich', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute for Archaeology and History*, 42, 2012, pp. 411–15.

⁶² C. M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200-1500*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 179.

⁶³ *CLB*, p. 560. Cf. the oath of the Norwich freeman, in Hudson and Tingey (eds), *Records of the City of Norwich*, 1: 129.

⁶⁴ C. W. Colby, 'The growth of oligarchy in English towns', *EHR*, 5, 1890, pp. 633–53; J. Lee, 'Urban policy and urban political culture: Henry VII and his towns', *Historical Research*, 82, 2009, pp. 493–510.

⁶⁵ D. M. Palliser, 'Towns and the English state, 1066–1500', in J. R. Maddicott and D. M. Palliser (eds), *The Medieval State: Essays presented to James Campbell*, London: Hambledon, 2000, pp. 127–45.

⁶⁶ C. A. Markham and J. C. Cox (eds), *The Records of the Borough of Northampton*, 2 vols, London: Elliot Stock, 1898, 1: 203–4.

⁶⁷ *YCR*, 2: 115–16.

⁶⁸ CRO, BA/H/17/A79/19.

⁶⁹ For the new emphasis on the 'rule of law', evident in Fortescue's *De Laudibus Legum Anglie* (written 1468-71) and in the texts and speeches of early Tudor statesmen, see J. L. Watts, "'A Newe Ffundacion of is Crowne": monarchy in the age of Henry VII', in B. Thompson (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VII*, Stamford: Paul

Watkins, 1995, pp. 31–53, and idem, “‘Common weal’ and ‘commonwealth’:
England’s monarchical republic in the making, c. 1450–c. 1530’, in A. Gamberini et
al. (eds), *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14th–17th Centuries*,
Rome: Viella, 2011, pp. 147–63.

⁷⁰ I. M. W. Harvey, ‘Was there popular politics in fifteenth-century England?’, in R. H.
Britnell and A. J. Pollard (eds), *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval
Politics and Society*, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995, pp. 160–2; I. Arthurson, ‘Espionage
and intelligence from the Wars of the Roses to the Reformation’, *Nottingham
Medieval Studies*, 35, 1991, pp. 134–54.

⁷¹ *YHB*, 1: 359–60; ‘The corporation of Southampton: letters and loose memoranda’,
in *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Eleventh Report, Appendix, Part III: The
Manuscripts of the Corporations of Southampton and King’s Lynn*, London: HMSO,
1887, pp. 106–7.

⁷² LMA, COL/CC/01/01/009, fol. 117.

⁷³ Edmund Dudley, *The Tree of Commonwealth*, ed. D. M. Brodie, Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1948, p. 87.

⁷⁴ NRO, NCR, 16a/2, p. 9; *YHB*, 1: 402, and 2: 460, 627; LMA, COL/CC/01/01/010,
fol. 250r.

⁷⁵ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/009, fol. 117.

⁷⁶ NRO, NCR, 17d/1, fol. 12, 78v–79r.

⁷⁷ For what follows, see NRO, NCR, 16a/2, pp. 16–19.

⁷⁸ The taxpayer, William Holston, had entered the freedom of the city six years earlier: J.
L’Estrange and W. Rye (eds), *Calendar of the Freemen of Norwich from 1307 to
1603*, London: Elliot Stock, 1888, p. 75.

⁷⁹ See, for example, C. D. Liddy and J. Haemers, ‘Popular politics in the late medieval city: York and Bruges’, *EHR*, 128, 2013, pp. 771–805, at 785–9.

⁸⁰ A. Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 151–64.

⁸¹ J. Watts, ‘Public or plebs: the changing meaning of “the commons”, 1381-1549’, in H. Pryce and J. Watts (eds), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 249–50.

⁸² C. D. Liddy, ‘Urban enclosure riots: risings of the commons in English towns, 1480-1525’, *P&P*, 226, 2015, pp. 41–77.

⁸³ As argued in J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, ‘“A bad chicken was brooding”: subversive speech in late medieval Flanders’, *P&P*, 214, 2012, pp. 45-86.

⁸⁴ The important work of Marjorie McIntosh, beginning with her research into the Essex manor of Havering, has concentrated on villages and smaller, market towns.

