

THE
CAMBRIDGE
URBAN HISTORY
OF
BRITAIN

VOLUME II
1540-1840

EDITED BY
PETER CLARK



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

© Cambridge University Press 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Bembo 10/12½ System QuarkXPress™ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 43141 7 hardback

Reformation and culture 1540–1700

VANESSA HARDING

THE PERIOD 1540–1700 saw a transformation of the religious and educational institutions of English, Welsh and Scottish towns, and of the society and culture of their inhabitants. In Britain as in Europe, towns and urban society played an important part in the reformation of the Church and of its role in secular society, both in terms of institutional change and in popular and elite responses to it. Between 1540 and 1580, many of the basic institutional structures of medieval urban society were abolished or fundamentally altered. Important foci of community and civic life, such as fraternities, chantries and ceremonial, disappeared, and town populations and governments had to find a new collective spirit and new ways of organising their sociability. Many town governments came to be influenced by a Protestant or Puritan political ideology, which shaped their view of society and their response to its problems. The reformed Scottish Church achieved a very close relationship with secular urban governments, and set the agenda for action in many spheres, beyond those of religion and education. In the century and a half after the Reformation, religion continued to play an important part in the lives of townspeople in England and Wales, but the Church as a universal institution had been weakened, and the former unity of belief and observance was never recovered. Towns came to accommodate a multiplicity of beliefs and congregations. In the longer term the fragmentation of religious gatherings was paralleled by a decline in observance overall, a growing secularisation of society to which the increase in educational endowment and provision may have contributed.

(i) THE REFORMATION YEARS, 1540–1580

By 1540, the first stage of the Reformation in England and Wales – the dissolution of all monastic foundations, with the exception of some hospitals – had taken place. This had a major impact on most towns, eliminating a formerly

important element in their physical, social and political environment. English medieval monasteries were by no means all based in towns, but they had had a strong influence on the development of the urban network in the middle ages, and their disappearance entailed important local changes. Ten of the twenty largest provincial English towns in 1524–5 were cathedral cities, and several of the remainder, such as Bury St Edmunds, St Albans and Reading, had been dominated by a single large monastic house. Some conventual churches became secular cathedrals or town churches, as at Bath, Bury St Edmunds, and St Albans, but many others were taken down or converted to secular use.¹ The surrender of York's monasteries must have had a 'shattering impact on the city', but in every town, the dissolution and the other institutional changes of the Reformation set a new pattern of social and political, as well as religious, relationships.²

The suppression in 1547 of religious guilds and fraternities and of chantry foundations marked an important change for the character and future development of urban communities. It must have been especially significant where the town's rulers had been incorporated as a guild, or where members of one or a few fraternities had dominated civic office, as at Worcester or York.³ The attack on saints' days, images and religious processions eliminated most of the important occasions of the urban ceremonial year. Social and political life in Coventry had been structured by membership of and passage through the guilds of Corpus Christi and Holy Trinity. Several lesser craft guilds sustained the city's rich ceremonial tradition, though the city's economic difficulties had already led to an amalgamation of the two great guilds, and a reduction in observance, by the mid-1530s.⁴ Corpus Christi processions and plays had served in many towns as an expression of civic unity and cohesiveness, and although there was not an immediate cessation of civic ceremony most of the urban play cycles had withered by 1580.⁵ Smaller urban craft associations, mercantile guilds and livery com-

¹ S. Durston and R. M. Doran, *Princes, Pastors and People* (London, 1991) p. 167; J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), p. 107; C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 219, 275; J. Schofield, *The Building of London from the Conquest to the Great Fire* (London, 1984), p. 147.

² A. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400–1640*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 64–5; D. Knowles and R. M. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (London, 1953), pp. 35–6; D. M. Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 220–1, 235.

³ P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500–1700* (London, 1976), p. 129; A. Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1973), pp. 189–90; Palliser, *Tudor York*, p. 49. Cf. Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, p. 22: 'these larger fraternities were often so dominated by the local town oligarchies that they might well be described as the local corporations at prayer – or providing for their own obsequies'.

⁴ C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', in R. Holt and G. Rosser, eds., *The Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1200–1540* (London, 1990), pp. 238–64.

⁵ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 269–71; M. James, 'Ritual, drama, and the social body in the late medieval English town', *P&P*, 98 (1983), 3–29; P. Collinson, 'Puritanism as popular reli-

panies were also affected by the Edwardian legislation.⁶ The Coventry journey-men's associations seem to have disappeared, though the more substantial mercantile crafts survived;⁷ London's religious fraternities were abolished, but probably all the city's approved crafts and livery companies continued, though forfeiting the lands they had held for 'superstitious purposes', valued at some £939 per annum.⁸ The guilds and companies of the larger towns still played an important role in social as well as economic organisation, contributing to stability and integration, but shorn of their religious function their character and pre-occupations changed. They continued to care for members, to manage charitable bequests and to observe collective festivities, but arguably an important aspect of sociability and mutual care had been lost.

The initial processes of dissolution and suppression required the cooperation of local authorities, and several town corporations were more than compliant, though respect for the authority of national government and the principle of order may have been a strong motive. When corporations were faced with the loss of some of their own property, however, with the suppression of the guilds, or of resources they valued, such as lands, almshouses, hospitals and schools, there was a strong incentive to collective action. Many municipalities thus became direct owners and managers of lands and resources; although in general they paid heavily for this, they probably exercised fuller authority in their jurisdictions than before, no longer in competition with powerful and autonomous ecclesiastical institutions. The corporation of Coventry borrowed a large sum to buy up lands from the former Benedictine cathedral priory's large estate in and near the city, to pre-empt purchase by an outsider who would thereby have obtained a great deal of power and influence in the city.⁹ The need to act quickly and collectively may also have contributed to the development of a municipal ethic translated into action in other areas of government. Some members of town elites had also profited as individuals from the dispersal of church lands, acquiring substantial urban residences and houses for rent, enhancing their local standing and control.

One effect of the Reformation felt in many towns was the closure of hospitals and schools along with the monastic houses or guilds to which they were attached. Although some of the larger hospitals were exempt from dissolution, a number of smaller hospices went in the first round of suppressions. The losses overall were considerable, but some scrupulosity on the part of commissioners, and determined efforts by urban corporations and citizens to save a valued

gious culture', in C. Durston and J. Eales, eds., *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560–1700* (London, 1996), p. 43. ⁶ Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, p. 36.

⁷ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 270.

⁸ Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, p. 123; G. Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London, 1908), pp. 208–14. ⁹ Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 219.

resource, combined to prevent a complete dismemberment. At least forty-three English towns petitioned Edward VI's government for the grant or purchase of guild and chantry property. These included those asking for the free restoration of schools or almshouses (Abingdon, Chelmsford, Grantham, Guildford); those buying back properties to provide continued support for such uses, among others (Coventry, Ludlow, Wisbech); and those such as Bristol and Maidstone that bought local lands now on the market with the aim of establishing charitable foundations.¹⁰ London made a special effort to ensure continued provision for the sick and poor, and secured the refoundation of its major hospitals and the creation of two new ones.¹¹ Other towns managed to save their hospitals, or to restore them after an interim; they may have been especially energetic when the hospital had been run by a civic guild. York's corporation purchased the former lands of the guild of St Christopher and St George, with which it had been closely identified, and leased those of the lesser guild of Corpus Christi, while Leicester, after nearly forty years, eventually secured property formerly belonging to town chantries, colleges and the Corpus Christi guild.¹²

Many of these developments were paralleled in Scotland, but within a different chronological and political framework. The Scottish Reformation was later than the English, and entailed more radical theological change within a short period. Although there were stirrings of reform in 1543, and evidence for some spread of Protestant teaching in the 1540s and 1550s, there was no major institutional or liturgical change until 1559–60. The political crisis of those years enabled a minority of committed reformers to frame a new ecclesiastical polity and to redefine the content and purpose of liturgy and observation in a way that had taken decades in England. Scottish townsmen and town governors played an important part in the process of religious Reformation.¹³

The Church had held an equally dominant position in Scottish urban society before the Reformation, and indeed the proportion of urban settlements primarily dependent on a religious house may have been greater. The larger towns, as in England, usually housed several convents, hospitals and friaries. There was no wholesale dissolution of monasteries in 1560: many of their resources were already substantially under the control of lay commendators, and the houses themselves were allowed to decline over a period. Their personnel were encouraged to take office in the reformed Church, but were not directly penalised for not doing so. Without support or new recruits, however, and with much of their former liturgical round proscribed, the decline in most cases was swift. In some cases a monastery church that had served the laity as well was taken over by the

¹⁰ Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, pp. 114–15, 125–7.

¹¹ P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1988), pp. 119, 69–72.

¹² Palliser, *Tudor York*, pp. 48–9, 239; Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, pp. 114–15, 131.

¹³ J. Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland 1470–1625* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 109–39.

local community, but for the most part they fell into ruin or were deliberately pulled down. The ambivalent position of the episcopate after 1560 meant that cathedral churches were also liable to decay, though that at Glasgow survived, thanks perhaps to the support of the town guilds.¹⁴ The reforming legislation of 1560–1 abolished the mass and the observance of saints' days, and thus undermined the religious basis for many urban guilds and fraternities. Crafts like the hammermen of Edinburgh clung to the cult of saints, but they seem to have been more divided between Catholics and reformers than some of the other city guilds.¹⁵ The hammermen of Aberdeen continued to claim rights over their altar in the town church after 1560, and more generally the craftsmen of that town resisted the loss of public and celebratory functions.¹⁶

Scotland was an even more emphatic example than England of a new collectivity of action to preserve resources and to establish a new ecclesiastical polity. Edinburgh's conservative council was deposed and replaced by a Protestant one in 1559, and, although there were divisions among the new men, the council played an active part in recovering resources for the reformed Church, establishing a poor hospital and supporting the town's ministers both morally and financially. Though some may have resisted reform at first, the craft guilds of Edinburgh came to play an important part in the 'trinity' of burgh government, along with council and kirk session.¹⁷

The extent to which the English people shared the views of prominent evangelicals and religious reformers and legislators has been one of the most disputed aspects of Reformation studies in recent years. The idea that Protestantism was the religion of the few, which they succeeded in imposing upon the many, has found wide support. In particular, it must be acknowledged that the evidence for enthusiasm for Protestant ideas and eagerness to implement liturgical and other changes may reflect only the attitudes of a small, if influential, minority within a larger community.¹⁸ The part that town populations played in the process of reformation still lacks full documentation, though a more complex picture is emerging than the one which more or less equated urban residence with support for reformed ideas.¹⁹

¹⁴ I. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation* (London, 1982), p. 192.

¹⁵ M. Lynch, ed., *The Early Modern Town in Scotland* (London, 1987), p. 27; M. Lynch, *Edinburgh and the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 56–9.

¹⁶ A. White, 'The impact of the Reformation on a burgh community; the case of Aberdeen', in Lynch, ed., *Early Modern Town*, pp. 89, 97–8.

¹⁷ Lynch, *Edinburgh and the Reformation*, pp. 18, 34, 55–6.

¹⁸ R. O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London, 1986), pp. 102–32; C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 285–95; D. M. Palliser, 'Popular reactions to the Reformation', in C. Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 98–104. But cf. P. Marshall, ed., *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500–1640* (London, 1997), p. 8.

¹⁹ See R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England* (Oxford, 1998).

It seems to be accepted that Protestantism was strong in London, in the urbanised South-East of England, and in many larger towns elsewhere, by the middle of the sixteenth century. Several circumstances facilitated the early success of reformed ideas among urban populations. The towns were specifically targeted by successive governments, in preaching campaigns and visitations; they probably had higher levels of general literacy than most rural communities, and certainly better access to printed and written works, both essential to the successful evangelisation of 'the religion of the book'. Some had direct contact, through their trading networks, with European centres of advanced Protestantism. Several (Sandwich, Canterbury, London, Norwich) were to have significant settlements of European religious refugees, whose congregational organisation served as a model for English reformers. While many towns had poor parishes and inadequately endowed clergy, some, especially in London, were wealthy and attracted able, educated clergy, trained at Oxford or Cambridge and in touch with developing theological and liturgical thought. By 1553 'pockets of informed Protestantism had certainly been planted in many towns', often those under the hand or eye of an active bishop or royal official.²⁰ London had Ridley; Bristol's clergy invited Latimer to preach in 1533; Exeter was influenced by its 'ferverly Protestant' dean Simon Heynes.²¹ The use of the pulpit to harangue urban populations may also have stirred up some of the more violent and disorderly aspects of the Reformation, including iconoclasm.²²

Evidence for the spread and support for reformed ideas can be found for London, Norwich, Ipswich, Bristol and Coventry, and several smaller towns. The paradigm of commercialism and continental contact might be supported by the evidence for Protestantism in prosperous East Anglian towns, such as Colchester, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds, which became 'organised centres of early and precocious reform' or the more rapid and widespread acceptance of reformed ideas in the port town of Hull than the small inland town of Leeds, though the latter did house a knot of Protestants.²³ Some contrast between urban and rural populations may also be drawn, for example in the South-West, where Catholic support declined more quickly in Exeter and towns like Totnes, which stood out against the (largely rural) prayer book rebels of 1549.²⁴

²⁰ C. Cross, *Church and People, 1450-1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (London, 1976), pp. 81-100.

²¹ S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 458-519; M. C. Skeeters, *Community and Clergy* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 38-46; R. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 160-1.

²² Cf. M. Aston, 'Iconoclasm: official and clandestine', in M. Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350-1600* (London, 1993), pp. 266-7, 276; S. Brigden, 'Youth and the English Reformation', in Marshall, ed., *The Impact of the English Reformation*, p. 71.

²³ Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 197; P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (London, 1988), p. 38; C. Cross, 'The development of Protestantism in Leeds and Hull, 1520-1640', *NHist.*, 18 (1982), 230-8; Palliser, 'Popular reactions to the Reformation', p. 104.

²⁴ Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, pp. 46, 172-3.

However, evidence for Protestant beliefs or actions is usually paralleled by evidence for opposition to them, or at least for alternative views. Influential Protestants clashed with traditionalists in Bristol, Gloucester and Rye; townspeople continued to invoke the intercession of saints and prayers for the dead in their wills. The resistance of Exeter's mayor and aldermen to the prayer book rebels may have been motivated by respect for order rather than confessional enthusiasm. The Marian restoration of Catholic worship was observed as much in the towns as in the country.²⁵ Although there were several Protestant communities in small Yorkshire towns such as Beverley, Halifax, Rotherham and Wakefield, the North in general was slower to take on Protestant ideas and practices, and the city of York was one of the most conservative of urban centres in this respect. Priests continued to pray for the dead after the practice was declared superstitious; the city welcomed Mary's accession, and received news of Elizabeth's rather more coolly. The rulers of the city retained Catholic, or at least traditional, sympathies into the 1560s and 1570s, by which time the corporations of other leading towns were more thoroughly Protestant.²⁶ Nevertheless, though religious conservatives could probably be found in all urban communities, the view that the English Reformation met with quicker and fuller success in the towns seems to be justified. Over a longer period, too, the association of urban communities and governments with evangelical Protestantism and subsequently dissent becomes stronger, as those inspired by the ideology of the godly commonwealth acceded to civic power, and attempted to put their ideas into practice.

The historiography of the Reformation in Scotland has not separated urban and rural experiences to the same extent as in England, though most specific studies have been of urban communities. As with England, however, the new doctrines were better received both in the towns and in Lowland areas than in the countryside and especially the sparsely settled Highlands. Michael Lynch argues that 'the more Scotland's "urban Reformation" is studied, the more varied it has become': the influence of local lairds and active and vocal minorities within the towns helped to decide how quickly and how thoroughly the new structures were established.²⁷ For the burgesses of Aberdeen, the experience of the Reformation was bound up with the power struggle between burgh and local magnates, and between magnate families in the north-east; it is not clear that there was any widespread support for Protestant doctrine before an internal coup brought a 'Protestant sympathiser' to power in the burgh in 1560. The city

²⁵ Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 198; Palliser, 'Popular reactions to the Reformation', pp. 103–5; Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, pp. 172–3; R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford, 1994) pp. 96–9.

²⁶ Palliser, 'Popular reactions to the Reformation', p. 104; Palliser, *Tudor York*, pp. 52–3, 242–4.