⁸⁵ I would like to thank my colleague, Andy Wood, for this point. His new research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, begins in 1500: ‘Social Relations and Everyday Life in England, 1500-1640’

https://www.dur.ac.uk/history/research/research_projects/everydaylife/.

⁸⁶ See, for example, J. Hatcher, ‘The great slump of the mid-fifteenth century’, in R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (eds), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 237–72.

⁸⁷ S. H. Rigby, ‘Urban population in late medieval England: the evidence of the lay subsidies’, *EcHR*, 63, 2010, pp. 393-417.

⁸⁸ C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. P. J. P. Goldberg,

‘Coventry’s “Lollard” programme of 1492 and the making of utopia’, in R. Horrox and S. Rees Jones (eds), *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200-1630*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 97–116, looks at issues of gender and religious belief.

⁸⁹ R. H. Britnell, ‘The English economy and the government, 1450-1550’, in J. L. Watts (ed.), *The End of the Middle Ages? England in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Stroud: Sutton, 1998, p. 95.

⁹⁰ Barron, *London*, pp. 211, 229. See also M. Davies, ‘Artisans, guilds and government in London’, in R. H. Britnell (ed.), *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, Stroud: Sutton, 1998, pp. 125–6, 143.

⁹¹ Barron, *London*, pp. 302–7.

⁹² S. Rees Jones, ‘Thomas More’s “Utopia” and medieval London’, in Horrox and Rees Jones (eds), *Pragmatic Utopias*, p. 127; *Letter-Book L*, pp. 118–20, 154, 203, 259, 291, 295, 302, 308.

⁹³ *YHB*, 1: 309–10. For the context, see *ibid.*, 1: 214–15, 224–5, 229–31.

⁹⁴ For the term, see P. Griffiths, ‘Secrecy and authority in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London’, *Historical Journal*, 40, 1997, p. 947.

⁹⁵ For example, Sellers (ed.), *York Memorandum Book*, 1: 248; F. B. Bickley (ed.), *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, 2 vols, Bristol: W. Crofton Hemmons, 1900, 2: 162; CRO, PA 34/1, fol. 3r.

⁹⁶ For example, LMA, COL/AD/01/011, fol. 122r (bakers), 131v-132r (girdlers), 149v (turners), 151v (paviors), 159r (tilers), 167r (masons), 168r (wiremongers), 171v (leathersellers), 177v (dyers), 196v (fletchers), 202r (butchers), 230v (carpenters), 251r (coopers), 253v (plumbers), 254v (pouchmakers), 255 (waxchandlers), 257v (netmakers).

⁹⁷ *GRB*, 2: 150–1, 160–1.

⁹⁸ For this hierarchy in London, see Barron, *London*, pp. 214–16, 226; Davies, ‘Artisans’, pp. 126–32. For elsewhere, see the Coventry weavers, where there was an inner group of twelve: CRO, PA 34/1, fol. 4r, 5v.

⁹⁹ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/008, fol. 165.

¹⁰⁰ LMA, COL/CC/01/01/010, fol. 150v.

¹⁰¹ B. Scribner, ‘Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert’, in H. Kühnel (ed.), *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992, p. 191.

¹⁰² *GRB*, 4: 84, 87.

¹⁰³ For this script, see LMA, COL/CA/01/01/003, fol. 155v, where a marginal entry reads: ‘Memorandum that atkynson hathe a Copy’. John Atkynson was the name of the haberdasher.

¹⁰⁴ For the friction between these two impulses, see A. Wood, ‘Fear, hatred and the hidden injuries of class in early modern England’, *Journal of Social History*, 39, 2006, pp. 803–26.

¹⁰⁵ For such a reproduction, cf. LMA, COL/CA/01/01/003, fol. 261–2r, 275r.

¹⁰⁶ McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, p. 137. See also B. Hanawalt, ‘“Good governance” in the medieval and early modern context’, *Journal of British Studies*, 37, 1998, pp. 246–57.

¹⁰⁷ LMA, COL/CA/01/01/003, fol. 242v, 244r.

¹⁰⁸ Griffiths, ‘Secrecy’, p. 928.

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