²⁷ M. Lynch, 'Preaching to the converted? Perspectives on the Scottish Reformation', in A. A. McDonald, M. Lynch and I. B. Cowan, eds., *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History and Culture Offered to John Durkan* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 321–3.

continued to display a strongly Catholic character for a number of years.²⁸ There was some disorder and even violence during the crisis of 1559–60: the houses of friars were a particular target for ‘reforming’ mobs in Edinburgh, Perth, Stirling, St Andrews and Dundee. The more stable elements in urban societies, however, received the changes more cautiously.²⁹

(ii) RELIGION AND URBAN SOCIETY, 1580–1700

The impact of the English and Scottish Reformations on the urban environment and the physical context of worship need not be further stressed. The effect on urban economies of the disappearance of the major religious houses, former customers for urban goods and services, centres for the redistribution of rural produce, and as attractors of religious tourism, must be set in the context of patterns of widespread and long-term economic change in the sixteenth century. The overall impact of the changes on urban corporations, however, and the status of the Church in towns after the Reformation, should be considered.

The attitudes of civic rulers played an important part in determining the character of urban religion and moral society in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not all urban governments sought to establish a ‘godly commonwealth’ under their rule, but it is a widespread theme, in both contemporary and modern comment.³⁰ The image of the town or city as a model of human society seems to have had considerable rhetorical power.³¹ The moral campaign was fought in day-to-day administration and discipline, as it was by all godly magistrates, but two areas in which civic corporations’ activity was particularly noticeable were the promotion of the ministry and preaching, and the suppression of ungodly pursuits.

In the reformed Scottish Church, the creation of kirk sessions, with lay elders and deacons, who in many cases also sat on burgh councils, embodied the idea of a fully integrated religious and political society.³² It would be wrong to take this too far, since in many burghs there may have been tension between the stricter interpreters of the new religion and its requirements and the more ‘accommodating Protestant feeling’ of pragmatic governors. Neither the elite nor the totality of Edinburgh government were wholly Protestant in the 1560s, but the identification was close. The deputy town clerk of Aberdeen was also bursar in civil law at King’s College and a chaplain in the parish church from 1563. In a significant sense, the way in which the reformed Church evolved was

²⁸ White, ‘Aberdeen’, pp. 81–101.

²⁹ Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, p. 189; M. Lynch, ‘The crown and the burghs’, in Lynch, ed., *Early Modern Town*, p. 62. ³⁰ Cf. Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, pp. 150–1.

³¹ Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England*, pp. 28–32.

³² G. Donaldson, ‘Church and community’, in G. Donaldson, *Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 226–7.

conditioned by the traditions of burgh life: it owed its success to the support of burgh leaders, but it was itself shaped by the association. It took over something of the integrative function, in religion and culture, played by the medieval guild.³³ The campaign for reformation and moral and religious improvement in Scotland focused on the ministry, dependent in many cases on urban corporations for patronage and financial support. The urban endowments on which a number of chaplains and prebends had subsisted before the Reformation were assigned to support hospitals and schools, and, in the towns as in the country, parish revenues had to support old priests and new ministers.³⁴ The grant of former church lands and revenues to the burghs involved them intimately in the provision and payment of the ministry.³⁵

Over the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the close relation of burgh council and kirk session continued, and it is impossible to think of Scottish urban society in this period without acknowledging the importance of the kirk. This close relation may have lain behind the burghs' enthusiastic support for the covenanting movement in the 1630s, responding to the threat posed to the Presbyterian polity by the religious policies of James VI/I and Charles I.³⁶ With episcopacy as a major issue in the Civil Wars in Scotland, and with campaigns focusing on the siege and capture of major cities, existing arrangements were liable to change, but the events may have encouraged doctrinaire Calvinistic Presbyterianism in burgh governments as it did in national political leadership. Certainly Aberdeen's council, once the Presbyterian party recovered power, continued to run the town's church before and after the Restoration, appointing and paying ministers,³⁷ and the final abolition of episcopacy left power in the hands of the coalition of kirk session and burgh council into the eighteenth century.

In England and Wales, a striking number of town governments saw it as their role as to establish a 'godly commonwealth', though the reasons for this were local rather than generic, and can usually be traced to the coincidence of individual enthusiasts, lay or clerical, in positions of power. Gloucester's religious and political radicalism in the Civil War, though clearly shaped by the city's social and economic problems, resulted from the dominance of municipal office by a small group of merchants and traders, sympathetic to Puritan ideas, from the 1590s; Dorchester was a relaxed and conservative small town before the

³³ Lynch, *Edinburgh and the Reformation*, pp. 173, 175, 184–5, 216; White, 'Aberdeen', p. 88.

³⁴ G. Donaldson, 'The parish clergy and the Reformation', in Donaldson, *Scottish Church History*, pp. 71–89. ³⁵ Lynch, 'The crown and the burghs', p. 70.

³⁶ Cf. D. Stevenson, 'The burghs and the Scottish Revolution', in Lynch, ed., *Early Modern Town*, p. 174.

³⁷ C. R. Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450–1750* (London, 1995), pp. 85–7, citing G. R. DesBrisay, 'Authority and discipline in Aberdeen, 1650–1700' (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 1989).

appointment of an inspiring Calvinist minister in 1605.³⁸ Nevertheless the structure of English urban government in the early modern period was often open to domination by self-perpetuating elites. It always relied on the willingness of the individual to shoulder office out of a sense of public obligation, and when these men were inspired also by the Puritan mission of moral reform, the opportunity and means were to hand. By the early seventeenth century, Puritan domination of urban corporations appears to have been widespread; even formerly conservative York was petitioning for extra preaching and sermons.³⁹

Several urban corporations invested in purchasing the patronage of local churches, keen to take advantage of the opportunity that this offered for influencing the character of parochial worship.⁴⁰ At least sixteen town corporations had the patronage of urban livings in the seventeenth century, the mayor and aldermen of London having by then increased their four to nine or ten.⁴¹ The significance of this depended, of course, on the outlook of the patron, but in general those who followed this course were seeking to establish a more advanced or preaching ministry. The corporation of Shrewsbury bought the advowson and impropriation of St Mary's from the crown in 1577, and hired a stipendiary curate, paying him substantially more for preaching a town lecture than for serving the cure; the rector of a Lincoln church in the seventeenth century attributed his appointment to 'the general vote of all the godly'.⁴² Norwich's rulers bought up an advowson in 1630, presented a 'notorious' Puritan minister and supported his establishment of combination lectureships elsewhere in the city.⁴³ Bristol's rulers, however, appear to have represented a range of tastes in their appointments to the seven parishes acquired in 1627.⁴⁴

Many municipalities also supported the establishment of lectureships. The corporation of Hull had shown their hostility to the town's conservative/Catholic incumbent by helping to ensure his deprivation at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, and the institution of a preacher more to their taste; later

³⁸ P. Clark, "'The Ramoth-Gilead of the Good': urban change and political radicalism at Gloucester 1540-1640", in J. Barry, ed., *The Tudor and Stuart Town* (London, 1990), pp. 244-73; D. Underdown, *Fire from Heaven* (London, 1992), pp. 7-26.

³⁹ Cross, *Church and People*, pp. 157-8.

⁴⁰ C. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church of England* (Oxford, 1963), p. 54; Palliser, *Tudor York*, p. 229; Durston and Doran, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, p. 168; W. J. Sheils, 'Religion in provincial towns: innovation and tradition', in F. Heal and R. O'Day, eds., *Church and Society in England, Henry VIII to James I* (London, 1977), pp. 159-60.

⁴¹ Hill, *Economic Problems*, pp. 56-7, 245-74; H. G. Owen, 'The London parish clergy in the reign of Elizabeth I' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1957), pp. 238-95; D. A. Williams, 'Puritanism in city government, 1610-40', *Guildhall Miscellany*, 1(4) (1955), 3-14.

⁴² P. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford, Calif., 1970) p. 91; Hill, *Economic Problems*, p. 58.

⁴³ J. F. Pound, *Tudor and Stuart Norwich* (Chichester, 1988), pp. 88-9.

⁴⁴ D. H. Sacks, 'Bristol's "wars of religion"', in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), p. 114.

they instituted a lectureship as well.⁴⁵ Gloucester's Puritan magistrates invited and subsidised a Puritan preacher in 1598, and subsequently set up a twice-weekly lectureship which they similarly offered to committed Calvinists.⁴⁶ Voluntary or temporary arrangements were soon replaced by permanent endowments. Paul Seaver finds evidence for as many as seventy-four borough lectureships before 1640, of which at least fifty-two were controlled by the municipality, while Claire Cross suggests that 'almost all towns of any standing . . . had at least founded lecturing posts if they had not also set up parish lectureships'.⁴⁷

A second aspect of the 'godly commonwealth' was the reform of public and private behaviour. This too has been the subject of some controversy: the idea that it was a specifically 'Puritan ideology' that led local elites to legislate officiously and extensively on the morality of the poorer members of their community has been questioned from several directions.⁴⁸ There is, however, adequate evidence that some urban rulers (corporations or justices, depending on local circumstances) in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw the suppression of ungodly behaviour (drunkenness, profanity, sabbath-breaking) as an important item on their agenda.⁴⁹ Traditional activities, such as dancing, drama and popular pageantry began to decline in the face of magisterial opposition, whose hostility to ungodly pursuits was certainly enmeshed with concerns about public order. The gathering of people at plays, shows and fairs was seen as dangerous in itself, apart from the dubious nature of the activities in which they might participate.⁵⁰

Municipal corporations thus played an important part in establishing the preaching ministry and in suppressing practices they regarded as Catholic, pagan or morally dangerous; in this, as in other matters, their aims began to conflict with those of central government in the 1620s and 1630s. The Caroline support for Arminianism ran directly counter to the views of Puritan municipalities, in England and even more markedly in Scotland, on the liturgy, the framework of worship and the proper observance of Sunday. In Worcester and Gloucester, a godly municipality clashed with a Laudian bishop and cathedral establishment;⁵¹ in Norwich, Bishop Wren came into immediate conflict with a group of Puritan aldermen, supporters of lectures and opponents of Sunday recreations.⁵² It

⁴⁵ C. Cross, 'Protestantism in Leeds and Hull', *NHist.*, 18 (1982), 235.

⁴⁶ Clark, "'The Ramoth-Gilead of the Good'", pp. 267–8.

⁴⁷ Seaver, *Puritan Lectureships*, pp. 79–81, 90; Cross, *Church and People*, p. 157.

⁴⁸ K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (London, 1979); M. Spufford, 'Puritanism and social control?', in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 41–57; M. Ingram, 'Reformation of manners in early modern England', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox, and S. Hindle, eds., *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 47–88.

⁴⁹ Ingram, 'Reformation of manners', p. 80.

⁵⁰ Collinson, 'Puritanism as popular religious culture', p. 43.

⁵¹ Dyer, *Worcester*, pp. 233–4; Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, p. 151.

⁵² Pound, *Tudor and Stuart Norwich*, pp. 89–90.

would be wrong, however, to suppose that all involved in urban government were sympathetic to advanced Protestant ideas. In Norwich, Bristol and Coventry, Arminianism found some support among town councillors.⁵³ And by this time English 'Puritanism' had itself become more complex and divided, so that godly municipalities were beginning to be divided by faction, thus weakening their resistance to outside intervention.⁵⁴

In the short term, the standing of the Church in England and Wales had been severely damaged by the Reformation. There can be little doubt that both the numbers and the incomes of urban clergy were seriously reduced. Many urban parishes had been abolished: York lost fifteen out of forty, Lincoln eighteen of thirty-four.⁵⁵ The dissolution of the chantries had a particularly severe impact on the towns, since chantry priests and conducts had been present in great numbers there, supplementing both liturgical performance and pastoral and educational care. Pre-Reformation London had had nearly 400 chantry priests, while rural Middlesex had only twenty or so. York had had over a hundred chantries, Bristol some forty-four; even a much smaller town like Worcester had eleven chantry priests in its ten parishes. In Exeter, where nineteen parish churches had maintained an additional mass-priest before the Reformation, few could by the reign of Elizabeth afford to support even a clerk or scholar, and most had no incumbent. Bristol's later sixteenth-century livings were poorer and less well served than before, and many could not be filled.⁵⁶

Nor was the surviving ministry of high quality: there were simply not enough men with appropriate training and reliable views to staff the parishes of the Elizabethan Church. Urban parishes may have been in a particularly bad way, as their money incomes were undermined by inflation; the values of the Bristol livings declined markedly, and the educational attainments of their incumbents or curates appear to have done the same.⁵⁷ Reformers and counter-reformers had voiced so many criticisms of the clerical estate and of their functions, and had allowed their supporters to abuse groups and individuals, that it was difficult for the survivors to reassert their dignity and authority once the dust had settled.⁵⁸ In the Church of England, the pressing need for an educated and dedicated ministry was recognised by senior churchmen, and steps that would in time redress it were taken. By the later sixteenth century the qualifications and

⁵³ *Ibid.*; A. Hughes, 'Coventry and the English Revolution', in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), p. 76; D. H. Sacks, 'Bristol's "wars of religion"', p. 113. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, p. 151.

⁵⁵ Sheils, 'Religion in provincial towns', p. 160; Palliser, *Tudor York*, p. 240; M. Aston and J. Bond, *The Landscape of Towns* (Stroud, 1976), p. 110; Cross, *Church and People*, p. 92.

⁵⁶ C. J. Kitching, ed., *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate* (London Record Society, 16, 1980), pp. xxv-xxvi; Palliser, *Tudor York*, p. 239; Dyer, *Worcester*, pp. 229-30; Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, p. 135; Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, pp. 85, 98-104; Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, pp. 101-6. ⁵⁷ Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, pp. 93-121.

⁵⁸ Durston and Doran, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, p. 153.

quality of the parish clergy had risen again, and urban livings may have attracted a disproportionate number of this new cohort.⁵⁹

The Scottish Church faced its own problems, in that for many years the old establishment and the new shared the revenues, and many incoming ministers had to subsist on very restricted endowments. There was also the common problem of a shortage of suitably qualified candidates for the ministry; the creation of lesser orders of the ministry was intended to supply the need for service without compromising the quality of the ministry itself. On the other hand, the Scottish Church may well have been inadequately staffed before the Reformation, and the situation was improved by the commitment of money from the Thirds of benefices to supporting reformed preachers, and by the important new role played by laymen in the community and discipline of the local church.⁶⁰

After the upheavals of the Reformation years, no church or system of belief could command the English laity's universal support, but criticisms of the limited popular appeal of the Church established by the Elizabethan settlement underestimate the strength of conviction and attachment to it that developed over time. There may have been a reduction in churchgoing in the longer term, and in expanding cities, notably London, the provision of religious services did not meet the rising population, but there was still a high level of attendance and observance. The majority of contemporary commentators were not hostile to religion as such, only to particular kinds of churchmanship. The severest critics of the Elizabethan Church were not irreligious, but favoured further and more rigorous reform; and they found a strong following in urban congregations and corporations.

There is much evidence for the strength of belief and observance in English towns in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and indeed of the popularity of advanced Protestant ideas, while always accepting that traditional and conservative views persisted in probably all communities. The geography of early reform was apparently repeated for acceptance of advanced Protestantism: London, the South-East and a number of provincial towns. The vestments controversy resulted in a large number of resignations or deprivations in London; the prophesyings or clerical conferences took place in Norwich, Northampton and other urban centres before they were banned in 1576.⁶¹ Increased attention is also being paid now to the development of a popular Puritan culture in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many traditional local and communal activities may have been suppressed or withered, but a new, secular civic culture, focused on the events of the Protestant calendar, began to establish itself, and

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147–53.

⁶⁰ G. Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 68–72, 84–8.

⁶¹ *VCH*, London, 1, pp. 309–11; Cross, *Church and People*, p. 138; Durston and Doran, *Princes, Pastors and People*, p. 149.

several aspects of advanced Protestant churchmanship, such as prayer meetings, catechising and collective fasts and sermons, can be seen as new cultural forms.⁶²

One aspect of the townspeople's implementation of Protestant values may be singled out: their voluntary support for lectures and a preaching ministry. Town parishes and pulpits offered opportunities for itinerant preachers and lecturers to be heard. There were cathedral lectures in Canterbury, Carlisle, Exeter, London, Norwich, Winchester and York; whatever their tone (they were likely to be conformist, though not invariably so) they at least increased the variety and frequency of preaching which Protestants sought.⁶³ More directly, townsmen could buy in preachers of their choice with more advanced convictions. The 'Puritan lectureships' were largely an urban phenomenon. Several London parishes began supporting lecturers in Edward's reign, and citizens of other provincial centres were doing so in the reign of Elizabeth. Men of Coventry, where there had been some Marian persecutions, had by the summer of 1559 invited a preacher, a protégé of Bullinger, to proclaim the gospel to them, and were prepared to support him and his family 'generously'. Parish lectureships were usually the work of groups of lay persons, concerned to improve provision in their parish or neighbourhood; a similar desire prompted thirteen London parishes to buy their advowsons and appoint their own ministers.⁶⁴

The reaction to Laudian Arminianism in the 1620s and 1630s shows how deeply internalised Calvinistic beliefs had become in England. Urban governments might be divided, but there seems to have been strong hostility among middling groups towards changes in liturgy and practice. Coventry gave Dr Prynne a hero's welcome, and Bristol's petition to the king in 1642 criticised the bishops and their activities.⁶⁵ The problem in the towns may indeed have been that religious enthusiasm, spilling out beyond the established Church, developed into advanced and separatist views in small congregations and gathered churches. London became a centre for such groups, from at least the 1560s, and Coventry was a home of Presbyterianism under Elizabeth, but the movement had limited success before the end of the century. Separatist and Anabaptist congregations were, however, established in Coventry, Lincoln, Salisbury and elsewhere, especially in East Anglia, in the early seventeenth century, perhaps borrowing ideas and inspiration from the settlements of Dutch and French refugees.⁶⁶ By 1640 a Bristol congregation had decided formally to separate from the established Church; it was followed by others in Norwich and London.⁶⁷

⁶² D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London, 1989); Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England*, pp. 94–126; Collinson, 'Puritanism as popular religious culture', pp. 46–56.

⁶³ Seaver, *Puritan Lectureships*, pp. 76–7. ⁶⁴ Cross, *Church and People*, pp. 133–4, 153–9.

⁶⁵ Pound, *Tudor and Stuart Norwich*, pp. 89–90; Hughes, 'Coventry', pp. 75–6; Sacks, 'Bristol's "wars of religion"', pp. 110–13.

⁶⁶ Cross, *Church and People*, pp. 138–52, 170; Durston and Doran, *Princes, Pastors and People*, p. 111.

⁶⁷ C. Cross, 'The Church in England, 1646–60', in G. E. Aylmer, ed., *The Interregnum: The Quest for Settlement, 1646–1660* (London, 1972), pp. 102, 116.

The Civil Wars offered new opportunities for reshaping religious observance and culture. The reformed Church had a firmer grip on Scottish society, and inspired strong resistance to the imposition of the English prayer book in 1637 (beginning with the demonstration in Edinburgh's town church of St Giles), and a continued commitment to extending its own polity and principles to England and Wales during the 1640s.⁶⁸ Following the adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant, bishops and religious collegiate bodies were abolished in England, and a new Directory of Public Worship replaced the prayer book. The former move obviously affected all English cathedral towns, undermining a key feature of their identity and dispersing an important group of consumers.⁶⁹ The Church in towns, as in the countryside, was purged of unacceptable doctrines and ministers. However, the attempt to impose the Presbyterian Classical system was not wholly successful, even in the capital, in the face of the diversity of religious belief and expression which had been liberated by the Civil War.⁷⁰ In several towns, like Coventry, the events of the 1640s allowed 'orthodox Puritanism' to flourish. The city became a 'second Geneva', integrating a godly magistracy and a moderate Presbyterian ministry, cooperating with respectable Independency. Though there were divisions over the details of policy, there was support for the Protector's liberal view of the Church's polity, and the extreme radical sects could gain no foothold there.⁷¹ Independent congregations are noted in many provincial towns, though they may have been small to start with, such as the nine who founded the Canterbury congregation in 1645. Three general Baptist churches met in London in 1641, and seven London Particular Baptist churches existed in 1644.⁷² In Bristol, however, the pre-war dominance of a moderate Calvinism had not prevented the establishment of separate churches, and in 1654 the city was riven by the rapid rise of the Quakers, leading to renewed political dissension. Coventry may have seen itself as a Geneva, but Nayler's 1656 entry constructed Bristol as Jerusalem.⁷³

The Restoration Church of England made little attempt to accommodate the moderate Presbyterian and independent churches that had flourished within the framework of the state Church during the Interregnum. The towns in general, and their Puritan representatives in particular, were punished for their part in the Civil Wars. The legislation of the Cavalier parliament excluded nonconformists from urban government and forced congregations into hiding or out of town, and the church settlement was carried through by a reinvigorated

⁶⁸ B. Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 2nd edn (London, 1994), pp. 178–80, 213–14, 224–8.

⁶⁹ Cf. e.g. A. Rosen, 'Winchester in transition, 1580–1700', in P. Clark, ed. *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), p. 167.

⁷⁰ Cross, 'The Church in England, 1646–60', pp. 103, 107–11; Tai Liu, *Puritan London: A Study of Religion and Society in the City Parishes* (Newark, N.J., 1986), pp. 51–102.

⁷¹ Hughes, 'Coventry', pp. 80–92.

⁷² R. J. Acheson, *Radical Puritans in England, 1550–1660* (London, 1990), pp. 45–60.

⁷³ Sacks, 'Bristol's "wars of religion"', pp. 120–1; Acheson, *Radical Puritans*, p. 72.

episcopate.⁷⁴ The political importance of religion, and of popular religious culture, was by no means at an end, however: anti-popery was a feature of both national culture and urban popular politics in the later seventeenth century.⁷⁵ It is clear that nonconformist congregations were submerged, not suppressed, by the Restoration. After 1689 they were free to establish churches openly, and with a further influx of Protestant religious refugees from France, London and other urban centres supported a proliferation of independent churches. Tory anxiety about the strength of nonconformity in London estimated the number of dissenters at 100,000 in the early eighteenth century; though this is clearly an exaggeration, the true number may have been over 40,000, with 74 dissenting congregations noted in the capital.⁷⁶

(iii) EDUCATION AND LITERATE CULTURE

The higher literacy of urban populations may have contributed to their reception of reformed teachings in the early and mid-sixteenth century, and education and educational opportunity remained an important feature of British towns in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some aspects of the production and dissemination of literate culture were necessarily urban, though the difference between metropolitan and provincial urban experience was much more marked than, for example, their experiences of Protestantism or dissent. London contained perhaps 10 per cent of England's population by the end of the seventeenth century, and a still more disproportionate amount of its wealth and literacy. If the specialisation of economic activity is to some extent a function of urban size, it is not surprising that, at least up to the end of the seventeenth century, so much educational opportunity and literate culture were concentrated in the capital.

In England, the decline of 'pious benefaction' with the Reformation, and the diversion of funds to educational and charitable uses, have been charted by W. K. Jordan, and the view of an 'educational revolution' following the Reformation examined by Lawrence Stone.⁷⁷ A number of urban schools, run by or associated with religious houses and chantry or guild foundations, fell with the dissolutions, and the elementary teaching provided by some chantry priests

⁷⁴ Hughes, 'Coventry', pp. 93-5; Cross, 'The Church in England, 1646-60', p. 120; J. Spurr, 'From Puritanism to dissent, 1660-1700', in Durston and Eales, eds., *The Culture of English Puritanism*, pp. 234-65; J. R. Jones, *Country and Court, England 1658-1714* (London, 1978), pp. 145-55.

⁷⁵ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, pp. 171-89; T. Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁷⁶ M. Port, ed., *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches* (London Record Society, 23, 1986), p. ix.

⁷⁷ W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660: A Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations* (New York, 1959); L. Stone, 'The educational revolution in England, 1560-1640', *P&P*, 28 (1964), 41-80.

must also have declined. The crown's direct provision for schools fell far short of what had been hoped or promised, and for the next generation, there may well have been a serious loss of educational opportunity. However, the value of education was widely recognised, and communities that lost schools were quick to petition for their restoration. At least twenty-six town guild or chantry schools had been re-endowed by 1553, and Mary also encouraged refoundations.⁷⁸

It is difficult to separate out the actions of private individuals or groups, and civic initiatives, both in the Reformation period and later, but towns and townsmen continued to found and support schools and educational opportunities through the reign of Elizabeth and in the early seventeenth century. Local studies demonstrate the importance of towns as sponsors and consumers of schooling. In two archdeaconries of Stafford and Salop (Lichfield diocese), all twenty-five market towns had either a grammar or town school or some evidence of teaching; more than half the schools in Coventry archdeaconry were in market towns, and all were grammar schools. Although some schools such as Shrewsbury became famous and attracted sons of the gentry from far away, and all tended to draw on the surrounding rural population, town schools were very substantially a resource for the children of well-to-do townsmen.⁷⁹ By the later seventeenth century private charity and private enterprise schools were widely available in larger towns and in and around the metropolis. The continued growth of the capital, at the expense of the rest of the country, meant that it focused a large demand for education: in 1704 there were fifty-four charity schools there. Girls' boarding schools were perhaps particularly a feature of London and larger towns.⁸⁰

The Scottish reformers explicitly recognised the importance of education to the creation of their new society, and called on town councils, among others, to provide for it from their own revenues or the appropriated revenues of the Church. Although local education was favoured, town schools were expected to provide a higher level of instruction, including grammar and Latin.⁸¹ The burghs had long been providers or sponsors of education, but the new emphasis put them at the front of the Church's campaign to educate and reform Scottish society, and in the short term the provision and quality of urban schooling seems to have been much more successful than that in rural areas. There were grammar schools in many Scottish towns in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and some burgh councils played an active role in running local schools. Education was thus a key feature of Scottish urban society in the later sixteenth

⁷⁸ Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, pp. 111–19.

⁷⁹ R. O'Day, *Education and Society, 1500–1800: The Social Foundations of Education in Early Modern Britain* (London, 1982), pp. 30, 35–8.

⁸⁰ J. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550–1760* (London, 1987), pp. 273–6; O'Day, *Education and Society*, pp. 196–216. ⁸¹ Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community*, pp. 181–2.

and seventeenth centuries; the Scottish universities, located in the major towns, contributed more to the character of urban culture in Scotland than did Oxford and Cambridge for England.⁸²

The higher literacy of urban populations was both a cause and a consequence of the flourishing educational opportunities in towns. Literacy rates are notoriously difficult to measure, and their interpretation, for the consumption of literate culture, is contested. It seems accepted, however, that there was both a significant general increase over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a noticeable bias in favour of London. Literacy among male Londoners was perhaps double that of rural males by 1640; literacy in other urban centres probably fell somewhere between the two, though there was wide regional variation.⁸³ The capital may also have attracted those who had already benefited from a provincial education: women who migrated to London in the later seventeenth century were more literate than those who stayed at home.⁸⁴ Rural education in Scotland was targeted for improvement by the reformers in the sixteenth century, but a rural-urban literacy differential was still noticeable in the seventeenth. In later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Edinburgh, the urban male was more likely to be literate than the suburban, and the suburban than the rural. The evidence suggests an already high literacy rate in 1660s Edinburgh, improving quite sharply by the end of the century.⁸⁵

In England, printing was monopolised by the London Stationers' Company, and London, as a huge concentration of population with, as noted above, higher average literacy than elsewhere, formed a ready market for their products. Higher metropolitan and urban wages must have contributed to demand.⁸⁶ Petty chapmen certainly purveyed print to the localities, but booksellers, largely urban, were a key point in the distribution network.⁸⁷ Booksellers were established in provincial towns such as Canterbury, Cambridge and Shrewsbury in the

⁸² O'Day, *Education and Society*, pp. 217-37.

⁸³ D. Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 72, 168-71; J. Barry, 'Literacy and literature in popular culture: reading and writing in historical perspective', in T. Harris, ed., *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850* (London, 1995), pp. 75-7.

⁸⁴ Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, p. 270; P. Earle, 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century', *Ec.HR*, 2nd series, 42 (1989), 334. Cf. R. A. Houston, 'The development of literacy in northern England, 1640-1750', *Ec.HR*, 2nd series, 35 (1982), 199-216.

⁸⁵ O'Day, *Education and Society*, p. 229; R. A. Houston, 'Literacy, education, and the culture of print in Enlightenment Edinburgh', *History*, 78 (1993), pp. 376-7. Cf. R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education, 1500-1800* (London, 1988).

⁸⁶ Cf. P. Burke, 'Popular culture in seventeenth-century London', *LJ*, 3 (1977), 154-7.

⁸⁷ M. Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (Cambridge, 1981); T. Watt, 'Piety in the pedlar's pack: continuity and change, 1578-1630', in Marshall, ed., *The Impact of the English Reformation*, pp. 308-42.

later sixteenth and early seventeenth century, though local gentry may also have made direct purchases from London and from travelling chapmen.⁸⁸ Bookselling and printselling appear among urban occupations, especially from the later seventeenth century, while bookbinders offered an additional service. By 1705 there were said to be 300 booksellers in the provinces.⁸⁹

The potential influence of print on political and religious culture was quickly recognised, with episcopal supervision and licensing. The early output of the presses included a large number of religious works, both liturgical and didactic; though some reformers may have been wary of allowing unmediated access to religious writings, it is clear that the vernacular Bible and works such as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* achieved wide circulation and were very instrumental in creating an informed Protestant consciousness.⁹⁰ These may have had a specific, educated audience in mind, but a significant proportion (between 30 per cent and 50 per cent) of ballads, aimed at a popular audience, registered at Stationers Hall between 1560 and 1590 were 'godly' or moralising. This must have contributed both to the dissemination of a reformed or Protestant culture and also to the spread of metropolitan influence to other towns and the countryside, though it is clear that the influence was two-way, in that London stationers responded to demand and tailored their output accordingly.⁹¹ Seventeenth-century chapbooks included satires on rural ignorance, presumably targeted at a knowing urban audience.⁹² The political turmoil of the mid-seventeenth century liberated publishing from effective censorship and saw an explosion of demand and supply. George Thomason was a London bookseller, and his collection of over 18,000 tracts published between 1640 and 1655 (and 3,000 published between 1655 and 1660) indicates both the vigour of metropolitan demand and the capacity of the industry to meet it. Pamphlet distribution was probably geographically wider, but the vast bulk of the output of the presses must have circulated in the capital. Oblique testimony to the range of printed works available to a Londoner of modest means is given by Nehemiah Wallington's notebooks, which include

⁸⁸ L. Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 67–8. T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 315–16.

⁸⁹ See e.g. J. Pound, 'The social and trade structure of Norwich, 1525–75', in P. Clark, ed., *The Early Modern Town* (London, 1976), pp. 141, 143; D. V. Glass, 'Socio-economic status and occupations in the city of London at the end of the seventeenth century', in *ibid.*, pp. 225–6; Rosen, 'Winchester', p. 177. The figure for provincial booksellers is quoted by P. Borsay, 'The Renaissance of provincial urban culture, c. 1680–1760', in P. Borsay, ed., *The Eighteenth Century Town* (London, 1990), p. 167.

⁹⁰ Barry, 'Literacy and literature', pp. 78–9; cf. M. Ingram, 'From Reformation to toleration: popular religious cultures in England, 1540–1690', in Harris, ed., *Popular Culture in England*, p. 103.

⁹¹ Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, pp. 8, 39–73, 322; cf. R. Cust, 'News and politics in early seventeenth-century England', *P&P*, 112 (1986), 60–90, which also stresses the central role of London. ⁹² Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, pp. 51–4.

many abstracts from and commentaries on printed materials which must have passed through his hands between c. 1620 and 1654.⁹³

In the later seventeenth century towns were beginning to increase the range of consumer goods they offered to a leisured, educated class, and among these were books, prints and other printed material. Again, the capital may have offered exceptional opportunities to the book-collector. Pepys was able to collect chapbooks, prints and pamphlets in the early 1660s, though his main collecting period, when he was seeking to build up a library of 3,000 books, came later, and was not solely focused on London sources. Even a more modest collector, Daniel Thomas (d. 1704), a mercer, had 890 books and atlases, though it is unlikely that all his fellows among London's mercantile society were so well provided.⁹⁴

The late seventeenth century also saw the growth of printed works specifically catering to urban needs and tastes: newspapers, directories and guide-books. The earliest London directory, dating from 1677, listed the names of merchants, information rendered 'very useful and necessary' by the growth in commercial and financial business after the Restoration.⁹⁵ Edward Lloyd's coffee-house in Lombard Street was well placed to garner verbal news, but it was his weekly printed broadsheet of shipping news, first appearing in 1692, that marked it out.⁹⁶ London newspaper publishing took off after the relaxation of controls in 1695, and from the early years of the eighteenth century titles and circulation flourished.⁹⁷ In all these areas, however, late seventeenth-century growth must be seen as the precursor to much more significant development in the eighteenth century. Likewise, as provincial towns and cities began to grow more rapidly, the range of cultured and educated services they provided increased, and the pre-eminence of London in these fields began to be diluted.⁹⁸

(iv) CHANGING SECULAR CULTURE IN EARLY MODERN URBAN SOCIETY

Between 1540 and 1700, English, Welsh and, arguably to a lesser degree, Scottish urban society became more secular, though it would be wrong to overestimate

⁹³ G. Fortescue, *Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books etc. Collected by George Thomason, 1640-61* (London, 1906); P. S. Seaver, *Wallington's World* (London, 1985), pp. 199-202.

⁹⁴ Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, pp. 267-8; R. Latham, *The Illustrated Pepys: Extracts from the Diary* (London, 1978), p. 11; P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class* (London, 1989), pp. 295-6.

⁹⁵ P. J. Corfield, '“Giving directions to the town”: the early town directories', *UHY* (1984), 24.

⁹⁶ V. Harding and P. Metcalf, *Lloyd's at Home: The Background and the Buildings* (London, 1985), p. 75.

⁹⁷ R. Porter, *London: A Social History* (London, 1994), p. 170.

⁹⁸ This view is implicit in Borsay, 'The Renaissance of provincial urban culture', and P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance* (Oxford, 1989).

the extent to which this happened.⁹⁹ Religion still played a very important part in the lives of most townspeople, but it was no longer the unifying cultural force it had been before the Reformation.¹⁰⁰ The traditional foci of urban association in the middle ages had been parish church, confraternity and guild. These were central elements in urban identity, whether of the individual or of the urban centre itself. Religious confraternities disappeared with the Reformation, and the meaning and importance of parish worship and guild membership changed. The following 150 years saw the emergence of new forms and occasions, shaped by their predecessors but also by the changing needs and pressures of urban life. Metropolitan society again exhibited these developments sooner and in a more marked degree than the provincial English towns and cities, while the institutionalised control that the Church had over Scottish urban society limited the scope for much change before the eighteenth century.

Although the growth of dissent is itself evidence of the continuing force of religion in the lives of townspeople, it also helped to undermine one of the traditional bases of urban religious life, the focus on the community of the parish. The comprehensive and sufficient nature of parochial worship was a central principle of the Elizabethan settlement. Both separatism and congregationalism were based on a fundamentally different organisational principle, involving self-selection and withdrawal from a wider collectivity. The principle was, obviously, divisive: its adherents rejected the idea that physical neighbours would necessarily be co-religionists, let alone co-worshippers. The system of gathered churches transcended territorial boundaries, and helped to dissolve the sense of close identification of multiple interests with the area of residence. By the end of the seventeenth century, religion had 'ceased to be something that could be taken for granted', and had become 'a matter for choice and commitment'.¹⁰¹ To some extent this was paralleled within the established Church in Scotland: an important aspect of the Presbyterian polity was the fragmentation of burgh communities, many of which had been focused on a single town parish. 'Model' parishes of committed congregations were carved out of the larger whole, with the avowed aim of increasing the quality of provision but with the effect of dividing the hitherto unified religious community of the burgh.¹⁰²

The urban parish in England and Wales gained a new role, however, with the responsibilities for poor relief which it handled from 1598 (London, and some other large towns, had instituted parish-based poor relief schemes before that date).¹⁰³ To some extent this revived the idea of the parish as a miniature commonwealth, in which the wealth of some contributed to the welfare of others, and promoted reciprocal interactions between members of the parish

⁹⁹ Cf. C. G. Brown, 'Did urbanization secularize Britain?', *UHY* (1988), 1–14, focusing on the nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ingram, 'From Reformation to toleration', pp. 97–9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁰² Lynch, ed., *Early Modern Town*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, pp. 122–9.

community. It may also have reinforced a sense of the bounds and membership of the community, as the concepts of eligibility and entitlement were more clearly articulated. On the other hand, a situation in which relief was distributed at the discretion of a parish elite hardly promoted the real sociability of the pre-Reformation parish. The English vestry had less far-reaching authority than the Scottish kirk session, but in both cases their moral and supervisory functions may have encouraged the formation of a group consciousness. The regular and at times celebratory meetings of the body fulfilled a social, and sociable, purpose as well as a business one.¹⁰⁴

Guilds, like parishes, lost an important part of their function with the Reformation and the loss of chantry endowments and commemorations. They also began to lose control of urban economic life, either through a too-rigid attitude in changing circumstances or an inability to control large flows of people and activities. In the mid-sixteenth century, the migration of young men to take up apprenticeships with the city companies was a major component of all migration to the capital; by the later seventeenth century its importance had declined markedly. Entries to the freedom were continuing to fall to the end of the seventeenth century and beyond, even as the capital continued to expand.¹⁰⁵ The greater guilds and companies, with less interest in the control of trade and manufacture, exercised strong social discipline over members in the sixteenth century, but also offered a focus for loyalty and sociability.¹⁰⁶ In the seventeenth century they built on this latter aspect of their activities, reinventing themselves as charitable and educational trusts with regular occasions for celebratory dining.¹⁰⁷

Guild life could also be reinvented through the private associations, clubs and friendly societies which began to appear in provincial towns and more noticeably in London from the later seventeenth century. Jonathan Barry has recently argued for the importance of such associations among the urban middling sort in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though their visibility in the historical record was limited before the spread of newspaper reporting in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Exactly the same problem – that informal, subscription-based

¹⁰⁴ Vestry and wardmote dinners were noted, and sometimes criticised: I. W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 73, 95; V. Pearl, 'Change and stability in seventeenth-century London', in J. Barry, ed., *The Tudor and Stuart Town* (London, 1990), p. 161.

¹⁰⁵ S. Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds*, pp. 76–86; M. Kitch, 'Capital and kingdom: migration to later Stuart London', in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay, eds., *London 1500–1700* (London, 1986), p. 226; J. R. Kellest, 'The breakdown of guild and corporation control over the handicraft and retail trade in London', *Ec.HR*, 2nd series, 10 (1957–8), 381–94.

¹⁰⁶ Rappaport, *Worlds*, pp. 215–73; Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, pp. 100–48.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. W. Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London* (London, 1834–7), *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ J. Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism? Urban association and the middling sort', in J. Barry and C. Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People* (London, 1994), pp. 92–3.

associations are much less well recorded than those that held property or obtained legal status, and therefore much more likely to be underestimated – occurs in the middle ages.¹⁰⁹ Urban life, no less challenging in the early modern period than before or later, encouraged individuals to participate in collective activity as a conscious creation of identity and continuity for themselves and their society. Barry notes many continuities, of language, form and ideology, from older civic associations. This may have been the result of conscious modelling, even appropriation, for the purposes of legitimation, but the conditions of urban life also encouraged new associations to adopt similar practices and values to the old. Public processions, calendar commemoration, collective dining were as much a feature of new charitable bodies as of civic guilds and parish fraternities. Shared values included mutual support, obedience to a collective good and sociability itself. ‘Participation in established bodies like guilds, churches, or local government was not so sharply differentiated from “voluntary” participation in other associations as we might expect; both expressed involvement in civil society.’¹¹⁰

A central theme of recent writing on the Reformation and its effects is the disappearance of communal festivity and calendar celebrations.¹¹¹ Protestant reformers were responsible for a strong attack on such practices, and although they were not immediately successful in eliminating them all, it was the beginning of a long campaign of attrition, in which godly municipalities played an important part. Civic processions and celebrations with an overtly religious theme, such as the Corpus Christi processions, were lost with the Elizabethan settlement; Corpus Christi play cycles, purged of their religious content, lasted longer, but most had disappeared by the end of the century.¹¹² Elizabeth’s government, on the whole, was not hostile to such manifestations; it was local authorities, concerned with order or imbued by Puritan views, who really determined the rate of decline. Uncertainty about what was appropriate or permissible may have helped to stifle a wide range of practices, but Puritan writers condemned dancing, Sunday sports and other activities, giving sympathetic civic officials the inspiration and justification they required. Gloucester Puritans suppressed the maypole in 1618; a few evangelical Protestants in positions of power succeeded in putting down the plays in York, Coventry and Kendal, despite popular opposition.¹¹³

Civic ritual did not die immediately. Godly corporations, which after all had

¹⁰⁹ C. M. Barron, ‘The parish fraternities of medieval London’, in C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, eds., *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society* (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. 13–37.

¹¹⁰ Barry, ‘Bourgeois collectivism?’, p. 103.

¹¹¹ D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 68–72; Hutton, *Merry England*, p. 111.

¹¹² Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, p. 69; Hutton, *Merry England*, pp. 115–21.

¹¹³ Clark, ‘The “Ramothe-Gilead of the Good”’, p. 268; Hutton, *Merry England*, pp. 126–8, 137–41.

something to gain from orderly civic ritual, did not target it, but the combination of expense, and doubts about the way it might be used or interpreted, contributed to what seems like an inexorable decline. The marching watch, a procession involving the whole citizenry, was suppressed in London in 1539, ostensibly for reasons of expense and order, and had been abandoned by many other towns by 1600. York developed a Midsummer Watch, perhaps partly to compensate for the loss of other civic pageantry, but even this did not last long. The public processions (including royal entries, see Plate 7) that did survive the sixteenth century were mostly suspended during the Civil War.¹¹⁴ London's Lord Mayor's Show took on some of the attributes, and indeed the pageants, of the Midsummer Watch, but it increasingly focused on the glories of the mayoralty and the company to which the new incumbent belonged; it could no longer be seen as a ritual integrating the whole civic community. The sophisticated Pepys dismissed the pageants of the 1663 Lord Mayor's Show as 'poor and absurd', even 'silly'.¹¹⁵ Inauguration rituals were still a feature of many corporate towns in the later seventeenth century, in many cases with feasting, and a number of new calendar customs and anniversaries were invented and celebrated, attracting some genteel interest, but the sense that this was a crucial and defining moment of the civic year and the town's identity had faded.¹¹⁶

Traditional dramatic celebrations were succeeded by two different phenomena, the early commercial theatre and genteel entertainments and social events. The commercial theatre flourished in London from the opening of the first playhouse in 1567, with a proliferation of theatre openings on the south bank in the 1590s. Like the alehouse, the theatre was feared and condemned by godly magistrates as a source of disorder, or at least of dangerous social mixing, and specifically as a possible competitor to churchgoing.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, it was enormously popular, as the calculations of audience size suggest, until the closure of the theatres in 1642, though arguably public taste had turned away from the drama by the 1630s, either towards the private theatres and Court masques, or to ruder pleasures such as bearbaiting.¹¹⁸ No provincial city had the audience to sustain the long seasons of the large open-air theatres of the metropolis, but the smaller post-Restoration playhouses appeared both in the capital and

¹¹⁴ Hutton, *Merry England*, pp. 121, 202.

¹¹⁵ M. Berlin, 'Civic ceremony in early modern London, *UHY* (1986), 15–27; S. Williams, 'The Lord Mayor's Show in Tudor and Stuart times', *Guildhall Miscellany*, 1(10) (1959), 15–16.

¹¹⁶ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*; P. Borsay, "'All the town's a stage": urban ritual and ceremony 1600–1800', in P. Clark, ed., *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600–1800* (London, 1984), pp. 231–2; P. J. Corfield, 'A provincial capital in the late seventeenth century: the case of Norwich', in Clark, ed., *Early Modern Town*, p. 255.

¹¹⁷ R. Ashton, 'Popular entertainment and social control in later Elizabethan and early Stuart London', *LJ*, 9 (1983), 5–8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6–9; A. Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 13–44, 183–91; M. Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–42* (Cambridge, 1984).

in provincial cities, offering a different kind of dramatic experience to a more genteel audience. Norwich had a 'miniature winter season' with theatres and shows. Public concerts of classical music, including concert cycles or seasons, also found first in London, had appeared in several provincial towns by the early eighteenth century.¹¹⁹ The shift from popular public spectacle to events aimed at a more restricted audience is demonstrated in Chester, where traditional plays and popular entertainments were curtailed in the sixteenth century, to be replaced by new festivities focused on the county elite such as horse racing. Peter Borsay has traced a significant growth in the number of race meetings held in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, followed by a second and more substantial boom between 1680 and 1730.¹²⁰

If traditional urban identities were weakened as a result of religious change and the growth of dissent, and some new institutions were created to complement the social function of parish, guild and ward, urban sociability was by no means confined to organised meetings and societies, or to the elite. Inns already provided a significant venue for plays and entertainments in the sixteenth century. The number of alehouses grew markedly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, paralleling, Peter Clark has argued, the decline of churchgoing and religious observance. Alehouses offered a locus for neighbourly *rencontre* and informal association, renewing the bonds of local community, in a way that parish celebrations and after-church meetings may have done formerly. They were in direct competition with the church for clients if they opened on Sundays, one reason for the hostility of godly magistrates.¹²¹ While they were widely spread across the country, they clustered more densely in towns than in the countryside, and more densely still in the capital. In London they were most numerous in the suburbs, where church provision and traditional social relations were both weaker than in the centre. Westminster had 551 common alehouses in 1631; there were 228 in Southwark and Kentish Street. Of 924 licensed alehouses in the city of London in 1657, the greatest densities were in the extramural wards of Portsoken and Faringdon without. London was also well served with taverns (over 400 in 1618), again notably clustered in the inner suburbs.¹²² Those areas were arguably one of the loci for significant social change and the evolution of a metropolitan (rather than a civic) culture, a process in which the alehouse could have played an important part.

Provincial alehouses provided an important point of contact between local

¹¹⁹ W. van Lennep, ed., *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, Part 1: 1660–1700 (Carbondale, Ill, 1975); Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 117–27; Corfield, 'A provincial capital', pp. 254–5.

¹²⁰ Underdown; *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, p. 69; S.-B. MacLean, 'Drama and ceremony in early modern England', *UHY* (1989), 43; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 180–96.

¹²¹ P. Clark, *The English Alehouse* (London, 1983), pp. 151–60.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 44–53; Ashton, 'Popular entertainment', 10–11.

communities and national communications networks.¹²³ In town as well as country, alehouses combined something of the function of a traditional local community centre with the provision of new-style entertainments and opportunities in a relatively uncontrolled environment. They offered attractions in the form of songs and music, opportunities for sexual encounters, public shows and games, as well as drink. Football and bowling-alleys, and 'new-type indoor games', including dicing, cards, and board-games became popular. These were often seen by conservatives and religious puritans alike as dangerous pastimes, ungodly in themselves and tending to oust traditional skills and practices such as archery.¹²⁴ Taverns and alehouses also often served as meeting places for the new social gatherings noted above, such as journeymen's clubs and friendly societies, further integrating old and new social practices.¹²⁵

(v) CONCLUSION

Religion remained an important social and cultural force in early modern towns, but its role had changed. In England and Wales, by the later seventeenth century, the Church was no longer a binding and comprehensive organisation, which all belonged to or at least respected, and through which a wide range of social and cultural experiences could be shared. Martin Ingram has argued that the effect of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century changes, culminating in the Toleration Act of 1689, was to create 'a distinctively different context in which popular religious cultures would henceforth be shaped'.¹²⁶ This argument could be extended more widely, given the dominance of religious belief and practice in late medieval and early modern thought and culture. Nevertheless, continuities between old and new forms of association and sociability should not be underestimated. Nor should continuities between the early and the later seventeenth century, though there appears, not least in the historiography of the subject, to be something of a significant break between the Civil War and the Restoration, with an urban renaissance beginning in the 'long eighteenth century'. There are good reasons for believing in such a break, but it is worth noting that many of the records from which a changed urban sensibility can be charted in the eighteenth century are lacking for the earlier period. The religious and social world of townsmen and women was certainly transformed over the period 1540-1700, but not beyond recognition.

¹²³ Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, pp. 195-6.

¹²⁴ Clark, *English Alehouse*, pp. 154-7; Ashton, 'Popular entertainment', 7.

¹²⁵ Barry, 'Bourgeois collectivism?', p. 84.

¹²⁶ Ingram, 'From Reformation to toleration', p. 123.